PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 292

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1996–97

COMPRISING PERIOD
10 March—21 March 1997

£70

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THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 292**

NINTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1996–97

House of Commons

Monday 10 March 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

River Thames

1. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received on the establishment of regular passenger services on the River Thames. [17753]

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. John Bowis): My Department is in regular contact with boat operators, the millennium exhibition organisers, the Port of London Authority and other interested parties about the possibility of introducing new passenger services on the River Thames. I met my hon. Friend, with representatives of the Transport on Water Association, to discuss this subject last September.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is my hon. Friend aware that during the Festival of Britain, 5 million people took to the river for transport? Does not the millennium exhibition at Greenwich represent an outstanding opportunity to establish a regular passenger service on the Thames? What is the prospect of public funds for piers, the essential infrastructure if this long-awaited and much to be desired service is to become a reality?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is right persistently to draw attention to the need to attract more passenger traffic to the Thames, particularly in the context of the millennium exhibition at Greenwich. Bids can be made to support the building of piers, and in the recent capital challenge allocations we have been able to support a pier for Bankside which will serve both the Tate and the Globe. The pier for the millennium exhibition, which will be at north Greenwich, is within the plans of the millennium company. I hope that it will attract a great many people as a result of the park-and-sail opportunities at the pier and at the sites at Barking and Woolwich.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that the concept that I have presented to him, along with the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) and the Transport on Water Association, has the advantage over the London First scheme in that it would be integrated with the transport network and would not result in tourists paying £5 or £10 a go? The Minister has received the correspondence and should be aware that no fewer than 10 piers could be constructed between Vauxhall and the Tower for a third of the cost of the London First proposals, and that those could be used not only by passenger services but by other vessels. Would not such a public investment be good value for money compared with the £80 million to £100 million being spent on two platforms of the Jubilee line—albeit, of course, that that could interchange with passenger services such as I have described?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that the Jubilee line extension will carry many more people to the millennium exhibition and the other stations on the route than could possibly be transported by water. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that he has consistently supported travel on water. With his twin interests, I suspect that he will one day press us to introduce a Thames pedalo. We have taken on board his points, and he and my hon. Friend the

Member for Romford have written to me. We have passed on their information and calculations to the cross river partnership, the organisation that we are part-funding to carry out an in-depth study of the possibilities of cross-river transport.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: May I welcome the Government's keen interest in regular passenger services on the Thames? May I remind my hon. Friend that the Thames does not stop at Greenwich—or even at the great barrier—but extends all the way to Gravesend, where we have excellent piers and much maritime industry and tradition? I welcome what he says, and I give him all encouragement to make greater use of our great river.

Mr. Bowis: I am happy to acknowledge my hon. Friend's support for extending the use of the river right along to the mouth of the Thames, and he will know that the Thames gateway initiatives are working on that in terms of road and rail links. I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue promoting the interests of north Kent for many years to come.

Millennium Festival

2. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what road improvement measures he proposes to improve access to the site of the millennium festival at Greenwich. [17754]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): The completion of the Hackney-M11 link road and the provision of an escape ramp for lorries at the southern end of the Blackwall tunnel will help coaches get to the site and help cars get to off-site car parks. The only additional roads needed for the exhibition are the local access roads, linked to the A102(M) by improved sliproads. We have made it clear from the outset that access to the exhibition site itself will be by public transport and river, not by car.

Mr. Timms: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. He will know that the organisers' plans entail only 1 per cent. of visitors reaching the festival site in their own cars. That means that there will need to be a great deal of parking elsewhere, almost certainly including sites over the river and north of the river in Newham. Does he share my concern that, to make that possible, there will need to be road infrastructure improvements? It is now getting rather late for some of them to be put in place. For instance, if Newham docklands is to be used for parking, there will need to be a new bridge on the A406 over the A13, and it will take 18 months to build; and if the Stratford rail lands are to be used, there will need to be new bridges over both the rail lands and over the River Lea.

Does the Secretary of State agree that we need to plan ahead to avoid traffic chaos around the time of the millennium festival; and will he consider carefully what needs to be done now to ensure that the necessary road improvements to facilitate off-site parking are in place in time?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there will be a large number of park-and-ride and park-and-sail sites. Of course it is right to plan ahead for adequate provision. The promoters are still in the process of finalising their plans for both park-and-ride and park-and-sail sites. All sites will require adequate access arrangements, and those will have to be included in planning applications. It will then be for the promoter to agree the details with the planning and highways authorities.

Mr. Hawkins: My right hon. Friend may or may not be aware that I had the opportunity this very morning to visit the site of the proposed millennium festival at Greenwich. It was very interesting to see how little opportunity there has yet been for hotel development. Does he agree that if the promoters on Greenwich council and in Millennium Central are to be able to fulfil their ambitions to have hotels, there will need to be a great deal of improvement to road access and car parking?

Will my right hon. Friend also look into the matter of the pier mentioned during exchanges on the first question today? The Port of London Authority needs to take a careful look at the standard of that pier and at road access to it.

Sir George Young: I shall certainly pursue the point about the end of the pier. My hon. Friend is right to point out that the Jubilee line extension will access the millennium site and open up a large number of sites for development in the part of London in question, which urgently needs fresh investment. I am sure that hotels also have a role to play. But their location, and whether they are to be developed, are matters primarily for the local planning authority.

Traffic Congestion, London

3. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the estimated cost to business of traffic congestion in London in the last year for which figures are available. [17755]

Mr. Bowis: There is no agreed measurement of the cost of traffic congestion to businesses, but we have in place a programme of road and rail improvements designed to reduce congestion to enable buses and bicycles to move more freely and to encourage greater use of rail services.

Mrs. Prentice: Does the Minister agree with the London Pride partnership, which recently said that London cannot succeed with a deteriorating transport system? If he does, what does he have to say to the millions of London commuters who have been told in the past month that the maintenance and renewal programme, worth up to £400 million, has been scrapped as a result of the Government's incompetent handling of the network?

Mr. Bowis: I would say to them: unlike the Labour party's programme of no new money, no new lines, no new roads, and no privatisation—for ideological reasons—we have in place a programme of about £200 million for London's trunk roads, £22 million for the red routes, over £100 million for the transport supplementary grant and capital challenge network enhancement projects, about £47 million for bus improvements, and hundreds of millions of pounds for rail

improvements. More than £1 billion, moreover, is in the programme for the London underground system—and all this in the coming year.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the only answer to traffic congestion in London is an improved underground system? He and I have both successfully driven one of the new Northern line trains, but does he agree that the privatisation of London Underground is the only hope for increased investment and that it is absurd of the Labour party to oppose it for purely doctrinal reasons?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is 100 per cent. correct. We have a programme of renewing investment in London's underground over the years leading up to privatisation and thereafter, within five years, completing the task of bringing the system up to date, in addition to the work and investment in new lines. Privatisation will come with all the guarantees in terms of fares and travelcards that the public expect. Any party that stands up in London at the general election without a policy to match that does not deserve the support of Londoners.

Mr. Tony Banks: Traffic congestion in London and the south-east costs billions of pounds every year. It is no good for the Minister to say that the problem will eventually solve itself: it can be solved only by proper traffic-restraining measures. We should stop private cars coming into central London, enforce parking regulations and have a decent tramway system. Those are all positive proposals and I hope that my Front-Bench colleagues will endorse them when they are in government.

Mr. Bowis: I am tempted to give way and let the hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench colleagues endorse that, if it is new Labour's policy to stop cars moving at all in London. I have already described to the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) our investment in a range of policies for road and rail, as well as the underground. Much of the road investment is aimed at improving traffic movement and includes traffic calming. Congestion in London is a result of the continuing improvement in London's economy, which we can be proud of, but to manage the increased traffic and to encourage greater use of public transport we shall have to take the steps that only the Government are prepared to take.

South West Trains

4. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent consultations he has had with the chief executive of Stagecoach Holdings plc about the operation of South West Trains. [17756]

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): The performance of franchised train operators is a matter for the franchising director. *[Interruption.]* Just wait. I have discussed the situation with Mr. Brian Cox and Mr. Peter Cotton of South West Trains.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the recent running, or rather re-running, of South West Trains by Stagecoach has been characterised by gross incompetence on the part of that company's management? However, does he further agree that that is an unacceptable exception to the general rule that privatisation has brought improved punctuality, reliability, information to passengers and, above all, investment? *[Interruption.]* That is in stark contrast to the bad old days of British Rail, when passengers were at the mercy of so many Labour Members, sponsored by the very trade unions that were meant to be running that inadequate system.

Mr. Watts: Yes. My hon. Friend will know that I described the handling of the situation by South West Trains as inept. The good news for him and his constituents is that from Easter South West Trains will be back to its original timetable. He will be aware that since the emergency timetable was introduced in the middle of February the number of peak-hour cancellations into London was reduced to one, and that of the remaining services cancelled 24 are outside the passenger service requirement: services between West Croydon and Guildford, which were introduced with the franchise as part of the new arrangements and are also served by Network SouthCentral. The arrangements were made to minimise the impact on passengers, particularly those coming into London during the peak hour.

Mrs. Dunwoody: If the Minister wants to be taken seriously, he should talk to the passengers who have had to wait for many hours on Waterloo station. What fines will be imposed on South West Trains for its behaviour to date? Unless they are punitive, no one will take him seriously.

Mr. Watts: The penalties for poor performance are as set out in the franchise agreement, and are of the order of £600 per train in the peak hour. They will be imposed in the normal way, when the performance figures for an accounting period are determined.

Mr. Norris: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is extraordinary to hear Labour Members urging the franchising director to fine South West Trains for its acknowledged errors and mistakes when, under the previous nationalised railway, such nonsense occurred regularly and the only redress for passengers was the usual unintelligible announcement of some vague excuse? Is not the reality that this time, South West Trains will be made to pay for its mistake, and that there is real accountability? Does he agree that the one thing that we can guarantee is that this problem will not happen again?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is right. There was no regime to ensure that poor performance in the public sector was penalised. We have a regime that will penalise those responsible for poor performance. We expect far better of the private sector than we became used to accepting from the public sector. We are determined to ensure that passengers enjoy the better standards of service to which they are entitled.

Mr. Chidgey: Can the Minister confirm reports that South West Trains mark 1 slam-door coaches will not be replaced until 2007? Does he remember that after the Clapham rail disaster some years ago, which injured many people including some of my constituents, the Health and Safety Executive condemned slam-door coaches as

increasing the risk to passenger safety? Does he agree that not only passenger interests but passenger safety are being compromised by the inept rail privatisation programme?

Mr. Watts: No. On the contrary, I can confirm that South West Trains intends to buy £90 million of new rolling stock to replace some of the mark 1 stock that it inherited from British Rail. On safety in general, the hon. Gentleman is wrong to suggest that the rolling stock is inherently unsafe. The matter is under review by the Health and Safety Executive, which will report its conclusions in due course.

Mr. Tracey: My hon. Friend will, like all of us, recall that the situation is just as bad as the old British Rail system. I welcome his message from South West Trains that services will be back to normal from Easter, but will he take the message back that it must maintain total consistency of service thereafter and accelerate the programme of improvements such as closed circuit television in car parks at stations such as Surbiton in my constituency?

Mr. Watts: I assure my hon. Friend that that message is understood clearly by South West Trains. He is right that the regrettable level of cancellations that passengers have suffered recently is no worse than the pattern of cancellations that was commonplace throughout the decades of state ownership.

Mr. Andrew Smith: How much penalty has South West Trains paid to date under the performance regime and has it broken the franchise agreement?

Mr. Watts: As I said in reply to an earlier question South West Trains will pay £600 for every cancelled peak-hour train. It would be foolish to try to give a total, because, as I said, there is still one scheduled peak-hour service to London that is being cancelled under the emergency timetable.

Mr. Forman: Does the Minister agree that the real point of these exchanges is that we expect better things and higher standards from a privatised railway, and on the whole we are likely to get that? Is he aware that those of my constituents who travel regularly to London Bridge from Carshalton Beeches and Wallington expect the 8.07 from Carshalton Beeches to arrive on time and for that train to go on to Wallington at 8.10, and to be there on time? As one of those who travels from those stations regularly, it is distressing to find that cancellations take place. Will my hon. Friend make extra efforts to ensure that such cancellations are the exception rather than the rule?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is right that we expect higher standards of performance from the private sector. We will continue to demand that those higher standards are delivered. I am sure that my hon. Friend would also acknowledge, however, that until the unfortunate past month of regular cancellations, the reliability and punctuality of South West Trains was very much better when compared year on year with the services provided in the last year of operation under British Rail.

Taking the year as the basis of comparison provides a more valid measure of the performance of the company than studying a period of four weeks in which it has handled matters ineptly. It is now taking rapid steps to deliver the standard of service that it wishes to deliver to its customers, and which we demand that it should deliver.

Barking to Gospel Oak Line

5. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investigations are being undertaken by his Department into the safety of the infrastructure of the Barking to Gospel Oak railway line. [17757]

Mr. Watts: None.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister agree that it is regrettable and deplorable that no investigations are being undertaken into the safety of the infrastructure of the line when on 7 February all services were cancelled because of concerns about the safety of one of the bridges over the River Lea? Many concerns have also been expressed about the safety of the infrastructure of many other bridges. Many people suspect that in the absence of any programme of investment, modernisation, upgrading and improvements to the safety features of the line, someone somewhere wants it closed altogether. Can the Minister assure us that that line is secure and safe? Will he also assure us that a full safety inspection will be undertaken as a matter of priority?

Mr. Watts: It was as a part of Railtrack's routine inspection of bridges along the route that a particular problem was discovered on bridge 35 over the River Lea. The services over that bridge were suspended while a more thorough investigation took place. That work has now been completed. The affected abutment of the bridge was exposed for detailed examination, which revealed that the piled foundations were unaffected, but concrete was poured into an eroded hole in order to strengthen the bridge until a more permanent repair could be undertaken. The Health and Safety Executive was aware of the problem and is satisfied that Railtrack has managed it adequately. All restrictions on the bridge have now been lifted.

As to the withdrawal of services on the line, that is no part of our plan or that of National Express, which is now the operator. Indeed, that company is committed to replacing all the slam-door mark 1 rolling stock on the Barking to Gospel Oak line and the Bedford to Bletchley line within two years.

South West Trains

6. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions he has given to the franchising director to ensure the disruption on South West Trains is not repeated (a) on that company's lines and (b) on other lines. [17758]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director's objectives, instructions and guidance require him to secure an overall improvement in the quality of services available to railway passengers. Franchise agreements contain provisions which give operators both direct and indirect incentives to achieve that.

Mr. Jones: Does the Minister agree that fining South West Trains £600 per train is completely inadequate given

that the taxpayer is subsidising it to the tune of £60 million a year? May I inform the Minister that only on Saturday a constituent of mine found himself stranded at Ascot on a journey to Aldershot when a train was cancelled with no more than two hours' notice? Is not it true that although the leading company behind South West Trains is called Stagecoach, it has acted like a bunch of cowboys while it has run the rail service? Is it not time that the Minister did something to take effective action to stop that company from leaving our constituents stranded at stations such as Ascot?

Mr. Watts: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman's constituent was inconvenienced. As someone who lives in Ascot, I would say that there are worse places to be stranded. However, that performance is not acceptable and I am sure that his constituent will obtain recompense from the company for its failure.

The Opposition's protests on behalf of passengers might have a ring of truth were they not comparable with the sponsored silence that we hear whenever passengers are inconvenienced by the activities of their friends in the trade unions.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Is it not remarkable how the Minister stands there as though all this had nothing to do with him? He cannot tell us the total penalty, nor even whether the franchise agreement has been broken, yet after all the chaos with South West Trains, Connex South Central is reported to be breaking its agreement and West Anglian-Great Northern is now planning to cut peak-hour services to Stevenage by a third. What responsibility will the Minister accept for that utterly disgraceful state of affairs on the privatised railways, or do the Government think that, having privatised the railway, they can now wash their hands of all responsibility? The House demands action from the Government to sort out the mess that they have created.

Mr. Watts: I am just as willing to take credit for all the good things that are happening as a result of privatisation, including the improved service to the hon. Gentleman's constituency of Oxford on the Oxford to Paddington line, as I am to criticise if performance slips below the standard that we have the right to expect. The hon. Gentleman based his question about West Anglian-Great Northern on false information. A one-third reduction in services to Stevenage is not proposed. Between 7 am and 10 am, there are 26 trains from Stevenage to London and the proposed number is 22; in the evening, there are 25 departures from London and the proposed number is 23. What the hon. Gentleman has missed is that peak-hour commuter services into London are regulated both in terms of a minimum number of train movements and, more importantly, by load factor regulations. The obligation on the train operator, which was never an obligation on British Rail, is to ensure that overcrowding does not exceed specified limits. If a certain number of train movements is not adequate to meet passenger demands, there is a requirement to provide more trains. The dual protection of a minimum number of trains per hour and load factor regulations ensures that passengers will have a far better standard of service than they ever had from British Rail.

European Ground Handling Directives

7. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what organisations and companies he has consulted with regard to the European ground handling directives; and what representations he has received. [17759]

Sir George Young: My Department consulted extensively within the aviation industry during the negotiation of the European Council directive on ground handling, and will shortly consult again on its implementation into UK law.

Mr. Steen: As, unlike European airports, most British airports have already carried out the spirit and competitive requirement of the directive, will the Secretary of State explain why his officials seem determined to extend the directive and interpret it even further so that the British support services at British airports will have to tender all over again, at enormous cost to them but with no real advantage to the public or the airports? Why cannot we just enforce the directive as it is, as every other European country does?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right to point out that the directive will bite much harder on European airports than on UK airports because in many European airports there is no competition. Indifferent services are sometimes provided at a high cost whereas within UK airports, especially the larger ones, there is an element of competition. It is therefore in the interests of passengers generally and of the UK ground handling industry that the industry should have access to European airports, and the directive provides that.

As for implementing the directive in the UK, we are not in the business of gold plating directives. Our objective is to implement the directive with the minimum burden on UK industry, and we shall shortly consult industry on the draft regulations. I shall certainly take my hon. Friend's exhortation to heart.

London Underground

8. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the long-term capital funding requirements of London Underground. [17760]

Sir George Young: The Government have considered very carefully the long-term capital funding requirements of London Underground. That was a key factor behind our decision that privatisation of the underground was the right way forward. I do not believe that any other approach to the funding of London Underground could deliver the same results.

Mr. Congdon: Given the significant investment in London Underground in the past five years, which doubled in real terms compared with the previous five years, and given that much more investment is needed to improve the underground's infrastructure for the benefit of Londoners, does my right hon. Friend agree that it has been shown conclusively that the underground should be privatised? Privatisation will deliver much-improved services to the people of London, and I warmly support that initiative.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that we have done better than our

predecessors on the level of core investment in London Underground, which is now 50 per cent. more than in the 1980s and 100 per cent. more than in the 1970s. None the less, we want to do even better. Against that background, I introduced proposals for the privatisation of London Underground, with the key element of recycling the proceeds back into the underground to remove the investment backlog within five years of privatisation.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Secretary of State knows that I am a big supporter of the Jubilee line. What is the funding position of the extension? Will it be open in March next year, as originally planned? If not, when will it open?

Sir George Young: Funding of the Jubilee line extension is not an issue: it has underspent against budget. There is no question of resources being inadequate to secure the completion of the extension. It looks likely that the extension will not open in full in March next year. London Transport hopes to make an announcement shortly about the precise dates.

Road Markings

9. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicular accidents have been caused by defective road markings in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [17761]

Mr. Bowis: The information collected by my Department about accident sites and road conditions does not distinguish between road markings and other traffic signs, but only 0.5 per cent. of all reported accidents involve defective road surfaces or signs.

Mr. French: Has my hon. Friend noticed the increase in diagonal hatch marks, the original purpose of which was to improve lane discipline? Has he also noticed that, on certain stretches, the part of the road that has a diagonal hatch mark is considerably wider than the part that has no mark? The motorist sometimes has to drive down a stretch of road that is narrower than is reasonable for a motor car. Will my hon. Friend try to ensure that the use of such excess road markings is curbed?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend makes an important point. He is right: the purpose of such road hatching is to segregate traffic, discourage overtaking, encourage driver discipline and provide crossing opportunities for pedestrians. However, as he said, it can also lead to vehicles being closer to pedestrians. Great care is required when planning such measures. It is the responsibility of the highway authority concerned. The Department issues guidance, and we shall review that guidance during the coming year. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's points are taken on board.

Rail Investment

10. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on investment in the national railway infrastructure. [17762]

Mr. Watts: In the first six months of 1996–97, Railtrack spent an additional £100 million on the renewal or enhancement of its infrastructure, 25 per cent. more than it spent in the first six months of 1995–96. In its network management statement, published last month, the company announced that it intends to spend an average of more than £4 million a day between 1995 and 2001—some £10 billion in total—on maintaining, renewing and enhancing the rail network.

Mr. Betts: Will the Minister explain to the users of the midland main line what possible benefits they will receive from privatisation, given that Railtrack's plans show no significant investment in that line, although it is one of the slowest and worst-maintained main lines in the country? Does he accept that the franchise operator has told me that there is no provision in the franchise for tilting trains, which is the only other way in which speeds on the line can be significantly increased? Was any thought given during the privatisation process to the interaction between investment in track and investment in rolling stock? It seems that users of the midland main line will get neither under privatisation. Apparently, the only benefit that my constituents will get will be free cups of tea and coffee, and longer times sitting on the trains in which to enjoy them.

Mr. Watts: The main benefits for passengers on the midland main line will be the provision of an extra 22 trains a day, served by new rolling stock which the company has ordered, and the refurbishment of all existing high-speed train sets. Because of the additional services that will operate each day, journeys to Sheffield will be shorter, and because stations will be served by the new rolling stock and the extra 22 services, the high-speed trains will have to make fewer intermediate stops. Moreover, passengers are already benefiting from the "foursight fare", which allows four people to travel anywhere on the network for a flat fare of £29.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Will my hon. Friend continue to put pressure on Railtrack to implement, sooner rather than later, the multi-million-pound plans for upgrading the west coast main line? Does he accept that those of us who use the line regularly expect to experience an altogether higher level of service in the coming years as a result of Mr. Richard Branson's takeover of the line?

Mr. Watts: Railtrack will spend £1.5 billion on the west coast main line, in addition to the £500 million that Virgin Rail will spend on the new tilting rolling stock to reduce journey times on the line. On current plans, the tilting trains and shorter journey times will be introduced from 2002, and there will be further improvements in journey times in subsequent years.

Mr. Bradley: Can we really have any faith in Railtrack's investment plans, given its record to date? Has the Minister seen the findings of the Railway Development Society? According to those findings, because of a lack of investment and for other reasons, private train operators in southern England are running fewer trains than agreed in the minimum service level requirements.

May I ask the Minister again whether the private train operators have broken their franchise agreements? Will they do anything about that? Will the Minister intervene? What protection will he give the public, given that

thousands, if not millions, of pounds of taxpayers' money is still going to the private train operating companies, to ensure that they are given the decent, reliable, efficient service for which they are crying out?

Mr. Watts: As I said in response to the initial question, Railtrack's expenditure is £100 million, or 25 per cent., up on last year in the first half of the current year. As for the passenger service requirement, on South West Trains there are some minor discrepancies between the PSR and the timetable that was written by, and inherited from, British Rail. Those discrepancies will be corrected when the new timetable is introduced in May or June.

The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising has described the discrepancies to me as minor. They arise from the fact that the private franchise operator has not yet written a timetable based on the PSR. As I said, it inherited timetables drawn up by British Rail.

Air Services Agreement

11. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made with the negotiation of a new air services agreement with the United States of America. [17763]

Sir George Young: Good progress has been made, most recently at a round of discussions in Washington last month.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am grateful for that reply. Will my right hon. Friend ensure in the concluding phase of the negotiations that they remain bilateral, and that there is no question of European Union interference, especially in the special relationship that the United Kingdom and the United States have in regard to air transport, as in so much else? In so doing, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the need for British carriers, such as British Airways, to have adequate gateways into the United States will be maintained at the conclusion of the agreement?

Sir George Young: I can confirm that responsibility for air service negotiations between this country and the United States is a matter for Her Majesty's Government. That responsibility is discharged by my Department, and we are opposed to any extension of the competence of the European Union into this dialogue. The hon. Gentleman will know that British Airways is a successful and competitive international airline. It would in the interest not just of British Airways but of other airlines in the UK if we could move towards a more liberal regime between the UK and the United States. I am sure that our airlines would compete effectively in that liberalised environment.

Mr. Pike: The Secretary of State will know that there has been a particular difficulty in opening up United States airlines' access to regional airports such as Manchester. Do the Government fully support the case for the regional airports? What progress has been made in that direction?

Sir George Young: As the hon. Gentleman may know, I recently had the pleasure of attending a meeting of the all-party group supporting Manchester airport, where hon. Members registered their pleasure at the recent decision on a second runway. We support regional airports. We will do all that we can in international dialogues to make it easier for people to access Manchester airport, so that that highly successful airport can continue to expand.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Disabled Staff

31. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what steps the Commission is taking to increase the recruitment of disabled staff. [17783]

34. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what proposals he has to improve the conditions of disabled staff. [17786]

Mr. A. J. Beith (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): All disabled people applying for House staff posts are offered an interview, provided that they have the minimum qualifications and that their disability would not prevent them from satisfactorily carrying out the duties of the advertised post. Provisions and adjustments are made to ensure that disabled people can work in the precincts, and candidates for jobs are asked to say what special arrangements they would need if taking up a job. The House of Commons complies with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and follows the guidance in the code of practice.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the right hon. Member aware that, on 13 January, he told me that only 13 people with disabilities were employed by the House of Commons Commission, and that it would pursue vigorously a policy of increasing the number of people with disabilities who work for the Commission? In that case, will he tell the House where these jobs are advertised, what contact he has with disability organisations and, above all, what serious steps have been taken to ensure that this building is fully accessible to people, whatever their disability? Many of us have been raising this issue in the House for more than 10 years, and we have had the same evasive and delaying answers from him and his predecessors, saying that it is very difficult and very complicated. Every other public building usually makes efforts to ensure that it is fully accessible—why not this one?

Mr. Beith: Strenuous efforts are made to make this building more accessible. The hon. Gentleman must be aware of some of the particular difficulties. As far as I am aware, the Commission has never refused to fund any improvements suggested by its expert advice that would assist disabled people, but of course ensuring that they take up posts in the House involves ensuring that advertisements invite them to apply, as they do, that they are given positive consideration, which I have just described, and that, wherever they need special help to be able to do the job, that too can be given. Those are valuable developments, although we are far from satisfied with the results achieved so far.

Mr. Flynn: Why has the right hon. Gentleman not responded to the questions that I tabled two, three and five years ago seeking improvements to this Chamber?

If there were a box in the corner of the Chamber and it were used by civil servants—which of course it is not—it would be totally inaccessible to some civil servants, and there would be a bar on their career prospects if they could not use such a box.

There is another problem in the Chamber which might immediately arise, because some candidates in the election are wheelchair-bound. Why have arrangements not been made for those people to be able to do their work as Members of Parliament? That should have been done many years ago. The problem will be with us in a few weeks.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman will know that considerable steps are taken to assist one of his hon. Friends who has a disability to ensure that he can do the job of a full Member of Parliament properly, although that does not arise directly from this question. I will consider the hon. Gentleman's point about facilities for civil servants attending the House.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that this is not simply a matter of statistics, but that the House has to try to set an example and lead the rest of the country? Although we recognise that this is an ancient building, over a period we need to make further investment to make it more accessible, not just to visitors but to people who work here.

Mr. Beith: The Commission agrees with that view and seeks to act accordingly.

Staff (General Election)

32. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement about the financial arrangements for staff on short–term contracts during the general election period. [17784]

Mr. Beith: In general, House of Commons staff on short-term contracts are not affected by the general election period. Their duties and remuneration remain unchanged.

Mr. Banks: I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that a large number of Conservative Members will jump ship before the general election and that perhaps a larger number will be going down with it at the election. In both cases, a generous financial lifeboat is available for them. What about the staff here? For example, what about those who rely on overtime payments because they serve hon. Members in the canteen? What happens to them? Would it be possible to have a general election financial bonus for those staff, to go along with the bonus of having a Labour Government after the election?

Mr. Beith: None of the House of Commons staff will lose his job or not have his contract renewed as a result of any outcome of the general election. I think that the hon. Gentleman refers primarily to the staff of hon. Members who are not the responsibility of the Commission. He must address questions about them to the Leader of the House. Most Refreshment Department staff will continue to be paid in full during the Dissolution, although they are not required to attend, and they will be able to carry out other activities if they wish. Those on evening duty are on half-pay during the Dissolution.

Staff (Overtime)

33. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the Commission's current estimate of the staff overtime bill for 1996–97. [17785]

Mr. Beith: The House expects to spend £850,000 on staff overtime in 1996–97.

Mr. Marshall: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that our staff who work this overtime serve the House with skill, courtesy and charm? Therefore, does he further agree that it is quite unnecessary for 70 members of our staff to go to a charm school during the general election campaign? Would not the money spent on that charm school be better spent on some hon. Members?

Mr. Beith: No overtime payments are involved in the training programmes that go on in the House and affect a far larger number of people. If there are valuable courses of this kind, I should be tempted to go on them myself, but I expect to be busy during the general election period.

TRANSPORT

M25

13. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the reasons for the delay in completion of the widening works of the M25 at Reigate; and who will meet the additional related costs. [17765]

Mr. Watts: The principal reasons have been the need to replace more of the existing road than was expected and the formation of ruts in the resurfaced carriageway. These costs of unforeseen works will be borne by the Highways Agency. I am happy to say that four lanes in both directions were opened on Saturday 8 March.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does the Minister understand that the people of Reigate are not interested in the petty squabbling and spite of the Conservative party but want to know why they have been frustrated in using the motorway between junctions 6 and 8, along with thousands of other people who use that road for commerce and for getting to and from work? Who will pay the additional costs that have been incurred by the inordinate and unacceptable delay over which the Minister has presided? What is the cost to the taxpayer of the absolute shambles and scandal over which he is presiding?

Mr. Watts: I have been inconvenienced from time to time in travelling from my home, and I know that the hon. Gentleman has also been inconvenienced. Throughout the roadworks, three lanes in each direction have been kept open. Until the contract is completed and the final accounts settled, the final cost cannot be determined.

Road and Rail Traffic

14. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his policy of transferring traffic from road to rail. [17766]

Mr. Watts: I review the effectiveness of this policy regularly. Newly privatised train operators have ambitious plans to attract new passengers and freight by getting traffic off the roads and on to the trains.

Mr. Grocott: That was not an answer to the question. May I help the Minister? Since the Conservative party came to power, despite its declared support for the transfer of traffic from road to rail, the proportion of passenger traffic by rail has gone down from 7 per cent.—admittedly low—to 5 per cent., and the proportion of freight traffic has gone down from 11 per cent. to 6 per cent. I have a simple proposition which is common sense to everyone except the Government. If a national rail system is dismembered and fragmented, as the Government have done through their privatisation policy, any strategy of trying to transfer goods from road to rail, which is difficult at the best of times, is made almost impossible.

Mr. Watts: There might be a little more in the hon. Gentlemen's argument on the effects of restructuring if it were not for the fact that, in 1996, the level of rail passenger traffic was higher than at any time in the previous five years. I am sure that he will welcome the intention of the new franchisee for the west coast main line to investigate the feasibility of through services to Shrewsbury, which I believe would be of benefit to his constituency.

The newly privatised rail freight operators have been succeeding in winning new business. More than 150 rail freight grants have been awarded, securing traffic to rail—which is equivalent to more than 3 million lorry journeys per year. Last Thursday, I announced that we are introducing regulations to extend to piggyback operations the 44-tonne derogation that is currently enjoyed by lorries taking containers and swap bodies to railheads. That is a further measure to encourage the switch of freight from road to rail. Those are some of the actions of which we are justifiably proud.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the Minister aware that the much improved service to Southend on the London-Tilbury-Southend line—it used to be called the misery line under British Rail—since privatisation is being helped further by the promise of new and faster trains? Is that not only one example of how we can get traffic from road to rail, and bring great benefits to the travelling public?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The order for new rolling stock placed last week will be widely welcomed by passengers on a line that used to be called the misery line but is now among the most popular lines on the entire railway network.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Legislative Programme

35. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what proportion of the Government's legislative programme he plans to complete by Easter. [17787]

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): As much as possible.

Mr. Hughes: I suppose that is about par for the course. On my calculation, 25 Government Bills are still before one or other House of Parliament. It would be helpful if the Leader of the House would give us a slightly more accurate estimate of how many of those he proposes should be completed—he must have a timetable. Just a postscript: will the extraordinary and possibly farcical change of party by the hon. Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) have any effect on the composition of the Committees considering any of those Bills?

Mr. Newton: It is not for me to determine the composition of Committees, as that is done under an order of the House which was passed only about two years ago. The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that relatively few Bills are now in Committee.

On the hon. Gentleman's general question, I am no more able to give him an answer now than I was when he asked it on a previous occasion, when I said that the number of variables involved would make any estimate merely speculative. That remains the case.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend expect to be able to give us a better answer this Thursday? Will he give us some indication of whether the House is likely to sit until 27 March or to come back after Easter and a short recess?

Mr. Newton: I am mindful of the interest in that question.

London Grand Committee

36. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will establish a Grand Committee for London. [17789]

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Cohen: Why have the Tories brought nothing but decline to London? They abolished the Greater London council and will not allow Londoners to have any strategic say in their own affairs. Consequently, traffic chokes up the capital; the health service and public transport have been run down; and there is large-scale homelessness, crime and unemployment. It has also damaged London's prosperity and prospects. As Labour will establish a new democratic authority for London and raise London's status, is it any wonder that discerning Londoners are turning in droves to Labour?

Mr. Newton: According to my information, London already has 84 Members of Parliament, more than 2,000

councillors, if we include the Corporation of the City of London, and 10 Members of the European Parliament. I have seen no evidence that Londoners want to pay for yet another level of expensive bureaucracy. Far from the picture painted by the hon. Gentleman, one reads almost daily in newspapers of London's reputation abroad and of the number of people brought here by that reputation.

Mr. Dykes: Obviously every capital city needs some type of collective system of government for the entire capital territory. Which system does my right hon. Friend personally prefer?

Mr. Newton: I personally prefer the position which the Government have adopted whereby there is, for example, a designated Minister for Transport in London, who was in the House only a short time ago, and whereby my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, as Minister for London, co-ordinates a Cabinet sub-committee for that purpose.

Summer Recess

37. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many recent representations he has received on the length of the annual summer recess; and if he will make a statement. [17790]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked about this on a number of occasions during questions on my weekly business statement.

Mr. Llwyd: With respect to the Lord President, that was not a very good answer, was it? I am interested to know whether the right hon. Gentleman has received any representations on shortening the ridiculously long long vacation and having a set working week to finish at a given time on Thursdays.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked about that a couple of times during business questions in the past six or seven months, or perhaps a little longer. I have commented on the matter fairly frequently and referred to the report of the Jopling Committee, which made no recommendations for changes along the lines suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

European Directives

38. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will bring forward measures to ensure that all European directives are debated on the Floor of the House. [17791]

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Steen: As it has become the practice to get European matters in and out of Committee as quickly as possible and with as little debate as possible, will the Leader of the House consider dealing with all European matters on the Floor of the House until the general election, as happened years ago, so that the whole country can see the extent of Brussels' interference in our way of life?

Mr. Newton: I note my hon. Friend's concern, but were we to proceed as he suggests and were all European matters to be discussed on the Floor of the House, I would want a signed undertaking from him that he did not wish to have an Easter recess at all.

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point of order relates to a response to a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) about the disposal by landfill of cattle carcases. He was told that 6,100 carcases suspected of having bovine spongiform encephalopathy had been disposed of by landfill, but that the locations, details and dates were too expensive to be provided. As a Back Bencher interested in environmental protection, I have been endeavouring to pursue the issue for some months but am finding it frustrating and almost impossible to operate solely by means of parliamentary questions and answers which are later contradicted and countermanded. I wonder whether you could advise me, Madam Speaker, whether you keep a record of the number of times Ministers have to correct their parliamentary answers to hon. Members so that, in the absence of any authoritative report on the disposal of carcases from the BSE cull, a Back Bencher like myself can arrive at the truth.

Madam Speaker: There is no way in which I can keep track of all that Ministers say in the House, any more than I can keep track of what Back Benchers say—*[Interruption.]* I am perfectly aware of what is happening. I was asked a question by the hon. Lady and I have every intention of replying to the point of order.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I am glad that the hon. Lady is not referring to the over-30-months scheme, which of course came into operation in the spring of last year; clearly, she is referring to earlier periods. I give her and the House an undertaking that I shall discuss the matter further with my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and then return to the House.

Mrs. Helen Jackson *rose—*

Madam Speaker: There can be no further point of order. The Minister has answered the hon. Lady; he will take the matter up with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and will report back to the House as a result of the hon. Lady's point of order.

Orders of the Day

Opposition Day

[7TH ALLOTTED DAY—FIRST PART]

Public Responsibility For Social Justice

3.33 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I beg to move,

That this House calls for a concerted effort to eradicate poverty and create full employment; believes in a society free of social injustice and inequality where decent, democratic values ensure that priorities become the defeat of homelessness, the maintenance of free health care and the guarantee of dignity from cradle to grave for all citizens; pledges itself to working against the politics of selfishness and greed and to developing a society where the contribution of the whole community is sought and valued; and, for the above reasons, rejects the Government's proposed spending plans for 1997–98 and 1998–99.

I welcome the opportunity to highlight social and economic justice and our public responsibility in this House for those issues. Central to the debate is the political will to effect change to the benefit of all our constituents, the communities that we represent and people outwith our country.

Politicians are not held in the highest regard at any level of political activity—community council, local council, Parliament or Europe. However, my experience during 15 years in the House is that the majority of Members of Parliament work very hard on behalf of individuals and hold dearly concepts of social and economic justice. We do not always achieve the results that we want, but there is a genuine consensus among politicians that we are here to represent people and we want to achieve the best for them.

It is tempting to concentrate on what the media tell us are the critical issues of the day, but we should step back from that from time to time and consider what we are doing as legislators, because that is fundamental to all of us. Everyone in the House—I am glad to see a substantial number of hon. Members present—should ask themselves why they signed up to represent their party and why they decided to become involved in politics, particularly when many people appear to regard politics as despicable.

I joined my party for a simple reason. People are always asked why "they" did not do something. That "they" was a grey, amorphous organisation. People should ask, "Why don't I become involved? Why don't I do something about what is happening in my community and my country?" As a young student at Glasgow university—that well-known breeding ground for politicians—I listened to our lecturers talking about history, culture and literature. I was struck by the words of John Donne, the metaphysical poet. Metaphysical poets are one of my great joys in life. I read them regularly. John Donne wrote:

"No man is an Island, entire of it self . . . And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

Whatever our party or our constituency, we are all here to talk about the people for whom the bell tolls. Politics is about the involvement of people. It is about thought and analysis of the situation in which we find ourselves.

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

When this institution was founded, we did not have electronic media or journalists wanting a quick quote on every issue. In one respect, insularity and immediacy have perhaps undermined our political process. Those who fought for you and me, Madam Speaker, to have the right, as women, to be members of this House and to vote did so because they believed that society would be changed irrevocably through representation. Indeed, such campaigns have changed many aspects of society.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The hon. Lady made some interesting observations about people saying not, "What can I do about it?", but, "What are they going to do about it?" I received 30 letters from children at a school in my constituency asking what I, the Government or somebody else could do. Only one out of 30 letters said, "What can I do?" It seems to me that the desire to fob off responsibility starts at far too early an age and I honestly do not know how to tackle that problem.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Lady has raised a genuine point that I shall address later in my speech. We all, as individuals, have a responsibility to contribute to society and the values and visions that we hold dear.

I studied history at university and it is clear from our history books that many social reforms would not have occurred without representation. One such example is slavery. People were told that black people could not be freed from slavery as they would not cope with society. I pay tribute to those who argued against that in Parliament and, with great difficulty, achieved the abolition of slavery.

Representation helped to remove the horrendous attitudes that allowed small boys and girls to work as chimney sweeps and stopped them being sent up chimneys to clear out the soot. I do not believe that the welfare state would have been established without representation. Those fundamental issues should underpin every aspect of our work as Members of Parliament, councillors, Members of the European Parliament, members of community councils or any organisation that works for society.

One reason why the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) and I tabled today's motion is that there seems to be a lull in politics. We no longer talk about visions and values. Perhaps it is the immediacy of having microphones stuck under our noses and having to make comments to journalists.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The hon. Lady will be aware that only this week my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Social Security announced far-reaching changes to the pensions system, looking well into the next century. Does that not suggest that we take a long-term view rather than relying on short-term soundbites as she suggests?

Mrs. Ewing: I shall return to pensions later in my speech. The problem has been with us for many years and it is sad that such a major issue now seems to be part of a general election campaign rather than being addressed seriously by the House of Commons through a series of meetings in relevant Committees and elsewhere.

As I was saying, there seems to be a lull in politics whereby we deal with immediate rather than long-term issues. Lloyd-George described himself in "Dod's" as a Welsh nationalist and a radical, but he dropped that description in 1922. I wonder why we have dispensed with the idea of being radical and examining long-term issues. Did it start in the 1960s with the "I'm all right, Jack" philosophy, or was it with the "Sermon on the Mound", as we refer to it in Scotland, when Baroness Thatcher said, "There is no such thing as society"?

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): What my right hon. and noble Friend said was that there was no such thing as society; society consisted of individuals who have to make their contribution. I am sure that the hon. Lady would not want to misrepresent my right hon. and noble Friend. In the spirit in which her speech is intended—to have a serious debate and move away from soundbite politics—and given that her party is quoting that Scotland has had a surplus since 1978 of £26 billion, will she confirm that, on the basis of her own figures and her party's calculations, which are of course misconceived, Scotland in fact had a deficit of £25 billion over the past four years and therefore received a contribution from England?

Mrs. Ewing: The right hon. Gentleman raises two points. First, society consists of individuals and the contribution that they make to it. Society has to take account of general perspectives and how we help all the people. Secondly, he wants to challenge the figures that his Government have produced. If he is really saying that Scotland is a poor nation, I wonder what he wants to do. Quite honestly, Scotland is not a poor nation. If it is, why do those sitting on the Treasury Bench want to hang on to it and not let us go? The money is to provide the kind of society that we want in Scotland.

Mr. Forsyth: On the specific point about the figure, I asked a simple question. Perhaps I put it in too complicated a manner. Will the hon. Lady confirm that, on the basis of her own party's figures, Scotland had a net contribution from England of £25 billion over the past four years—that there was a deficit of £25 billion? That is her party's figure; will she confirm it?

Mrs. Ewing: The right hon. Gentleman is talking about a United Kingdom deficit. The Government's statistics have shown that Scotland has been subsidising that UK deficit for a very substantial period of time. We want to change that and use the resources in Scotland. The right hon. Gentleman is trying once again to reduce the debate to the bandying around of statistics. All the analysis that has been undertaken by economists in Scotland and by the Government has shown that Scotland is a net contributor to the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom has a substantial deficit. If we could restore our assets to Scotland, we could achieve a great deal.

Underpinning all our actions are the philosophical arguments that I want to put to the House. I believe that it is important to have a philosophical debate about values and vision in the House of Commons before the election. We are all privileged and honoured to have been elected to serve in this place, but we need to see out of our own back windows into a world where fear, poverty and depression dominate the lives of citizens in our

constituencies and countries, and indeed abroad. Today's headlines, to which the Secretary of State for Scotland was trying to draw attention, must not distract any of us from the vision and deeply held value that we are all Jock Tamson's bairns. Today's debate is about vision and values, and Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party are proud to lead it.

Any of us in the House who read the mail from our constituents and listen sincerely to what people say in our weekly surgeries or in formal or informal meetings with organisations in our constituencies know that real concern is centred on vision and values. Let us take education, for example. In a social democratic society, we have always believed in Scotland that education was a means by which people from a poor background could rise through the meritocracy and project themselves into a better life. That is what my parents wanted for my brother and me and what everybody's parents want for their children. Yet education is under severe threat in Scotland at the moment.

We are told that every home should be a castle, but 75,000 Scots were homeless last year and there were 50,000 homeless people in Wales. Those figures are horrific. Imagine not having the right to go home after a day's work, walk into a warm home and say, "This is mine, this is my security and this is where I feel good." The statistics are appalling.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way on housing. I draw her attention to the amendment tabled to the Finance Bill which would reduce the level of VAT on energy-saving materials to 8 per cent. Does she agree that that would have a beneficial environmental effect, improve health and comfort and create jobs? Is she as disappointed as I am that, by all accounts, Labour Front Benchers will not support the amendment tomorrow night? Does she agree that that is significant? If the amendment is not supported, we will fail to make an important gain for the fuel poor, and to take the opportunity to inflict a defeat on the Government.

Mrs. Ewing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me of that amendment. He may be interested to learn that when the Scottish Labour party held a conference this weekend in Inverness, it issued an executive statement stating:

"Because of the pressing need to renovate Scotland's housing stock, we will make housing repairs—including energy efficiency measures—one of our key priorities for our environment task force".

It is strange that a measure that has been investigated by the all-party warm homes group, of which my hon. Friend is a member, and that would cost only £8 million, has been abandoned by the Labour party.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I am not trying to argue with the hon. Lady, but she said that there were 75,000 homeless in Scotland. I thought that the Shelter figure for last year was 31,000. Whom does her figure cover?

Mrs. Ewing: I gave the most recent figures given to me by Shelter in Scotland. Substantial debates on housing were initiated by my party in the Scottish Grand Committee and in Adjournment debates in the House. It is always difficult to assess exact numbers, but we have pinpointed the extent of the problem that we face. Our councils are hard pressed for cash. The measures in the Budget will make it even more difficult for our councils to address the problems, both by new build and by renovating existing stock.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I am sympathetic to the hon. Lady's arguments, but I wonder why we should be less concerned about people in England who are homeless than about those in Scotland and Wales. A proportionate number of people are homeless in England, many of whom are Scottish or Welsh in origin. Does that upset the primary nationalist argument that England is somehow a land flowing with milk and honey at Scotland's expense?

Mrs. Ewing: That is a flippant remark. If the hon. Gentleman reads the motion carefully, he will discover that we are discussing public responsibility for social and economic justice. I am speaking specifically as a Scottish Member of Parliament about Scottish issues—and some of my colleagues will speak as Welsh Members on Welsh issues—but I am deeply concerned about the problems faced by everyone in the United Kingdom and, indeed, all those further afield in the international community. That is why we have put the subject of social and economic justice back on to the political agenda in the run-up to the general election.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) mentioned the issue of health and care for the elderly. We await with interest the White Paper to be published later this week, but I wonder why we have had to wait so long for such a document to be produced.

When I worked in the administration of training social workers in the west of Scotland—an area that included the whole of Strathclyde and Dumfries and Galloway—there was always deep concern about care for the elderly, which was then called "the sleeping giant". Why have we suddenly started to discuss this problem on the eve of an election? It is cheap electioneering, rather than a serious attempt to address a situation that should have been dealt with years ago. The facilities exist in this House to allow us to have a considered review of the difficulties that we now face.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Ewing: I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene again, but I have promised that I would be brief. I have been generous in giving way to other hon. Members.

We must have principles in the run-up to the general election. The vast majority of people throughout the United Kingdom—irrespective of their country of origin or beliefs—dislike selfishness and greed. The motion aims to encourage a society where the contribution of the community is sought and valued, and where social injustice and inequity are eradicated. The constitutional change that we seek will benefit not only the nations of Scotland and Wales, but will act as a catalyst for a rethink and a rejection of vested interests, traditions and attitudes. We seek the removal of centralisation, and this has been one of the most centralising Parliaments in the EU—and, indeed, throughout western civilisation.

Eurosceptics talk about a democratic deficit between Europe and the United Kingdom, but they seem to be blindly ignorant and unaware of the democratic deficit

[Mrs. Ewing]

between this place and the nations of Scotland and Wales, as well as the regions of England. We have to face up to new challenges, and we should not simply bandy around figures or cheap sound bites and slogans at the election. The new challenges involve the EU, and raise questions. Where does it go? Will it be confederal? Will it be federal? What decisions will be taken? How many countries will join us? The United Nations is as representative an organisation as we would want at a time when we face the crisis in Albania, and when we have yet to resolve the problems in Bosnia. There is a plethora of international organisations—both voluntary and statutory—in which we should be involved and in which we must take a more long-term view. We should represent citizens at home and abroad and we must say to them that we have visions and values.

I still believe that politics is an honest profession. I can only reiterate that in my 15 years as a Member of Parliament, I have gained a great deal of respect for those men and women who give so much to try to resolve people's problems. The SNP and Plaid Cymru are today challenging the failure of the two major parties and of this institution. The two main parties are political clones—although their Back Benchers are not—and are in a mood of retrenchment rather than reform. Nothing is likely to change after the election, whichever party is in government.

Politics is at a crossroads. The public are cynical, and I defy any hon. Member to say other than that. What are we to do? Do we keep on in the same direction, with the same political and social philosophies of the two main Unionist parties? On the other hand, should we tell the public that there is now an opportunity for a change of direction, as signposted in the motion that we have tabled today? We want social and economic justice to be at the heart of the coming election campaign, not just because it is what we believe in but because it is a cause dear to all the peoples of the United Kingdom.

3.59 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on securing a debate on this important topic. I am not sure which the Labour party in Scotland is more afraid of: the Scottish National party, or a debate on social and economic justice. I never thought to see such an appalling turn-out of Scottish Labour Members for a debate on these issues; we are reduced to one spin doctor posing as a Labour Back Bencher.

Public responsibility in the SNP sense means more state interference, in the form of public ownership, for instance. That used to be a widely shared view among Labour Members. Those of us who, not so many years ago, proclaimed that only the market could generate wealth were derided as outcasts—but where are the outcasts now? They appear to be on the Opposition Benches, doubtless bruised by their fraternal conference in Scotland last week.

The truth is that market forces reign unchallenged around the world. More and more people in more and more political parties understand the importance of the market as a means of creating the wealth to ensure prosperity and social and economic justice. Indeed, Scottish Labour Members seem to have bowed rather spectacularly to their masters in Islington; the party elections were the final pogrom against the old left. Today, socialism appears to be the creed that dare not speak its name. New Labour seems to have new priorities, forged in the harsh environment of the Islington cocktail party—more socialite than socialist.

The guttering flame of socialism, however, still burns bright in Scotland. The Scottish nationalists appear to be the last remaining socialist party in Britain: the most left-wing party in Europe. That is what makes a mockery of their prattle about social justice. Dispensing social justice means having the resources, and the SNP's programme is a blueprint for the impoverishment of Scotland—a one-way ticket to the third world.

SNP Members want to take Scotland out of the United Kingdom, where they apparently feel stifled among a population of 55 million, and into a federalist Europe of, eventually, 500 million. They have, of course, no guarantee of getting into Europe at all. They have no admission ticket; and the price of admission would be entry on the most integrationist of terms.

The SNP, like the Labour party, would sign up to the social chapter and the minimum wage, and in so doing would condemn hundreds of thousands of Scots to the dole queue. Unemployment in Germany in the past two months rose by 500,000; unemployment in France and Spain showed the same trend. That shows where these policies lead—not to social justice. They may lead to better conditions for those in work—conditions governed by legislation—but that comes at the expense of other people's jobs, and long-term job security.

Sir Russell Johnston: The right hon. Gentleman has referred to German unemployment. How does he think this country would have managed if it had had to absorb a country of 17 million people with a rotten economic system?

Mr. Forsyth: I shall treat that as the hon. Gentleman's argument against economic and monetary union.

The Scottish nationalists would enter their brave new world with a deficit of £8.2 billion. Even if they got all the oil and gas revenues, which they will not, that would shrink to a mere £6.4 billion.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) produced some fantasy figures, claiming that Scotland has a budget surplus of £400 million. He did it by applying 1994 Treasury figures to 1996, assuming that 90 per cent. of North sea oil revenues would accrue to Scotland, and rounding up Scottish income tax receipts to inflate them by a mere £60 million—15 per cent. of the alleged surplus.

There are 68 Scottish National party spending commitments, including extravagances such as the renationalisation of Railtrack which were not costed in its programme, which promises a 20 per cent. increase in public spending, with no increases in taxation.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Forsyth: In a moment: I want to finish with the hon. Gentleman first.

The hon. Gentleman then got more ambitious, did a paste-up job of Treasury answers to disparate parliamentary questions, and magicked out of the air a

Scottish cumulative surplus of £26.7 billion since 1978. That figure keeps appearing in letters in *The Scotsman* and elsewhere. I know that our policies in Scotland have been brilliantly successful, but the figures are a mirage. The calculations assume that Scotland's share of United Kingdom general Government borrowing requirement was constant at 17.9 per cent. throughout the period, but it was not: in 1991, it was 54 per cent.

As the hon. Member for Moray confirmed by her silence, and as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan can confirm now, over the past four years—using the SNP's own assumptions, which are, of course, crackpot—Scotland had a cumulative deficit of £25 billion.

Mr. Salmond: The Secretary of State is wrong about the figures in several ways. They come from an answer from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, not from the Scottish National party. Without any argument, the United Kingdom general Government deficit over the past five years is £176 billion, which has doubled the national debt. Does the Secretary of State therefore conclude that the UK is non-viable?

This debate is about public responsibility, and we read in the press over the weekend that the Scottish Office had a copy of the draft report on slaughterhouse hygiene that was not passed on to Professor Hugh Pennington. Does the Secretary of State think that his Department had a public responsibility to pass that vital information on to the professor whom he appointed to study the issue of E. coli?

Mr. Forsyth: The report has been passed on, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

It is significant that, for weeks on end, the hon. Gentleman has been going around saying that Scotland is subsidising England to the tune of more than £26 billion. I have now asked the hon. Gentleman, his party's leader, whether the SNP's bogus calculations show that England has been subsidising Scotland for the past four years to the tune of £25 billion. I do not accept his figures for a moment; they are his own figures, and he has refused to confirm the position.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Forsyth: Only if the hon. Gentleman deals with the specific point.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman clearly does not intend to deal with the specific point, so I will not give way to him.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he will show that he is prepared to deal with the specific point.

Mr. Salmond: The Secretary of State should know that he cannot set conditions on giving way.

In the past five years, the United Kingdom had a general Government deficit of £176 billion, so it is hardly surprising that Scotland, as part of the United Kingdom, was in deficit over that period; it is perhaps more interesting that, if we apply the Secretary of State's and the Scottish Office's calculations for the next five years, the Scottish subsidy to London becomes £12.5 billion. Does he accept that calculation, based on the Treasury answer of 30 January?

Mr. Forsyth: All I can say is that I am glad that I am not the hon. Gentleman's bank manager. He has been travelling the length and breadth of Scotland saying that England has been subsidised by Scotland, but he has made a clear admission this afternoon that, for the past four years, England has, on his calculations—which I do not accept for a moment—provided £25 billion for Scotland.

If the SNP were honest, and said, "Tighten your belts to the last notch and accept a massive slump in living standards, for that is the price of separatism," it would find few takers, but it would earn respect for its integrity, which it certainly does not deserve on its performance this afternoon.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): My right hon. Friend has struck at the very heart of the nationalists' argument. Is he aware that, in Wales in 1994-95, the last year for which figures are available, the fiscal deficit was £5.7 billion, and that the total tax take from all sources was £9.9 billion, which means that taxes right across the board in Wales would have to be raised by about 57 per cent. merely to maintain the current level of public services?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is right. What is offensive about nationalists in both Scotland and Wales is that they prate about social justice when their programme entails national bankruptcy. The SNP's only ideological allies in Europe are in the south of Albania. Further afield, there are the encouraging examples of socialist North Korea and Cuba. There can be no social justice without wealth creation.

At its 1995 conference, the SNP voted to renationalise the public utilities. Is that still its policy? It is committed to renationalising Railtrack and similarly destroying Scotland's bus services. It would lose our seat at the top table everywhere: NATO, the G7, the UN Security Council. Our voice would be unheard in the councils of the world. How would that help the disadvantaged?

The SNP would abolish the assisted places scheme—a kick in the teeth to every lad and lass o'pairts in Scotland. *[Interruption.]* The groans come from an Opposition who are led by a man who enjoyed a public school education, and who would kick the ladder away from families with incomes of less than £9,000 a year. That is new Labour: "Don't do as I do—just take the message."

Only one thing can strike down poverty and bring social justice to every Scot: the sound Conservative free enterprise policies of privatisation, deregulation and devolution of decision-making to families and individuals. Opposition Members did not want Scots to buy their council houses or even to decide what colour to paint their front doors or to make any other decision. Now that Labour in Scotland is being led by the nose and forced by its Islington ringmaster to go through the capitalist hoop, the last unreconstructed socialists in Scotland are the Scottish nationalists.

Mr. Dafis: We can assume that the Secretary of State for Wales will pursue the same line of reasoning on

[Mr. Dafis]

Wales, with which I shall deal later. Does he think that the voice of Ireland, a country similar in size to Scotland and Wales, is unheard in the councils of the world? Would Scotland really suffer the deficiency that he described?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman should examine what is happening in Ireland. It has far higher unemployment, because it has embraced the social chapter. He may have read the recent article in the *Financial Times* about the Irish business community complaining about how they lose inward investment because of the burden of the social chapter. The difference between us and Ireland is that we are a net contributor to the Community; Ireland is dependent on subsidy from the Community. That is how successful the policies advocated by the nationalists have been in creating prosperity in Ireland.

If the hon. Member for Moray wanted a serious debate on what is being achieved in dealing with our social and economic problems, she should have examined what has been achieved in Scotland by the Government's policies. Some £7.7 billion of investment has been attracted to Scotland since 1981, with the expected creation or safeguarding of 130,000 jobs. That investment has come because we rejected the policies of Opposition Members, who have had to come round to supporting policies that they had vehemently opposed.

The percentage of households in owner-occupation has risen to almost 60 per cent., compared with 35 per cent. in 1979. That huge revolution in giving people a stake in the community is matched by the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security for a new deal for pensioners. Once again, the Opposition parties suck their teeth and oppose anything that transfers real power to individuals and real ownership to the people.

The proportion of school leavers with no Scottish certificate of education qualifications fell from 31 per cent. in 1980 to less than 8 per cent. in 1995. The proportion of pupils staying on for the fifth year at school has nearly doubled. The number of full-time students in higher education has risen by more than 90 per cent. since 1980. The crime clear-up rate has risen by one quarter from 30 per cent. in 1978 to 39 per cent. in 1995. Recorded crime has fallen by 15 per cent. since 1991. Average full-time earnings have increased by nearly one third in real terms since 1979.

Where has the hon. Member for Moray been? All that has been achieved in Scotland by a Conservative Government, who have pursued the right policies for Britain.

We have achieved those results because of our commitment to three principles. First, we are committed to economic and fiscal policies that create the environment for business to succeed—an environment of low inflation and low taxes. The United Kingdom is currently reaping the benefits of that policy stance as it approaches its sixth year of sustained growth. It is enjoying the strongest economic recovery of any major European country, yet all we hear from people who describe themselves as Scottish nationalists is prattle about Ireland. Why do they not start singing the praises of Scotland instead of running their country down?

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) asked for this to be a debate about the principles, vision and values that should be directing our society. Instead, all that the right hon. Gentleman has produced are selective statistics that are designed, first, to rubbish his opponents and, secondly, to put the best possible gloss on his own opinion. That is why people are turning off politics. If the Minister is so clever and is running Scotland so well, why has his party been totally rejected? The Conservatives have been wiped out from local councils and from Europe. They are now about to meet the wrath of the electorate.

Mr. Forsyth: We shall see.

Mr. Gallie: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have read the Opposition motion on the Order Paper. It refers not to principles but to poverty and the means of addressing it. As far as I am aware, that is precisely what my right hon. Friend is doing.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order; it is a matter of argument. Let us continue the argument.

Mr. Forsyth: In fairness to the hon. Member for Moray, I think that the record will show that she said that parties must have principles in the run-up to a general election. That is the difference between us and the opposition parties: we have principles that we have applied and stuck to all the time that we have been in power.

Our second principle, which has been responsible for the transformation of our country, is that we have ensured that Scotland's distinctive priorities and needs are fully taken into account by the Government as a whole. The post of Secretary of State for Scotland would be lost as a result of the proposals for devolution from the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson).

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): No, it would not.

Mr. Forsyth: What would happen if there was a Tory Government at Westminster and a Labour Administration in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh? Would the Labour leader come and sit in a Tory Cabinet? Of course not. He will be a message laddie, which is no doubt why the hon. Member for Hamilton is being groomed for that role. My voice in Cabinet ensures that the Scottish dimension is never overlooked in the policies of the United Kingdom Government, and that, wherever appropriate, a distinctively Scottish approach, which reflects Scottish circumstances, is taken.

The third principle to which we have been committed is to ensure that, wherever possible, we have moved government closer to the people. Our consistent approach has been to devolve power downwards from centralised bureaucracies to local consumers and the community. *[Interruption.]*

I note that the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), who has earned a reputation in Scotland as the voucher snatcher, is laughing. She cannot abide the idea of parents being able to choose the nursery education for their families. She cannot stand that. She would rather have a bureaucracy telling people who can and cannot have a place, and one which patronised people by telling them what it thinks is good for them. That is the difference between us.

Take, for example, the reforms that we have introduced into the health service to make it more effective. The clear distinction that we have made between the purchase of health services on behalf of the population in a given area and those organisations that provide those services has led to greater clarity about the respective roles and responsibilities. *[Interruption.]* I note that the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) is trying to find out who is here from the Labour party to speak up for economic and social justice.

The benefits of our reforms, which apparently the Labour party now accepts, including the separation of the purchaser and provider roles—remember how the Opposition used to oppose that—are seen in the increased willingness of the national health service trusts to be innovative and to develop new ideas to provide a better service to patients. Those benefits are also reflected in the imaginative way in which the health boards are able to look more strategically at the health service that their population really needs.

A key feature of our reforms is the emphasis on the primary care sector, which is closest to patients on a day-to-day basis and which is obviously in the best position to identify worthwhile improvements that patients want. GP fundholders now cover half the population. They have benefited patients by bringing down waiting times for in-patient treatment and increasing the range of services available locally in GP premises.

Taken together, those key changes allow the NHS to focus ever more clearly on the needs of the individual citizens whom they are there to serve. In that way, we ensure that change is driven by what people need. Our recent White Paper on the Scottish health service, "Ready for the Future", signals our intention to build on achievements so far to make the Scottish health service even more responsive to patients' needs. A more detailed agenda for action in primary care will be issued later this week.

We shall continue to ensure that services are accessible, and provided as close as possible to patients' homes. We shall ensure that decisions about the pattern of services are taken by those with the greatest awareness of patients' needs.

That is underpinned by our unequivocal commitment that the health service will continue to be free at the point of delivery, funded largely by general taxation—and, of course, funded for every year of the next Parliament, so that there is a real increase year by year. How sad that the Labour party, which claims to have been involved at the start of the health service, now finds itself muddled and unable to give the same commitment to the health service.

Not only will the hon. Member for Hamilton not make that commitment, but the Labour party—in opposition, not in government—is writing to NHS trusts in Scotland, telling them to sack health service employees. The Leader of the Opposition told his party that it must not be complacent, that it must take nothing for granted, but the hon. Member for Hamilton wrote to chief executives of NHS trusts in Scotland:

"I am writing in advance of the General Election to intimate what the approach of an incoming Labour Government would be towards NHS Trusts, especially in relation to the number operating in Scotland."

He goes on at length and then comes to the main point of his letter:

"I would therefore like you to start immediate consultations with other Trusts with the overall objective of reducing the total number of Trusts in Scotland from 45 to 25. The elimination through the common sense merger of 20 NHS Trusts will in time free substantial funds for patient care and the National Health Service will be the stronger for it.

There is only a maximum of nine weeks to the General Election and it is the constitutional convention"—

I think that that is meant to be a joke—

"that the government machine does prepare contingency plans for a change of government. This notification therefore is perfectly in order and I hope it is also helpful in allowing you to plan ahead for a government with very different priorities to the present one."

The hon. Gentleman's priorities are to sack staff in the NHS, centralise services, and merge hospital services as part of a hatchet job on the NHS to provide money for his chums in local government. That is Labour's agenda.

Mr. George Robertson: Our priority is patient care, not bureaucracy. By reducing the number of bureaucracies in Scotland, we can help the interests of patients.

I rose to the Dispatch Box to ask the Secretary of State a specific question: will he rule out any future privatisation in the health service along the lines that we saw in Stonehaven hospital? Will he rule out the possibility that a future Conservative Administration will include clinical services in bids, as they did at Stonehaven hospital?

Mr. Forsyth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has answered that question on a number of occasions.

The hon. Gentleman has not addressed the point that I put. He is writing to the chief executives of NHS trusts, telling them to sack staff in advance of Labour winning a general election. That is a piece of arrogance of enormous proportions, and we now know the hon. Gentleman's agenda for the health service. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says that it would save £30 million as a result of merging those NHS trusts. I have asked my officials to work out exactly how many people we would need to sack to save that sum—*[Interruption.]* I am perfectly entitled to ask my officials to tell me how many people I would have to sack to save £30 million by merging NHS trusts.

The hon. Gentleman has made it his policy, so he can now give me the answer. Will he tell the House how many people, whom he dismisses as bureaucrats and administrators, would be sacked to achieve savings—on top of the savings that we are already making—of £30 million, net of redundancy costs? I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Gentleman either does not know, or will not say. I suspect that he will not say.

Mr. Robertson: A merger or amalgamation of national health service trusts in Scotland should be easily attainable. Some trusts are already talking about amalgamations, and the Secretary of State for Scotland goes on endlessly about local authorities stripping out levels of administration.

Why will the Secretary of State not answer the central question? The people of Scotland want to know before the general election whether his policy is to privatise clinical

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services. That was tried at Stonehaven, but no one has tried it in England yet. Will he rule out the privatisation of clinical services in the NHS?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman knows the answer, but I shall repeat it if he really wants to hear it again. We would not rule out any proposal from clinicians themselves.

Mr. Robertson: So clinical services could be privatised?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that, if clinicians brought forward a proposal, we would consider it, and would not rule it out in principle. We think that the health service should be driven by the demands and needs of those who are involved in the provision of front-line services.

The hon. Gentleman held a press conference, and with a great flourish announced that he would save £30 million by merging NHS trusts. He said that that is where the money for patient care would be found. Our White Paper put £40 million extra into the NHS. The hon. Gentleman knows that savings have been achieved. He cannot tell us how many jobs would be lost in the NHS under his proposals, because he does not want to say. He knows that, in order to save £30 million, he will have to cut into clinical services.

The hon. Gentleman dismisses administrators, and talks about posh reception areas. People who work in the front room of the health service take the details of distressed patients who come into hospital. Are they not part of the NHS team? Are those administrators to be swept away? Does he denounce as unimportant the people who look after patients' records? Where will the money be saved? Let us have the figures.

If the hon. Gentleman cannot give them now, perhaps he will give them in his speech, after he has received the information from those in Islington who tell him what to say these days. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is now getting worried about the time. It is time he answered some of these questions. We want to know in which parts of the health service people's jobs are on the line, thanks to his commitment to that policy.

In education, as in the health service, the Government have ensured that decisions are increasingly devolved to the people in schools who know what is required.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): We have been talking about unemployment in the health service as a result of Labour's policies. Could my right hon. Friend extract from the Scottish National party a figure for the number of jobs that would be lost at the Royal Air Force bases at Leuchars, Kinloss and Lossiemouth, and among personnel in the Royal Navy, the Scottish regiments and the defence industry were we to have Scottish independence? I am sure that the figure would be substantial.

Mr. Forsyth: My right hon. Friend is right. I am not sure what the hon. Member for Moray has to say on the subject, but I will happily give way to her if she wants to answer that question. She is also not prepared to say what the consequences of her policies would be, although she opened the debate by saying that we should have a proper discussion on these important issues.

Mrs. Ewing *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I give way to the hon. Lady—it is like fishing.

Mrs. Ewing: I will not take any lectures from Conservative Members, given that the Government have amalgamated and destroyed some of our proud regiments in Scotland. They have reduced by 31 per cent. the number of personnel employed in the RAF.

We have made it perfectly clear that no bases will be closed. Such arguments are propounded by a desperate party. It is moral blackmail. The Government try to destroy people's confidence in their own ability to participate in the international community in all aspects of our life, including defence. We have made it clear in our defence policy document, which we have put in the public domain, that an independent Scotland would have no implications for the key elements of our defence forces. That is against a background in which the defence forces themselves, and international defence communications, are changing.

Mr. Forsyth: I do not want to be distracted too much, but I suggest that, if the hon. Lady gives that answer again, she should begin it with "Once upon a time".

Let me make another point about the consequences for Scotland's economic prosperity. *[Interruption.]* The Labour party used to be concerned about such issues. It used to be concerned about jobs. It is this Government who have delivered prosperity to Scotland and created new opportunities for employment, thanks in part to the efforts of the enterprise network and Scottish Enterprise, which we established. Now a Scottish parliament is being proposed, with tartan-tax-raising powers that would destroy jobs and prosperity, and damage people's savings and their income from dividends and other sources.

Not content with damaging the business climate in Scotland and allowing business rates to be sent sky high by the irresponsible councils that their party runs in Glasgow and elsewhere—the same people who would be in a Scottish parliament—Opposition Members who are committed to a Scottish parliament want to destroy Scottish Enterprise and the local enterprise companies. They want to destroy the engine—the job creation machine—in Scotland.

We have that on the authority of a Glasgow councillor, no less—Councillor Jean McFadden, who produced a report from the John Wheatley centre. We are told that, under a Scottish Parliament, the functions of the LECs would be transferred to local authorities, and that the structure of the national enterprise bodies, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, would be reformed—in other words, crushed. As for the Scottish National party, we have confirmation from Mr. George Reid, who is described as the party's trade and industry spokesman, that the transfer of the LECs to local authorities would also be its policy.

Here we have a structure that has been successful in delivering jobs, but both those Opposition parties plan to wreck it in order to find the money to pay the £80 billion for their "pretendy parliament"—as I believe Billy Connolly called it— in Edinburgh.

That is in complete contrast to the Government. We will continue to support Scottish Enterprise and the local enterprise companies, because we support people who deliver. I am therefore pleased to announce further support for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise in the current year. I shall be providing a further £5 million for Scottish Enterprise—

Mr. George Robertson: Where will you find the money?

Mr. Forsyth: We shall find it by not spending it all. Local government under Labour control has something to learn from that.

Among other things, that support will allow Scottish Enterprise to meet existing and planned inward investment pressures created by the recent successes of Locate in Scotland in attracting overseas companies to Scotland, particularly in relation to the Hyundai project, and will ensure that the priority that the Government attach to supporting Scotland's indigenous companies is continued.

The recent successes of Locate in Scotland are a significant boost for the Scottish economy, with the Hyundai project alone expected to bring an additional 2,000 direct jobs to Scotland. The extra resources will allow Scottish Enterprise to consolidate and build on that success, while protecting the equally important support currently given to Scotland's indigenous companies.

As the hon. Member for Moray represents a constituency in the highlands, I could not allow this occasion to pass without announcing that Highlands and Islands Enterprise will receive £525,000 in extra support in the current financial year. Those extra resources will enable it to spend on a number of key projects, and will help to relieve funding pressures in the coming year.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Forsyth: Wait for the good news.

The projects to benefit reflect the wide range of programmes through which Highlands and Islands Enterprise pursues its role to promote the economic and social development of the highlands and islands. This is good news for the highlands and islands: it will allow Highlands and Islands Enterprise to continue to play a full part in the regeneration of the highlands and islands economy, and to build on the success of its achievements to date.

Mr. Salmond: We should obviously have more of these debates, so that the sweetie bag can be brought out even more often.

Once upon a time—last Thursday night—the Scottish Office was briefing against the Ministry of Agriculture, to the effect that the slaughterhouse report had not been received by Scottish Office civil servants. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, as was reported in the newspapers at the weekend, the draft report was in the hands of the Scottish Office? Does he accept that he, as Secretary of State for Scotland, was responsible for the fact that the report was not passed on to Professor Hugh Pennington?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman reads his newspapers a bit better, he will be aware of the facts. The original report that referred to E. coli was never given to any meeting attended by a Scottish Office official.

I ask the hon. Member for Moray: is it not embarrassing to have the hon. Gentleman intervening in the debate? She started off by saying that she wanted it to be on a serious subject and to move away from soundbite politics, and here we have the hon. Gentleman, as normal, trivialising the debate. I think we must conclude that he fears that the hon. Lady's performance has not quite delivered what he had hoped for in terms of the coverage tomorrow.

It is probably time for me to draw this speech to a conclusion. I realise that it is proving an uncomfortable experience for Opposition Members, who used to say that they were in favour of jobs, prosperity and investment in the health service, but who are now beached like whales, unable to deliver and doomed.

Scotland is flourishing, and there is every reason to believe that it will continue to flourish as long as the Union is maintained. The truth is that the Union has secured for all of us, whether English, Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish, a long history of freedom, prosperity and stability under the Crown.

It is our historic partnership of nations that has forged a role throughout the globe. It is together that we have influenced affairs on the world stage. That is why the maintenance of the Union is fundamental to the prosperity and well-being of the people of Scotland. We have identified and will continue to seek ways to help Government to listen to the people of Scotland and to respond to their concerns and priorities in a way that does not threaten the United Kingdom. That is the best way forward for Scotland, and for all the people of the United Kingdom.

4.36 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): It is a little unwise for the Secretary of State for Scotland to quote what Billy Connolly said about anything because, if he does that again, I might tell him what Billy Connolly says about him.

It was a bit tasteless for the Secretary of State to wax lyrical on the subject of national health service teams. Probably no hon. Member has done more personally to destroy the concept of teamwork in the NHS than the Secretary of State. Some of us are old enough to remember his private business life, much of which was devoted precisely to the business of breaking up teams in the NHS by denying the concept that all auxiliaries and non-medical staff in hospitals were part of a team, privatising, cutting their wages, and making their positions as insecure as possible—all for the private profit of Michael Forsyth Associates and its client companies. For the Secretary of State to arrive here a decade later and bleat about the role of teams in the NHS provokes the memories of what he built his dubious reputation on.

The Secretary of State referred to me as a spin doctor. That cannot possibly be true—I am more of a consultant, I think. However, if he wants to go down that road a little, I will give him a little lesson. This is from a spin consultant. If he wants to retain any credibility, he should not send out a special adviser one night to say that he is incandescent and to brief against another Minister and appear the next morning wide-eyed and innocent, claiming to have forgotten all about what was done in his name and at his instruction because, frankly, no one believes that sort of performance. He does not even have the virtue of subtlety to commend him. His performance

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last week did no good for Scotland and even less good for the office he holds. If he has anything to say against his colleague the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, he should have the guts to say it out loud and not leave the Prime Minister in the ridiculous position of saying the next morning that the stories were ridiculous and absurd and that he could not imagine where they had come from—when everyone in the House knew that the stories came from only one man: the Secretary of State for Scotland.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make a short speech. I do not currently make many speeches for a simple reason: I have the nominal title of shadow Minister for election planning. As is all too conspicuous, there is no Minister for election planning, which may account for the Tories' current difficulties.

I shall take the quite unusual course of picking up some of the points that have been made in the debate. I come from a good Scottish education system in which I was taught that that is what debate is about; not about set speeches but about dealing with issues that have been raised.

I support the distinguished hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). The hon. Gentleman intervened on the Minister to ask about employment in Germany, and was given a typically trite response. The Secretary of State seems to think that a debating point is a substitute for an argument. The hon. Gentleman's intervention was important. I travelled in east Germany at the time of the first democratic elections in the whole of Germany and saw the incredible industrial museums that employed 10,000 to 12,000 people. The only possible course on health and safety grounds alone was to close them and start again.

Germany has done an incredible job for the whole of Europe by taking on that task. It has encountered difficulties, largely as a result, and that has given rise to schadenfreude among Conservative Europhobes who have temporarily suppressed their prejudices to toe, not very successfully, the Cabinet line. That is a sad reaction. As the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber said, imagine what state this country would have been in even with North sea oil and the proceeds of privatisation if it had had to do that. We are in a bad enough economic mess. What would it have been like if we had inherited a country of 17 million people with the incredible economic problems that east Germany presented to west Germany on reunification?

On a more micro level of debate, I should like to refer to the assisted places scheme. I shall start by registering a complaint. How many families in my constituency benefit from that scheme—if benefit it is? I am by no means convinced that sending kids to the environment of a private school provides any lifetime benefit for them, but that is a wider issue. I have tabled questions asking to be told, by constituency, how many children are funded under the assisted places scheme. The Scottish Office has refused to give me that information under the facade of the usual evasion that the information could be collected only at disproportionate expense. Yet every family that benefits must have an address and there are not so many of them that they cannot be easily listed and divided among 72 constituencies. The reason for the Scottish Office's not giving that information has nothing to do with the expense of collecting it. It does not want to give the information because it would reveal how few children from a constituency such as mine are catered for by the scheme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: That is another scurrilous allegation from a rather nasty Member, if I may say so. It is quite wrong to suggest that the information is not being provided by the Scottish Office because it would not be politically expedient to do so. The cost of collecting the information—perhaps this is the answer that the hon. Gentleman has been given—would be beyond the established guidelines. However, if the hon. Gentleman wants the information to be collected I have no objection to that being done. I imagine that it will reveal that the city in the United Kingdom with the greatest number of assisted places and the greatest dependency on the assisted places scheme is Edinburgh. I said in my speech that that city had provided the Leader of the Opposition with his ladder up. What is the hon. Gentleman's objection to children from families with incomes of less than £9,500, as half of them are, being able to get the same opportunities as the Leader of the Opposition? Why does it matter which parliamentary constituency they live in?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The same rules apply to the Front Bench as to other hon. Members. That was a rather long intervention.

Mr. Wilson: I am delighted to be called nasty by the Minister. Given his political creed, I would be distinctly worried if he did not describe me as nasty—I am opposed to everything that he stands for, dogmatically and philosophically. Nothing could be as juvenile as judging anybody by the school to which his parents sent him. *[Interruption.]* I do not know which is the organ grinder and which is the monkey, but I should be pleased to hear from either the Secretary of State or his parliamentary private secretary. Neither wants to respond.

No one is judged by the school to which his parents sent him. There is no envy involved because, by and large, I believe that sending kids to private schools is not good for them. Even if I thought differently I would recognise that, in any society, priorities must be set. An interesting parliamentary reply last week showed that even in Scotland, where there is a legal maximum of 33 children in a primary school class, 74,000 Scottish children are in primary classes of more than 30. That shows that the resources have much work to do. I want to know how many children in my constituency are in the assisted places scheme because I want to be able to tell my constituents that one, two or three children benefit under the scheme but that, by an alternative use of the resources, 500, 600 or 700 children could benefit. That is a reasonable point for any hon. Member to make.

Mr. Forsyth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wilson: The last time the Minister tried to make four interventions in a speech by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition he made a complete fool of himself. I do not see why he should be anxious to do that again.

Mrs. Ewing *rose—*

Mr. Wilson: I do not propose to take any more interventions.

The Minister said that we wanted to crush—I think that that was the word he used—Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise. Those two bodies would never have existed but for Labour Governments. The Highlands and Islands development board and the Scottish development agency were among the great creations of Labour Governments in the 1960s and 1970s.

I am reminded of the kind of stuff that the Minister comes out with. In his heyday in the 1980s he described the Women's Rural Institute as a Marxist front organisation. In the 1960s, when Willy Ross was setting up the HIDB, Michael Noble, the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland at that time, described it as a Marxist conspiracy. There is a long tradition of that.

I assure the Secretary of State that, long after he has gone, the successors to the Highlands and Islands development board and Scottish Enterprise will be not only secure, but will once again be enhanced as agencies of economic and social change. The great feature of the HIDB was that, originally, it was not simply an economic organisation, but had a strong social remit which has been largely eroded by the Government's ideological changes.

The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) moved the motion with dignity. Its spirit is absolutely right. It is entirely proper, in the run-up to a general election campaign, that the agenda of poverty and homelessness and the conditions that afflict a substantial proportion of our constituents should be given an airing, and not brushed aside in the general melée of agendas that are set either by the media or by politicians.

In the past couple of weeks, I have had a couple of all-party meetings in my constituency. They were organised by Church organisations which said that the issues that they want to put across form what might broadly be called the humane and social agenda. The issues include homelessness and poverty, not just in our country, but throughout the world. It is entirely right that, in the period before a general election, those subjects should receive an airing.

Sometimes, we are all too clever. If there is a problem of homelessness in any society, it is very likely that its very simple cause is that there are not enough houses. That is the case in this society. We have a Government who are driven by ideology—with the Secretary of State playing his full role—and have refused to allow local authorities to provide houses for rent. That has been the primary cause of homelessness, including hidden homelessness, in any community—and certainly in those that I represent.

I believe that a national minimum wage will be one of the major social innovations of the post-war years. It will be a landmark reform, which the Tories will despise and oppose because they cannot bear the idea of the introduction of a minimum standard of decency into any sphere of a society that they want to be driven by the market. However, once a national minimum wage is established as a concept, they will never dare overturn it. Until the day the national health service was created, the Tories bitterly opposed it, because they opposed the idea of people having access to the best medical care irrespective of their ability to pay for it. Once it was in place, they could chip away at its edges, erode it and remove bits of it, but they never dared to attack its core. A national minimum wage will be in that category of great social reforms.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman's comments on a minimum wage may well be true. A minimum wage exists in other countries. In France, for example, it is set at the equivalent of about £2. Would he like to tell the House at what level he thinks a national minimum wage would be set on its introduction here?

Mr. Wilson: No, I would not. The level at which a national minimum wage is set will be determined by a commission, which will consider the views of both employer and employee bodies. I understand why the hon. Gentleman takes a very short-term view of politics. I take a slightly longer-term view, however, and believe that it is far more important to establish the principle of a national minimum wage. That is what will be done in the next Parliament. Once the principle is established, it will never be abolished.

Part of the tragedy, and the indictment of the events of recent years, is that there is almost no level at which a national minimum wage could be set which would not benefit a substantial number of people. In this supposedly wealthy society and successful economy, hundreds of thousands of people are earning below £2 an hour, and millions of people are earning below £3 an hour. In his last days in the House, the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) would do well to support the concept of a national minimum wage.

The motion is ostensibly unexceptional, although I have not conducted a close textual analysis of it. It states that the House

"rejects the Government's proposed spending plans"

for the next two years. I did not hear the hon. Member for Moray say whether that means that she rejects the Government's global figures or only their detailed breakdown of them. I hope that she does not really believe that, after 18 years of Tory government, every penny—or even every billion pounds—of public expenditure has been so closely scrutinised and intelligently applied that there is not an awful lot of room to reapply priorities so that we can provide very different forms of public expenditure.

Mrs. Ewing: What would the hon. Gentleman cut?

Mr. Wilson: It would have been more helpful if the parties that tabled the motion had made some suggestions on that subject. It is extraordinary that, since the previous general election, expenditure on social security, for example, has increased annually by £15 billion. That is astonishing. It would also be astonishing if an incoming Government could not produce a great deal of intelligent thought on how that money could be better spent, to create a successful economy rather than subsidised failure. Expenditure on subsidising low pay—for which the taxpayer pays—instead of providing a national minimum wage is one very obvious example of that.

The thrust of the comments made by the hon. Member for Moray is right. I also do not think that anyone needs to go further in politics, when looking for a big idea, than the eradication of poverty. The real debate is about the means of attaining that goal, about the speed at which it

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is possible to move it. achieving it and about the priority that it should receive. Despite all the brickbats that are tossed and all the attempts to sap the morale of those looking forward with hope and optimism to the advent of a Labour Government, I have not the slightest doubt that, in the future, as in the past, eradicating poverty will be the priority of a Labour Government.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Moray should remember that Labour Governments delivered all the desirable features in society—such as the education system, which provided opportunity to her and me; and the national health service, which entitled us both to high-quality health care, to which we insist our children should be entitled—and the broad range of social reforms that have made the United Kingdom a civilised place in which to live. I have never heard much credit given to those Governments by the Scottish National party, but that goal is our hope and our inspiration—in which the public are now sharing. They look forward to the return of a Labour Government, to address the issues raised in today's motion.

4.56 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) seems to have made a reputation in politics for attacking organisations and people who are involved with organisations that assist companies. It was therefore interesting to hear him praise the Highlands and Islands development board and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. He did so without declaring an interest: the fact that he and his company have been substantial beneficiaries of those organisations. It seems that he has one rule for others and another for himself. If he wants to speak in the House about standards and values, I suggest that he should first look in the mirror.

Mr. Wilson: The company with which I am very proud to be involved is probably the only one in the highlands and islands which, before grant and loan disclosure existed, made a specific request that every penny given to the company—it was not very much—should be made public. That is the openness that we have practised ourselves and have always expected from others. Having made that point, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now tell us how much he has received from his time with Stagecoach.

Mr. Walker: Nothing—absolutely nothing. The hon. Gentleman has picked on the wrong target. He should do his homework more carefully. I say again that, if he wants to be critical of other hon. Members, he should first look in the mirror. Those who live in glass houses should not chuck bricks.

Like the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), hon. Members care about the society in which we live. I do not think that any individual or party can claim sole concern for people's well-being—the only difference is that some of us see different routes for arriving at similar answers. The issue is whether the route one travels will or will not produce the answer.

I should also tell the hon. Member for Moray that I have always respected people in Scotland who say that they want independence and who are prepared and willing to pay the costs, whatever they are, for it. There will be costs, because no one yet knows what the debate will entail. All we currently know is that separation, in whatever form, can be very expensive if it is achieved in acrimonious circumstances. Also, independence in Europe is simply a slogan. It is nonsense. Jim Fairley, a well-respected nationalist in Tayside, has written and spoken at great length about it, and much more effectively than I.

If the hon. Member for Moray seriously believes that the Royal Air Force bases in Scotland would remain unchanged, she is not living in the real world. She has only to consider the aircraft on those bases to realise that the Tornado, Jaguar and Nimrod are very expensive and require massive support from the many people who work on the bases, in or out of uniform. Their number would change substantially if the types of aircraft were changed. Anyone who has any experience of military matters will tell the hon. Lady that. I do not believe that the Royal Marine base at, for example, Condor in Arbroath would remain in its current form, because it is part of the Royal Marine Brigade, which requires certain things that would not exist if the base were operating alone.

The SNP's policies, especially those relating to social and economic matters, belong, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland clearly said, to the world of fairytales and make-believe. If Scotland and the UK are as bad as the hon. Lady claims, why are so many people from all over the world desperate to come and live here? If this is such an awful place, why do we face the ghastly problem of more people wanting to come here than we can possibly take? Of course, some people in the UK and Scotland have problems, but the vast majority have a quality of life of which our grandparents never dreamed. I have seen a dramatic change in my lifetime. I was one of six children living in a two-roomed house with my parents.

Of course there are problems—anyone who thinks that there are not does not hold surgeries—but it is interesting that a substantial number of the problems brought to Members' surgeries are really local authority matters, involving the failure of those authorities. Councillors are there to deal with them. The system that other hon. Members and I operate shows that, if one writes to the chief executive of a local authority, it is surprising how quickly one can unclog things that should have been unclogged without their having to be brought to the authority's notice.

I could use all my speech to comment on the SNP's military budget, which is a fairytale, but I shall deal with some matters that the SNP fails to address. How does it account for the fact that so much is missing from its budget? One of the problems with operating a budget, whether in government or in business, is that one has to state everything, or there will be a deficit at the end of the day.

The SNP wishes to remove standing charges for gas, electricity, telecommunications and other utilities and says that the cost will be met from the profits of the companies involved. The SNP has obviously never run a company if it thinks that such a change will not have an impact on profits. If we link this idea with Labour's utility tax, it is clear that profitable companies will quickly cease to be profitable. I recommend that the left-wing SNP recall the

selective employment tax, which Labour introduced many years ago and which savaged employment levels and the profitability of businesses in the service sector.

The SNP wishes to abolish the assisted places scheme—so does Labour—but does not tell us how the youngsters currently in the scheme will be educated and how the cost of their education will be met. It wishes to abolish nursery vouchers—it will be a voucher snatcher—and transfer the provisions to local authorities. No mention is made of how the cost of changes to the administration will be met. The list is endless—I should like to ask questions about some 50 items in the SNP's budget, but I shall not.

This is an interesting debate, because it has given my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland the opportunity to demolish the SNP's arguments. We can all wander around with our hearts on our sleeves—that is easy and costs nothing—but we have to consider how to implement policies and cost ideas.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North mentioned the massive increase in the social security budget. Had the Government not looked after people who had been adversely affected by the recession, they would have been condemned—and rightly so. The Government, however, quite properly dealt with matters, as any Government would be required to do.

Funnily enough, that brings me to the point about Germany made by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave him a pointed response about the single currency. I have recently been talking to representatives of business and business organisations and talking at seminars, conventions and annual general meetings. I put to them a question that I now put to the House: if one is running a company that is the leader in its field—that accurately describes the UK's position relative to the rest of Europe in that UK plc is outperforming all the other countries—would the directors link that company to others that are not doing nearly so well, or doing very badly, and leave to them all their company's financial policies? The directors said that of course they would not and that it would be crazy to do so. I pointed out that that is exactly what some people are suggested UK plc should do, because that is what joining a single currency would mean. It would mean giving control to those who are not doing as well as we are and allowing them to make judgments on economic and fiscal policy affecting this country.

Whatever the merits—if there are any—of a single currency in theory, in practice if one is doing well, one does not allow the decision making to be taken over by those who are doing worse. That is basic to the running of any organisation.

Sir Russell Johnston: The hon. Gentleman is skirting around my point. I said that it was unfair of the Secretary of State for Scotland—it is not unusual for him to be unfair—to compare our employment position with that of Germany, given that Germany had just managed to absorb into its economy 17 million people who are economically backward. I said that we could not have done that, and that is perfectly true. By the way, on the question of a single currency, perhaps the hon. Gentleman should ask Toyota what it thinks and take notice of the fact that inward investment in France is higher than that in Britain.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman should do his homework more carefully. Toyota has done a U-turn on the single currency; it now says the opposite of what it was saying and, given the UK's current performance, can see an advantage in its being outside the single currency. It is important to note that, during unification, the Germans miscalculated the basis on which the various currencies should be made one. They are now paying a terrible price and will continue to do so—chickens always come home to roost in relation to financial and fiscal policy.

As with a company's balance sheets, it may be possible to hide things for a year or even two but, over a period, the truth always emerges. The SNP wears its heart on its sleeve but, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State showed using the SNP's own figures, its budget reveals a massive deficit. That does not mean that Scotland could not be an economic entity on its own, if it was able to get somebody else to pick up the tabs, as southern Ireland has. Our money—United Kingdom taxpayers' money—has made southern Ireland what it is.

Mr. Gallie: Does my hon. Friend recall a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee not long ago when the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) suggested that Scotland would have to subsidise the rest of Europe, unlike Ireland?

Mr. Walker: I do not believe any figures that come from the hon. Member for Moray or any other member of the Scottish National party. I would not want to be involved in any kind of merger on the figures that they produce, which do not stand up to close examination. Their figures are wishful thinking and fairytale economics.

One can address the problems of society only if one has a thriving economy in which employers can create jobs, producing goods and services for which the world will pay. Scotland and the United Kingdom have no option—we have to be a world trading nation. Just to stand still, we have to export more than one third of the goods and services that we produce. It is essential that we have an economic climate in which entrepreneurs—risk takers—can create jobs.

The problem for members of the left-wing Scottish National party is that they have not learnt the lesson of modern history, which is that their kind of socialism does not work. They cannot point to any country in which it brings home the goods. Despite our difficulties during the recession, the United Kingdom has come out of it better than anyone else and the world is looking to us.

I remind Opposition Members that the hours that we spent in Standing Committee changing trade union legislation helped to create today's enterprise economy. To throw all that away would be crazy, whether in an independent Scotland or in the United Kingdom. Jobs would vanish, as has happened in every other socialist country, and we would end up with money being printed and ever fewer people being employed.

The Scottish nationalists wear their hearts on their sleeves and tell people that they care, but they would not be able to sort out the problems because they would

[Mr. Walker]

not have the necessary economic circumstances. After 18 years, the Conservative Government have produced a situation that we dreamed about in the post-war years. We have had growth for nearly six years and we have low inflation and low interest rates. We are the dynamo of Europe. We would be crazy to throw all that away with hearts-on-sleeves, fairytale, economic policies.

5.12 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I welcome the way in which the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) introduced the debate. I shall try to follow the path that she set. Social justice and the problem of poverty are proper subjects for serious debate, focusing attention not only on specific policies, but, as she tried to do, on the principles and attitudes that animate the main political forces in Scotland and Wales, throughout the United Kingdom and across the European Union.

I have been in the House for 32 years. I came here in 1964—at a younger age than the number of years I have since spent here—motivated by idealism and hope. My deepest disappointment, 32 years on, is that so many of those ideals seem not to have been shared by others, although I continue to regard them as self-evidently right.

Long exposure to shock newspaper headlines rather anaesthetises one, but I remember the headline in *The Independent on Sunday* on 21 July last year. It said, "UK most unequal country in the West". The Secretary of State might well remember that, as might other Conservative Members. Let me quote a little from the article:

"Britain is now the most unequal country in the Western world, an authoritative new United Nations report reveals. The gap between rich and poor is as great as in Nigeria.

Detailed statistics in the Human Development Report published last week also demonstrate that inequality has grown sharply during Conservative rule and that the poor in Britain now have to live on much the same incomes as their equivalents in Hungary and Korea."

The article goes on:

"The report shows that the poorest 40 per cent. of Britons share a lower proportion of the national wealth—14.6 per cent.—than in any other Western country. This is only marginally better than in Russia, the only industrialised nation, east or west, to have a worse record."

Later, the article says:

"The British poor are much better off in absolute terms than the poor in most Third World countries, but they are worse off than those in other Western nations."

I draw this particularly to the attention of the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), who has just sat down after vigorously blowing his trumpet. The article says:

"The poorest fifth of Britons have an average per capita income 32 per cent. lower than their equivalents in the US and 44 per cent. lower than in the Netherlands."

The social protection offered in the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany, France and other European countries—

Mr. Bill Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Russell Johnston: One moment. I should like to finish this point, then I shall give way. The social protection that led those countries to devise the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty is openly rejected by Conservatives. The Secretary of State did so this afternoon. I find that the most bizarre political stance that I have ever witnessed from a party.

Mr. Walker *rose—*

Sir Russell Johnston: I can see the hon. Gentleman. He does not need to flap his hands all the time. I shall give way to him in a minute.

It seems odd for a party that has had responsibility for government for 18 years to try to get votes by going around saying, "The great thing about us is that we are going to reduce social protection for you."

Mr. Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman go back to his newspaper article and tell the House about different spending priorities and what money can buy? That is what is important, and I think that he will find that it is missing from the article.

Sir Russell Johnston: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman—with effort—I do not accept what he says. That factor has been taken into account.

I find it a matter for shame to be told that my country is the most unequal in the west. It should be a matter for shame for the Government that their 18 years of uninterrupted, unfettered power have produced such inequality.

One of the affirmations of the 1947 founding document of Liberal International refers to

"security from the hazards of sickness, unemployment, disability and old age."

That is part of the reason why I am a Liberal. Further on, the document says:

"The welfare of the community must prevail and must be safeguarded from the abuse of power by sectional interests."

I do not agree with the Secretary of State's attempt to excuse the comment of Lady Thatcher—then Mrs. Thatcher—that she did not believe in society. That meant that she did not believe in the community. Much damage has been done to the concept of public service in this country by her ideological commitment to the free market. It has also contributed to the increase in poverty, which we are now debating. She and her equally ideologically driven advisers, such as Sir Alan Walters and Lord McAlpine—where are they now, pray?—espoused the trickle-down theory, in which perhaps the Secretary of State still believes. She said—he cannot get out of this one—that

"It is our job to glory in inequality."

She argued that scraps from the rich man's table would, in the end, be widely distributed. Presumably, the poor should be appropriately grateful. As we know, that did not happen and life at the bottom became worse. The deliberate promotion of inequality, far from encouraging growth, hinders it.

Last year, the chief economist of the World bank, Michael Bruno, said:

"Reducing inequality not only benefits the poor immediately but will benefit all through higher growth."

The economic arguments are not the determinant of my opinion, which is based on concepts of fairness and generosity and the political imperative—certainly for a

Liberal Democrat—to work towards a harmonious society, not only of opportunity but of kindness and concern, but it is significant to find the moral and economic arguments coinciding.

One of my mentors—I have a number—has been the great American liberal economist, John Kenneth Galbraith. Let me quote a portion of a speech he made to the Liberal International Congress in Ottawa in 1987, as it remains entirely relevant today. It is not very long, but it will certainly be good for the Secretary of State. As I am in the business of helping the underprivileged, including—

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): Intellectually.

Sir Russell Johnston: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend, whose sharp legal brain seizes the right words so solicitously.

Professor Galbraith said:

"There is a further matter on which liberals take an adverse view of current ideological fashion"—

it is still current for the Secretary of State—

"As always, we seek an economic world in which all can participate and from which all have a decent return. We want progress towards a greater equality of return; we see this as a broadly civilizing tendency in modern society. In support of this goal we stand firmly for the principle of effectively progressive taxation and for income and other welfare support to the disadvantaged and the poor.

Here we encounter another ideological aberration of our time."

That is not a personal remark about the Secretary of State, although it could be. Professor Galbraith continued:

"That is the effort to make increasing inequality socially respectable. It is not permissible in the modern democratic polity ever to legislate explicitly for the rich. Accordingly, there must be a cover story, however implausible; what is wanted cannot be admitted. We have had, in these last years, large reductions in the effective rates of income tax on the very rich."

Professor Galbraith was referring to the United States, but his comments are relevant to Britain. He continued:

"And also a powerful crusade against the welfare services to the poor. The rich, it is held, need incentives to greater economic effort; the poor need release from the debilitating effect of welfare; they must, in the words of one exceptionally convenient contemporary philosopher, have 'the spur of their own poverty'. The rich have not been working because they have too little money; the poor have not been working because they have too much."

That is the nonsense that has underlined the Government's economic approach over the years and has done so much damage.

The hon. Member for Moray was fair and generous in speaking of the commitment of the great majority of hon. Members to solving the problems of their constituents and the search for general betterment.

We argue a lot about ways and means and the effect of specific policies. We also argue about intention and motivation. It can be said absolutely fairly that, in 18 long years, the Government have not demonstrated any drive to reduce poverty or inequality.

The hon. Lady also spoke about the fear of poverty. According to Shelter, last year there were 31,000 homeless people on the streets of Scotland. We had a small exchange on the figure; the hon. Lady said that it was 75,000. I do not know which is correct, but it is still awful. The responsibility for that lies across the Floor of the House.

I shall read one further quote from Galbraith. It is only short, but it is good stuff:

"There are some matters on which the market is in inescapable default. In no industrial country does it supply good housing to people of moderate income or below. Nor does it supply medical and health services and care to the least advantaged people. Or good mass transportation in the cities. Or needless to say, education of the required universality and quality. These things the market does not do."

The hon. Member for Moray referred to education. The Liberal Democrats have said clearly that we would support an increase in taxation to improve educational provision. The public response has been positive; Labour's response has been silence. We are committed to arguing for the removal of nearly 500,000 of the lowest earners from income tax by increasing tax on earnings above £100,000 a year. That would be a practical contribution to the alleviation of poverty and a redistribution of wealth, as is our concept of low-income benefit.

The hon. Lady deserves our gratitude for raising an important set of issues in a very reasonable way. Sadly, the Secretary of State did not exactly follow her example. In his speech and his approach, the Secretary of State epitomises what is wrong with British politics. He is interested only in point scoring. He is very good at it, but it is a superficial, nihilistic exercise. Rational debate and calm reflection are concepts that are alien to him, as are consensus and co-operation. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has vanished, but he spoke about team work. Those qualities characterise so many successful countries in continental Europe, but they are ideas that the Secretary of State simply does not understand. He thinks that politics is about fighting. It should not be about fighting. I fear that his style will dominate the forthcoming general election. Let us hope that some will not follow him, but will try to maintain higher standards.

5.26 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I understand that we could well have heard the valedictory speech of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). It is a privilege to follow him, and I congratulate him on his 32 years in the House and the way in which he has conducted himself throughout. The humour in his speeches—certainly in those that I have heard in the past five years—is always welcome. I cannot hope to match his use of long words and the way in which he strings them together, and I shall not attempt to do so, but I certainly admire him. Having said that, I have to add, as he would expect me to do, that I seldom agree with the principles in his word: that is a difference between us.

The hon. Gentleman said that he was disappointed that, after 32 years in the House, he had not achieved all his aims. I am pleased about that, because I disagree with many of them. None the less, I congratulate him, and I feel sure that the House will be the poorer for his absence after the general election.

Sir Russell Johnston: The hon. Gentleman is being very kind, but he is speaking as if I was about to be borne out of here and buried.

Mr. Gallie: I hope that will not be the case, and that the hon. Gentleman may return to another place, but

[Mr. Gallie]

that is beyond my knowledge and power. I am quite sure that all hon. Members join me in congratulating him on his 32 years in the House.

I take issue with the hon. Gentleman on several points. He referred to my right hon. Friend Baroness Thatcher. Countries throughout the world have taken her lead on privatisation. Her handling of the economy is now the model for other world economies. She deserves great credit for that. At the same time, she recognised that, unless a country has a successful economy, is able to earn and its privatised companies do well, the poor are the people who suffer, because there is no cash to go into the services that we would all like to supply. One difference between the hon. Gentleman and those on the Opposition Front Bench is that he has at least stuck to his principles over the years. It seems strange that, at this late stage, those in the Labour party have abandoned theirs.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber spoke of the great majority in the House who back the words of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). I suggest that, if there were any substance to that statement, the hon. Lady would win the vote, but I suspect that she will not. That point underlines the inaccuracies of the hon. Gentleman's words tonight.

I return to the point that the hon. Member for Moray made about pensions, on which I intervened. I should point out to her that Conservatives have been aiming for reform of pensions over many years. That is why this country has such a pool of private and works pensions backing up the current state pension. The Government have achieved that by taking a long-term view. It is right at this time to speak out about the longer term, well into the next century, and the fact that provisions will have been made, unlike in other countries such as Germany and France, which have buried their heads in the sand on the issue. The Government should take great credit for that.

One of the keys to the eradication of poverty has to be employment, aiming perhaps for full employment—although whether that is ever achievable is open to question. In this country, unlike every other country across Europe, jobs are being created and unemployment is falling.

Since I came into the House, unemployment in my constituency has fallen from 11.4 per cent. to 7.7 per cent. I welcome that. In that time, we have had great difficulties. Companies such as British Aerospace have had to change priorities; instead of the Jetstream programme being a big seller, it greatly cost that company. Jobs have been lost in such enterprises, but at the same time, they have been created around the periphery and in other areas, especially in small business. The Government should be given great credit for their efforts.

I turn to inward investment in Scotland—I make no apology for concentrating on Scotland. The United Kingdom takes 50 per cent. of the inward investment coming into Europe. Of that, 50 per cent. goes to Scotland. I would have thought that the hon. Member for Moray and her colleagues would be singing the praises of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, those who have operated Locate in Scotland and Scottish Enterprise, and everyone else who has been involved in those great successes.

In considering employment, we have to look at the threats to it and the risks that would arise from the social chapter—another major difference between Conservative and Opposition Members.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I listened with considerable interest to the hon. Gentleman saying that half of all inward investment coming into the United Kingdom goes to Scotland. We are told in Wales that half of the inward investment goes to Wales. Does nothing at all go to England and Northern Ireland?

Mr. Gallie: I cannot speak for England and Northern Ireland, but I would certainly expect them to have got something. I am prepared to be corrected by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, whose figures I never dispute, because I find accuracy behind them. I do not know the figures for Wales, but I do know what I understand to be the factual figures for Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The United Kingdom gets about 40 per cent. of the inward investment coming into the whole of Europe, and Scotland and Wales get considerably more than their proportion according to population, as one would expect.

Mr. Gallie: I shall re-examine my figures. If the figures were not what I understood them to be, I would be quite happy to apologise to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) in advance and thank him for correcting me on the issue.

The amount of defence spending in Scotland and in my constituency is a major factor. I know that the hon. Member for Moray takes great interest in the Nimrod programme. The fact is that that programme will sustain jobs in my constituency just as it does in hers. If we were to go the way of the hon. Lady and her colleagues, I suspect that that programme would have very little chance of retention in Scotland, given the importance of its strategic defence aspects.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) mentioned the minimum wage, but did not specify the level. I concede that a minimum wage of £2, such as that in France, would not be a great danger to jobs. The hon. Gentleman's words were very guarded. He moved well away from any thought of a minimum wage of £4 or £4.30, as suggested by the trade unions. I suggest that my figure of £2 an hour is much nearer to the hearts and minds of those who lead the Labour party than to the hearts and minds of trade unionists who advocate adoption of such a policy.

We are told that one reason why the United Kingdom attracts so much inward investment is that we have low-wage policies. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, average wages in the United Kingdom have risen by 30 per cent. since 1979 under 18 years of Tory government. Where does that put the last Labour Government? That certainly paints them as a Government of low wages. Hopefully, the electorate will reflect on that in the coming election—not as an afterthought but as a consequence of ill-conceived and ill-judged decisions.

Tackling homelessness involves much more than simply building houses. We must look at the structure of society. We must consider the number of divorces. At one time, the chance of a marriage breaking up was well

above 4:1, but it has since dropped to 3:1 and is on its way down towards a 2:1 chance. There lies one reason for homelessness rising. There have been changes in family life—youngsters leave home at an earlier age.

Irrespective of such matters, I understand that, over the past three years, 18,000 new homes have been built each year in Scotland. The housebuilding target for the next 10 years is 130,000 homes. On that basis, the Government are well ahead of the targets that have been determined. When we consider housing programmes, we cannot avoid the fact that, nowadays, almost 60 per cent. of people in Scotland own their own homes compared with 35 per cent. in 1979. That means that individuals are putting their own cash into housing, housing is being improved to meet the needs of individuals and rising housing standards are funded differently from in the past, when public housing was to largely under the control of local authorities.

Those were the days of slum housing and bad judgment on housing issues. The public sector building programmes of the 1950s have been followed by the demolition of many of the houses that were built then. The local authorities' plans were ill conceived. Thank God we have moved on and now allow people to make their own judgments, even if they are not home owners. People now have a say in the provision of their homes, through Scottish Homes, co-operatives, contracts with private companies and shared ownership schemes. Those approaches are the way forward, rather than the old ways of local authority domination and dictatorial behaviour.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that the Budget will mean that local authorities' budgets for housing renewal and improvement will be cut by 35 per cent.? That is a severe cut. I have no objection in principle to the concept of home ownership—which is right—but the houses that are left in council hands need much renovation and improvement. The Conservatives' Budget will make it much more difficult for councils to solve that problem.

Mr. Gallie: I do not know what the local authorities in the hon. Lady's area are doing, but in my constituency in the past five or six years, we have been blessed by a Conservative majority on Kyle and Carrick district council. It has done more than any other local authority in Scotland to improve the standard of local authority housing. It achieved that partly with capital receipts and partly with the capital allocations made available to it by the Scottish Office. Our housing stock is now better than ever before.

It is true that some steps must be taken to reduce the debt burden on the reduced number of houses in local authority control. The clawback of 75 per cent. for next year will reduce capital expenditure by local authorities, but perhaps they should have reduced the debt burden earlier. If they had, we might not have needed to take the stringent steps now necessary.

The Labour party claims that the health service has problems with bureaucracy. It should remember the situation in 1979, when there were real cuts in the health service; when nurses were underpaid; when the number of nurses and doctors was cut; and when patients had to send their bed linen home with their families to be washed. New voters will not remember that time, but many others will. God forbid we ever go back to those days.

I have taken the trouble to find out how much administrative costs have changed in the North Ayrshire and Arran NHS trust's hospitals. Since the trust was established in 1993, the number of nurses has increased by some 5 per cent., the number of junior doctors and clinicians has increased by 22 per cent. and the number of administrators has fallen by 21 per cent. So much for the claims by Labour Members. I suggest that they do their homework on the subject.

It was interesting that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) had no answer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's question about the savings that could be made by changes in trust structures. Those structures have worked well for people in my constituency.

The nationalists live in a dream world. They offer increases in every area of public expenditure, but they do not believe that any burden would be passed on to the taxpayer. However, I commend them for sticking to their socialist beliefs. Such socialist beliefs were responsible for the problems in eastern Europe that the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber mentioned, but the people paid the price for the socialist regimes and their mistaken policies.

The Labour party, on the other hand, is like St. Peter, because it now denies socialism at every opportunity. The poor would be threatened by Labour's plans for a Scottish Assembly, which would mean wasted resources. The only jobs that a Scottish Assembly created would be for politicians and bureaucrats. If the Labour party wants to tackle bureaucracy, I suggest that it abandons plans for an ill thought-out Scottish Assembly.

The windfall tax would not be a new tax. I would have expected the Labour party to abhor such a tax, because it will be a tax on fuel. As the regulator has pointed out time and again, the gas, electricity and telecommunications industries will be required to pass on the cost of the tax to the consumer.

The well-being of people in Scotland, and the rest of the United Kingdom, would be risked further if the Labour party sought to give back to local authorities the power to tax local businesses, industry and commerce. The establishment of the uniform business rate was a great achievement by the Government, and we jeopardise it at our peril. I wonder whether anyone on the Labour Front Bench is prepared to say now that the Labour party has no intention of making any changes to the uniform business rate.

Our debate today is about poverty. To combat poverty, we need a prosperous and thriving nation. Our industries must be competitive and able to trade with Europe and the world. Inflation has been under control for some years, and interest rates are balanced. Economic growth in the past five or six years has been higher than in virtually every other nation in Europe. We have much of which to be proud, and the re-election of a Conservative Government is the best hope for those who feel the pangs of poverty.

5.48 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): May I first congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on her opening speech, setting the scene for the debate? I also congratulate the hon. Member for

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) on an excellent and thoughtful speech that I enjoyed immensely and from which I learnt a great deal.

I am pleased to be able to contribute to this important debate, and it is noteworthy that there are no Welsh Labour Members in the Chamber—*[Interruption.]*—apart from the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), who has come back into the Chamber. I am pleased to note that there is one Welsh Member in the Chamber.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jonathan Evans): What about me?

Mr. Llwyd: I meant Labour Members. I will come to the Minister in a minute. I would like to get on with my speech, as this is a serious subject. I must not fall into holes that I have dug for myself.

This important area of policy appears to have been overlooked by the Government and the Official Opposition. The reason is that neither the Conservative party nor the Labour party has any distinct policies that could in any way be described as recognising the core values that are so vital to millions throughout the United Kingdom.

I wish to confine my remarks to the effects of the last few years' financial settlements on local government. I well recall serving on the Standing Committee which scrutinised the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans)—among others—also served on that Committee.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): So did I.

Mr. Llwyd: I beg the pardon of the hon. Member for Cardiff, West, who seeks further attention.

The Government's view was that change was vital because of perceived confusion among the public about the roles and functions of district and borough councils and county councils. So vital was it that the status quo was retained in large swathes of England a short time later. During the debates, there were fine words from the Government about the future role and aspirations of local government—"equipping local government for the 21st century" and so on. Fine words they were, but the reality was considerably different.

More than 110 measures have been passed by this House in the past 18 months which have curtailed or adversely affected local government's powers and responsibilities. It is therefore logical that the Government should starve local authorities of funding. After all, the local authorities will have to bear the brunt of complaints from constituents. The same smokescreen which appears between health trusts and the Government is now also appearing between constituents and the Government. Increasingly, people complain to local government when, frankly, the fault lies at the feet of the Government. If the Government do not give local government the resources, it cannot possibly to its job.

It is important that the public know and understand what is happening in local government. The dead hand of central Government is clearly upon it, and councils are expected to make substantial cuts year on year. This year is the sixth successive year of cuts, and one must ask where on earth those cuts are to be made.

On Friday evening, a headmaster of a small primary school came to my surgery and said that he was being asked to cut £10,000 from his budget for the coming year. Last year, he had to cut £4,000. The upshot is that there will be fewer members of staff teaching, and he—in addition to all his administrative tasks—will have to teach in the substantial special needs section of the school. He is desperately concerned and anxious about the future and about the quality of schooling that the school will provide. The school is Dolgarrog school, a few miles away from the school I attended at Llanrwst.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Llwyd: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The school will suffer a cut of £160,000 from its budget and, inevitably, this will mean the loss of between eight and 12 teaching jobs as the cuts cannot be made anywhere else. This will adversely affect those whom the system is designed to serve. Schools the length and breadth of Wales—and Scotland, I am sure—are faced with huge crises. The one area left to cut is teaching staff, but it is obvious that those cuts are at best counter-productive, and at worst downright damaging to children's education.

The Government today are all about cost, cost, cost. I fear that, during the past 18 years, a culture has emerged that is best summarised by saying that people know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. It is surely plain that no cuts should be entertained which affect the quality of education, but that is precisely what is happening—to everyone's dismay.

Plaid Cymru-controlled Gwynedd must make cuts, as will all other local authorities in Wales, and is facing huge cuts again this year. But it values the provision of good education and, consequently, is cutting less from its education budget than any unitary authority in Wales. That is the right approach, and a shining example of a council putting values first and costs second. I am not saying that everything will be rosy in Gwynedd—far from it. Like everywhere else in the British Isles, Gwynedd will face savage cuts in leisure, planning, highways and social services. But it has decided to cut only 3 per cent. from the schools budget, and that is a recognition that education is extremely important to us all. We must invest in the future.

The worst possible example of short-termism is effectively to cut society's investment in its greatest asset—young people and children—for the sake of limiting public expenditure so as to offer tax bribes to middle England in an attempt to secure the re-election, God forbid, of this ineffective and morally bankrupt Government.

We will also see cuts in policing budgets. The budget for North Wales police, for example, will not even meet the force's pension commitments. That police force is expected to continue to deliver an excellent service and to buy into the latest computer networks to gain easy access to criminal records. It simply cannot do that. At best, it will stand still, while at worst, there will be cuts. The force is severely undermanned at the moment, in any event.

However, I acknowledge that the Home Office recently agreed to forward extra moneys to help cover the crisis North Wales police is facing with regard to the north Wales abuse inquiry. For that, I am grateful.

Mr. Wigley: Although any additional resources for the police are to be welcomed, does my hon. Friend agree that local authorities' social services departments in north Wales need additional resources so that their budgets are not adversely affected to a greater extent next year?

Mr. Llwyd: That is the next worry, and local government seems to be going from one crisis to the next. It grieves me that we have ended up in this situation in important services that need to be planned well in advance.

The Conservative Government and the Labour party have fully signed up to the "lock 'em up" brigade. I served on the Committee discussing the Crime (Sentences) Bill, and I found it astonishing that it appeared to be a right-wing beauty contest between the two parties. There was no question of investigating why youngsters offended—it was simply a case of lock 'em up. That is the easy way out, as it takes no skill and no care, and it appears to be the only answer available to the larger parties.

I am intensely worried that the core services so valued by our constituents will be subject to cuts. Schools are in crisis, homes for the elderly are closing, and spending on social services will be cut. The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) fits in neatly there. Once again, the weak and defenceless in society will bear the brunt of the cuts. Those who benefit from special needs and the community care budget—including the elderly and the infirm—will bear the brunt of savage cuts.

We are taking a huge retrograde step, and attacking the very values that we hold dear. I find that deeply unacceptable. Do the Government or the Labour party have any values left? They seem content to cut income tax and preside over cuts in the services for the vulnerable. What kind of values are those?

As long as the bulk of local government finance comes from central Government, the former will for ever be at the mercy of the latter. I want greater local financial autonomy—probably in the form of a local income tax. Tension between local authorities and central Government will continue to increase; local authorities are daily criticised for having to cut services but they are not really responsible for the cuts they are forced to make.

Often before in the House I have referred to the common-sense idea that, if we want someone to act responsibly we must give him responsibility. That may be a truism, but it is a useful maxim. Local government should have far more direct responsibility and financial responsibility. Our system of paying for local government is antiquated, and needs a complete overhaul. The standard spending assessment approach is deficient in many ways. It is unfair to rural areas, because it does not sufficiently recognise the added cost of providing essential services for rural communities with sparse populations. Certainly, lip service is paid to those indices, but the system remains unfair, and it is not adequate to meet the needs of local government.

The nursery voucher scheme is another gimmick that owes more to politics than education. It will undermine and damage Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, the Welsh language playgroup organisation, a much valued body, which has been built up on good values and a great deal of excellent voluntary work. I should hate to see that excellent provision damaged for no other reason than the exercise of Tory dogma and a vain attempt by the Tories to come up with a so-called big idea.

It would not be overstating the problem to say that local government is in crisis this year. The immediate future is extremely worrying, and there will be widespread distress and anxiety. What compounds this desperate situation is the fact that both the Conservatives and the Labour party believe firmly in a tax-cutting agenda. The shadow Chancellor has said that he will abide by the spending plans for the next two years—so no change there.

What on earth, therefore, is the point of voting for Labour? If people want to vote for a reactionary, regressive, ambitious party which has lost touch with the common people, they now have a choice between the Tories and the Blair Tories. Each party is as devoid of values as the other. Neither is listening; both are scrambling to be the most right wing when it comes to social and penal policy. In short, they are virtually indistinguishable.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) mentioned increased wages. It is, however, a great shame that the link between wages and pensions has not been retained. Had it been, pensioners would at a stroke have been far better off today—even on the evidence of the hon. Gentleman's speech.

I have been delighted to note the emphasis in this debate on the needs of the vulnerable, but no one speaks for the pensioners any more. They form a large section of society, who gave their all to secure our futures. We owe them a large debt, which we ought to set about paying honourably. They deserve better; Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party will ensure that this most important issue is given due political priority. I respectfully remind the House that it was the Conservatives who, by decoupling pensions from earnings, created this problem and made our senior citizens lag behind. Surely a society that espoused proper values would address that unfairness as a matter of urgency.

The Government are content to spend £940 million a year on part of the defence programme, but they deem improving the lot of tens of thousands of pensioners prohibitively expensive. That is plain immoral.

The Labour party, in its craving for power, has jettisoned all the values it once had. I sincerely hope that the people of Wales and Scotland will realise that they are mere pawns in a power game. The other evening I listened to the leader of Glasgow city council complaining bitterly that she was getting no change from her Labour colleagues in Parliament—the crisis facing Glasgow, she said, was falling on deaf ears. And that is happening even before the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) reaches No. 11.

I have always thought that the Opposition were meant to oppose, not to go along with everything regardless of its merit. The truth, however, is dawning on the electorate. The people of Wales and Scotland are beginning to realise that they are being sacrificed on the altar of Labour's search for power—which is the all-consuming passion surrounding Blair and the Labour party. But come the election, the people of Wales and Scotland, I believe,

[Mr. Llwyd]

will say that Labour has taken them for granted once too often. They will, I hope, realise that all core values have been abandoned in the race for middle England and the affluent south-east.

What is more, as the dreadful local service cuts begin to bite throughout Wales and Scotland, the people of Wales and Scotland will realise that the Labour party has no core values any more, and no regard for the interests or well-being of ordinary folk. In Wales, only one party opposes these cuts; just as the SNP opposes them in Scotland. Labour will not intervene, for fear of not reaching those ministerial limousines.

Both Labour and the Tories agreed to cut income tax last year and this year. Plaid Cymru, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats did not agree. At least we can stand on our record, and say that we were prepared to stand up for ordinary people. Tax cuts are fine, but tax cuts for the sake of cuts are immoral at a time when services are being cut and people are struggling to make ends meet.

If values are to be upheld, if the voices of ordinary men and women are to be heard, and if vital local services are to be protected, the choice for the people of Wales is clear. A vote for Plaid Cymru is a vote for the future of Wales—and not just for one part of it, but for the well-being of everyone in Wales.

6.6 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). All I can say to him is: best of luck at the national stadium on Saturday, when Wales play England. The rest of what he said, and of what the Scottish National party and Labour party spokesmen have said, was most disappointing. They always run the country down and never say a good word about the achievements of the past 18 years. I am quite sure that the Secretary of State for Wales will put the hon. Gentleman right about the tremendous economic achievements in Wales under a Conservative Government. I refer particularly to the remarkable amount of inward investment, of which we are all justly proud.

For some months now I have thought that each speech I made in this place would be my last, but more Scottish business seems to come up week by week. Like the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), I arrived here in 1964 and made my maiden speech on Second Reading of the Finance Bill in November of that year—in front of a much more crowded and rumbustious House, during the white heat of the 100 days of socialism which ended in the raging disaster of the late 1960s.

Today represents a dreadful climbdown for the SNP. A fortnight ago there were headlines all over the Scottish press to the effect that the SNP would press for a vote of no confidence in the Government today. The Labour party, the Welsh and the Irishmen would support SNP Members in that endeavour, we read, and the Government would fall. In fact, hardly a socialist or Labour Member has been present for the debate—just two of them on the Front Bench and no Back Bencher, with the exception of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). So the whole idea of a vote of no confidence in the Government has failed. That just goes to show how the Labour party, the SNP and other parties in the House are at war with each other.

Perhaps Labour deserted this debate because of its significant fall in the polls last week; or perhaps it was to do with steamrollering democracy through the Labour party conference in Inverness at the weekend. Most disappointing of all is the fact that neither Labour, nor the Liberal Democrats, nor the SNP will clearly outline their policies even though we shall, in a week or two, be entering a general election period. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) in particular refused absolutely to explain his party's policies for Scotland. He waved the question aside and said that the debate was over.

We shall enter the election period not knowing the Labour party's position on the West Lothian question, the tartan tax, pensions and how many Scottish Members of Parliament should be in Westminster; on local government expenditure in Scotland, all we know is that Labour is not prepared to give a penny more.

We are bemused by the fact that the Labour and Liberal parties have decided to have a referendum after a decision and legislation on proportional representation—our electoral system is an extremely important matter—yet the same Labour party is prepared to go ahead with a referendum on a Scottish Assembly before legislation is introduced, which is quite the wrong way round. The Opposition cannot have it one way for proportional representation and the other for the constitution.

Economic growth, success in controlling inflation and interest rates and the general expansion in industry with the consequent reduction in unemployment are all going well, as voters will know, yet the Opposition can do nothing but pour cold water on every aspect of Government activity over recent years.

The motion is full of fine phrases. We all want to

"eradicate poverty and create full employment",

although it would be interesting to ask the Opposition what they mean by full, because all Governments have accepted that there is a limit beyond which one cannot go. Of course we want to create

"a society free of social injustice"

and to espouse "democratic values". Conservative Members have those values, but we sometimes wonder about the Labour party and the Scottish nationalists.

The Government have provided

"free health care . . . from cradle to grave"

with ever increasing significance and to an ever higher standard. We help elderly folk as much as we can, and further information will be forthcoming later this week on an important step forward in health care for the elderly. We all believe in the community values advocated in the motion.

The motion contains all those ideas, with which all hon. Members would agree, but ends without any indication of how they are to be paid for. The Opposition say that they do not accept the Red Book figures for this year and the next, which shows that they have no idea whatever how to pay for the additional facilities that they have called for in this debate.

The hon. Member for Hamilton, in particular, was rumbled, because he was nonplussed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's attack relative to the health service. The health service is doing exceptionally well in Scotland and quality is improving all the time. My local health board spent £121 million in 1994-95, increasing to

£131 million this year. That is a huge increase in real terms in health service spending. The hon. Member for Hamilton is prepared to cut staff and reduce expenditure by £30 million, which we all find hard to understand, bearing in mind our definite decision to continue increasing health service expenditure in real terms, year in and year out.

I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about defence. The hon. Member for Moray dodged the issue. Nobody worked harder than many of us in the House of Commons to retain the Scottish regiments. We effectively lost two: the amalgamation of the Gordons and the Queen's Own Highlanders, and the second battalion of the Scots Guards.

As much as I disliked its happening, the total lost was only 1,000 men, while the Scottish National party's policy would affect many thousands of men currently serving at Lossiemouth, Kinloss and Leuchars and in the Royal Navy and the Scottish regiments. That would be a serious setback for Scotland in terms not only of employment but of the prestige of the services and our great love for our regimental and Royal Air Force service men.

The SNP also refused to accept the point about the inevitable loss of our voice in the world were we to go for independence. The United Kingdom as it is today has tremendous power throughout the world, but if we are cut down to a relatively small country, we shall lose the importance of our vote not only in Europe but further afield.

I find it hard to understand why, when the SNP continually complains, as does the Labour party, about quangos, it intends to set up a host of new ones, such as a Scottish land commission, a Scottish export unit, a Scottish forest enterprise board, a Scottish commission for racial equality—

Mr. George Robertson: I said no such thing.

Sir Hector Monro: I am not accusing the hon. Gentleman: I am talking about the Scottish National party; he should listen occasionally. He is not always in trouble—only 99 per cent. of the time.

There are costs, costs, costs under Opposition parties' socialist proposals, but no indication of where the money is to come from: it will come inevitably from increased taxation. The shadow Chancellor said that there would be no increase in income tax, but that means only that tax will go bang, bang, bang on everything else. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) rightly said, the windfall tax, especially on electricity, will inevitably have more impact than value added tax on electricity had. It will have a dramatic impact on fuel and power, yet the Labour party is prepared to go ahead with it.

Between now and the general election, Labour has a great deal of explaining to do about how the country is to be taxed out of existence to fulfil the many promises that it has made, largely with the support of the SNP and the Liberal Democrats.

All in all, the debate has been a tremendous disappointment to the Scottish National party: it set out to have a great day and show what a great party it was, but it has ended up with no Labour Back Benchers whatever to support it, precious few from any other party, and one Liberal. The debate has been the biggest damp squib that I have attended in all my years in the House of Commons, and I hope that the nationalists feel thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

6.17 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on securing the debate and on the way in which she expounded her views. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) on their distinguished service in the House. I do not want them to be spirited away and would like their wise counsels to be available to us in the next Parliament from outside the Chamber, so I shall not go on for as long as did the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie).

Is not it amazing that the Secretary of State knows which the next party of government will be, in that he spent almost 90 per cent. of his 32 minutes attacking Labour in the style of a true oppositionist? He mentioned the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) about the national health service trusts and job losses.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): What is the hon. Gentleman going to say about that?

Mr. McFall: The right hon. Gentleman asks what I am going to say, but with immaculate timing the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), when asked in a written question today by the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards),

"if he will make a statement about the development of NHS Trusts in Wales",

said:

"There are currently 30 NHS Trusts in Wales.

My right hon. Friend and I have received a joint application from the Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS Trusts to dissolve and create a new single trust from April 1997. Public consultation on this application ended on 17 February 1997.

Taking full account of the many representations received, and of the individual merits of bringing the two trusts together, we have decided to approve the merger."

All the huff and puff—

Mr. Michael Forsyth *rose*—

Mr. McFall: The Secretary of State had 32 minutes. He has said enough. If it is good enough for Wales, what is wrong with Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth *rose*—

Mr. McFall: The Secretary of State cannot bully his way to the Dispatch Box. He was hyper in his 32 minutes. Let him sit down, take the tablets and listen to the debate. He has had his say.

Mr. Forsyth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman is not giving way. Perhaps he can further clarify that.

Mr. McFall: It is not on for a member of the Cabinet to call hon. Members nasty and then expect to get his way

[Mr. McFall]

thereafter. He must sit in his place because I have the Floor. The question is, if it is good enough for Wales, why not Scotland? Perhaps the Secretary of State for Wales will answer that question in his civilised way, unlike the Secretary of State for Scotland.

The message from the Secretary of State for Scotland was about privatisation of the health service in Scotland. He is on record as saying that if clinicians want it, privatisation of clinical services will take place. Despite the fact that the Secretary of State for Health has ruled it out, the Secretary of State for Scotland says that privatisation of clinical services is on the agenda for Scotland. The agenda for a fifth Tory term in Scotland is going to strike at the heart of the NHS. The message to the people of Scotland is that is the Secretary of State for Scotland will destroy the public element of the NHS, another example of his being at odds with his Cabinet colleagues. It is not enough that he is at odds with them on E. coli; he is now at odds with them on health service privatisation.

We have come to a pretty pass when we read in the weekend papers that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has instructed his officials to write to the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Butler, about the Secretary of State for Scotland's off-the-record criticism of him last week during the row on the report on failing hygiene standards in abattoirs. The Secretary of State for Scotland ordered his staff on Thursday night to tell the press that he was "incandescent with rage" with another member of the Cabinet. Reporters to whom we have spoken gave us the names of the press representatives he sent out. One newspaper said:

"Said one seasoned Whitehall observer: 'It's every man for himself. And if that is the case, you can bet on Michael Forsyth being among the first on board."

There are serious questions on E. coli for the Secretary of State for Scotland. I listened carefully to his remarks. If the Scottish Office received the Swann document from the Minister of Agriculture, why did the Secretary of State not pass it on to Professor Pennington? He said in the Chamber that it was not received by a Scottish Office official but that it was received by the Scottish Office. When did the Scottish Office receive it? The Secretary of State, with a great wave and flourish, announced that he had persuaded the Prime Minister to establish a Cabinet sub-committee. By doing that, he took the issue to a national level. How many times did the sub-committee meet and what documents and papers did it request? Those questions are still pending. I hope that the Secretary of State will apologise to the people of Scotland for the inaction of his Department and his Government, and for the fact that 20 people died of E. coli in Scotland. An apology is required and so are answers on the E. coli document. The Secretary of State will not get away with it.

The debate is about public responsibility for social justice. The Government's record on social and economic injustice in Scotland is nothing short of disgraceful. Let us rehearse quickly the statistics of 18 years of Conservative Government in Scotland. One in five households of working age have no one in work. That is the direct result of Conservative policy. Since the Prime Minister took over, 1 million Scots have experienced unemployment. The number of people living on means-tested benefit has doubled since 1979. Some 85,000 Scots earn less than £2.50 an hour. That is why the Labour party argues the case for a minimum wage. There is, first, a moral case and, secondly, an economic case. I have never heard Opposition Members explain whether it is fair that a security guard earns £1 or £1.20 an hour or say what they will they do about it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): Opposition?

Mr. McFall: I said "Opposition" because my mind is travelling ahead, as it should be. The Government have not answered the case morally or economically.

The Secretary of State goes on about the tartan tax, but the people of Scotland do not believe what he says. The real tartan tax is VAT on fuel. He and his colleagues voted, not once, but twice for that unfair tax: they voted to introduce it and then to double it. The Tories are the party of unfair tax. A fifth term of Tory Government in Scotland would see the reintroduction of VAT at 17.5 per cent., but they will not get in.

The Secretary of State and his colleagues have devalued Scottish democracy. Ten Scottish Conservative Members—and the five in St. Andrew's house—are responsible for the £6.9 billion that has been spent on quangos. There are now nearly four times as many quango members, personal appointees of the Secretary of State, as local councillors.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Where is the fifth man?

Mr. McFall: The Secretary of State asks about the fifth man; is there not a Minister in the House of Lords?

The Tory years have been an absolute disaster for Scotland. We agree with the Scottish National party about that, but we differ on what to do next. Scottish nationalists believe that destroying the Union and making wild and unrealistic spending pledges will solve Scotland's problems, but it will not. Scotland needs the realistic plans to combat social injustice and poverty which Labour will deliver, not the pie-in-the-sky promises of the separatists.

Let us consider some of the separatists' promises. They raise the issue of defence. Like the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), I do not have the time to go into the matter in detail, but they estimate that the annual cost of a Scottish military would be £1.7 billion. However, evidence from similar sized countries such as Norway, suggests that the bill would be at least £800 million higher, at about £2.5 billion. Moreover, most comparable countries achieve that level of spending only by relying on less expensive troops through conscription. The only way in which the SNP's spending targets could be even nearly met is by the large-scale reintroduction of conscription in Scotland. The separatists are telling the young people of Scotland, "Two minutes spent voting for us and we will give you two years of military service." The SNP cannot run away from that.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McFall: I will not give way because I have only a few minutes left. The Secretary of State made a few points on the SNP's wild financial promises. Its economics is fantasy politics.

Let us look at some of the SNP promises. It has said that it will restore benefits to 16 and 17 year-olds—that would cost £20 million a year. It has said it will abolish housing debt and build 15,000 new houses—that would cost £1.3 billion. It has said it will reduce whisky duties to 10 per cent.—that would cost £90 million a year. It has pledged a 15 per cent. increase in income tax allowances—that would cost £4 billion a year. It has also said that it will introduce a maximum charge of £45 a week for residential care—that would cost £45 million a year. It has also pledged a £5 increase in the single pension and a £8 increase for a couple's pension, which would cost £200 million a year. Those promises are equivalent to a total of £5.65 billion a year. Where would that money come from?

Perhaps the cartoon that appeared two weeks ago in *The Herald* got it better than any of us when it portrayed the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) outside a business park which carried the sign

"Scottish National Phantasia

Business Theme Park

Sponsored by the Brigadoon Self-belief Tartan Think Tank

No Rates No Taxes

No Bad News

Free Oil

Massive Bungs

'Together we can blow it'.

Beware flying pigs."

That is the scale of the SNP's promises.

What about what the Tories have done to Scotland? The Secretary of State should go back to his constituents in Stirling and tell them that, since 1992, the Government have raised an extra £47 million from them. The Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), should tell his constituents that the Government have raised an extra £54 million from them. The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) should tell his constituents that the Government have raised an extra £50 million from them. The right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) should tell his constituents that the Government have raised £57 million from them, while the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) should tell his constituents that the Government have raised £59 million from them. Since 1992, the Government have raised a total of more than £500 million from those constituents. That is the real tartan tax and that is why the people of Scotland will not tolerate the Conservatives' future.

For my text at the end of my speech—

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Text?

Mr. McFall: Indeed, it is an epistle. Let me read it out.

Mr. Salmond: An epistle?

Mr. McFall: This is the epistle. It states:

"When parents dare not let their children out to play; when senior citizens who have given a lifetime of service to the community are forced to spend their sunset years—which should be amongst the most rewarding in their lives—as prisoners in their own homes, then we have reached a point where action must be taken."

My hon. Friends and I say "Hear, hear" to that. Who wrote that? Was it my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton? No. It was the Secretary of State for Scotland. It is a testimony to the 18 years of misrule by the Conservative Government in Scotland. The people of Scotland will appreciate those comments, and they will never again appoint a Secretary of State like him, or a Conservative Government. They will vote for the return of decency and fairness to Scotland and to Government.

6.32 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am glad to have a few minutes to draw together the strands of the debate. I do not want to spend too much time responding to the depressing line of reasoning pursued by the Secretary of State for Scotland, which, I dare say, the Secretary of State for Wales will repeat. They have tried to prove that Scotland and Wales are dependant nations and that they do not have the resources, wherewithal or ability to stand as nations in their own right among the other nations of the world. That story was peddled to every colony, internal or external, throughout the history of imperialism. It was usually peddled by the Governor General—there was no difference tonight.

Plaid Cymru will effectively challenge the figures that have already been bandied about by the Secretary of States for Wales, just as our colleagues in the Scottish National party will challenge those relating to Scotland.

This is an important time for the debate to take place because we are approaching an election. It is a time when profound misgivings have been expressed about the direction in which our society is moving. Just one manifestation of that concern was the conference held last week by the Forgotten 30 Per Cent. Group. That group, which consists of Church of England clergy, supported by Church Action on Poverty, expressed its profound concern about the exclusion of 30 per cent. of our people from society through poverty. That group called for the

"revitalisation of community and public resources"

and a "fundamental shift in values". Our debate is a response to that concern.

One aspect of that concern relates to inequality, deprivation and social breakdown; another is the trend towards serious short-termism, which has starved society of the resources that we need in public investment to guarantee future stability, sustainability and success. The current political concern stems from the fact that the two big political parties are vying with each other to prove that they are capable and willing to reduce public expenditure and cut taxes. That is the game that they are playing.

Getting public expenditure below 40 per cent. of gross domestic product has become an economic and political virility symbol for the two largest parties. According to that Tory-Labour consensus, public expenditure is seen as problematic and burdensome. The only measure of success is the level of private consumption. That was the clear message of the undertakings on taxation and public expenditure from the shadow Chancellor in January. He justified the refusal to raise the top rate of income tax by saying that it reflected Labour's acceptance of the need to reward work.

What about the importance of rewarding the work among the low paid and those who are insecurely employed in the public sector? What about rewarding

[Mr. Cynog Dafis]

those working in the health sector and in social services, who currently work well over the hours for which they are paid because they are unwilling to see the people they care for left without care? What about rewarding those people rather than just those who pay the top rate of income tax? How are we to address such inequality except by providing adequate public expenditure? It comes back to that.

One would not, of course, expect better of a Thatcherite Tory party than the pursuit of a line of reasoning dictated by the desire to cut public expenditure. The party is still Thatcherite although the lady of that name has departed from the scene. There is widespread dismay, however, at the fact that the Labour party seems to be accommodating Thatcherism. That dismay was well expressed in an editorial in *The Guardian* following the shadow Chancellor's statement on 20 January. It stated:

"It is a frightening admission that Labour may not put the moral and political case for redistribution except at the margins of social deprivation . . . Labour is relinquishing the chance to make the much-needed changes to the Britain it inherits."

That is a pretty severe indictment.

What does that rightward shift portend for Wales? According to current targets, the Welsh Office budget for public expenditure for 1997–98 will be reduced in real terms by 0.9 per cent. In 1998–99, there will be a real terms reduction of 2.3 per cent. The going is already tough for service providers and service users, but it will be worse next year, and very much worse the year after. In other words, "They ain't seen nothing yet," unless a Labour Government are prepared to increase Welsh Office spending at the expense of other departmental budgets. It is just as possible, however, that that Government will reduce the Welsh Office and Scottish Office budgets according to other priorities in order to increase the budgets of other Departments. A recent article by the Labour leader on defence in *The Daily Telegraph* suggested that there was no likelihood that Labour would shift resources from the defence budget to the Welsh Office and towards other more progressive activities.

Where will the resources come from for the health service in Wales—for example, in Dyfed Powys, where trusts already face significant deficits at the end of the next financial year? Their staff are already under severe pressure, but the trusts will be forced to cut vital services unless extra resources are made available. There is no doubt about that. I should like to hear tonight that extra resources will be found.

What about the severe pressure facing colleges of further education in Wales, which will have reduced budgets next year? Higher education is a key area of the Welsh economy, as well as a public service, employs more than 14,000 people, and has teaching and research programmes that are vital for the future prosperity of Wales. Its staff, too, are under pressure. University staff salaries have fallen well behind those of other sectors of society as their work loads have increased. They have called for a pay review body to look at the salary issue; we strongly support that call. They have delivered efficiency gains of some 30 per cent. over the past decade, but what is to come next?

In the two years from 1996 to 1998, cumulative cuts will amount to 7 per cent., and over the next three years capital funding will be cut by 64 per cent. in the vain hope that the private finance initiative will pick up the tab. Such cuts in a key sector amount to short-termism of the worst kind. The Institute for Grassland and Environmental Research is in my constituency. It is not a Welsh Office responsibility. It should be, but in Wales scientific research does not come under the ambit of the Welsh Office. The institute has an outstanding record: it is world famous and successful, and it attracts commercial funding but, this year, funding cuts by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will lead to a reduction in IGER funding of some 10 per cent., seriously imperilling the coherence of the programme and the institute's ability to attract commercial funding because core funding makes it more, not less, possible to attract commercial funding.

My final example is housing. Next year, the Tai Cymru budget will be cut by £259 million—a 31 per cent. cut in one year—moving us even further away from a programme that will eliminate homelessness and raise the quality of the housing stock in Wales, which we should be putting together. Such a programme was identified in the well-researched document issued by the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations entitled "Target 2000", which called for a doubling of the housing budget. What we get, however, is a halving of the housing budget.

That is the inheritance left us by the Tories as they face oblivion. We all earnestly desire that oblivion as soon as possible, the Labour party is intent on maintaining that inheritance for two years, and probably more. There is a clear contrast between that perception of matters and the perception of the SNP and Plaid Cymru. The alternative approach can be seen, in terms of Plaid Cymru's policies, in the "100,000 Answers" programme for employment creation and for sustainable economic, social and environmental development. We are talking about a public investment programme, at a net annual cost of £400 million, funded from a progressive taxation system, which would reduce the burden on the low paid while requiring wealthier people—including me and many more like me—to pay more. That is a reasonable trade-off in terms of the benefit to be gained.

That is a programme for a self-governing Wales, but its principles are relevant to the rest of Britain. It bears an uncanny resemblance to the programme of the Real World coalition of more than 30 organisations, published just last year. That document, aptly named "The Politics of the Real World", calls for a major programme of public investment over 10 years to create work opportunities and meet social needs. It also emphasises the national status of Wales and Scotland and calls for powerful parliaments for both those countries.

The final chapter of the document talks of the dangers of the politics of self interest and the pursuit of what it calls "safety through insulation". It speaks about the dangers of the better off and about

"withdrawing . . . into the bunker of narrow self-interest: reducing taxes, cutting public services, ending overseas aid, restricting immigration, erecting security walls"—

and so on. It continues:

"In the short term, this approach looks cheaper"—

it does—

"it seems to offer a private way out, not dependent on the uncertain cooperation of others. But it is doomed to failure."

It is important to emphasise that such an agenda is doomed to failure. Real World goes on to say:

"Most people in Britain, we believe, will regard this prospect"

—retreating into a security bunker, which already happens in significant parts of the United States where that kind of economic agenda has been pursued—

"as appalling, and will wish to avoid it. The alternative seems to us inescapable. Responsibility for the whole community—globally, and within the UK—must be accepted by all. The problems we face must be reduced by common action, not shut away. Though there will be financial costs, the return in terms of genuine security and the quality of community life will be far higher. This is in everyone's interest, even that of the reasonably affluent who will have to pay the larger share."

The document concludes:

"If Real World's vision looks radical this is a measure of how feeble the idea of political purpose in Britain has now become."

That is true of the debate that we have had over the past couple of years.

We are seeing the convergence of the two big parties on social and economic policy. It springs from Labour's wish to take votes and seats from Tories in England. That is misguided and the Labour leadership is going well beyond what is necessary to achieve it, given the current change in attitudes. In any case, there is a different consensus in Wales and Scotland; it is not a necessary exercise in our countries. What is happening shows how vital it is for the SNP and Plaid Cymru to take votes and seats from both Tories and Labour in Wales and Scotland on our kind of agenda—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but it is very likely to happen.

That is vital for Scotland and Wales, but it is also important for England because it is one of the few ways in which we can keep alight the torch of the values that we have tried to debate with some success, but not a great deal, tonight.

6.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): This has been an interesting and varied debate. It was opened by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), who began by saying how pleased she was that it was well attended. Unfortunately, she was greeted by a sea of green, particularly on the Benches of the official Opposition. They continue to be a sea of green. It was an early example of what characterised the hon. Lady's speech—an expression of wishful thinking in the absence of factual support. However, she is the mover of the motion and she deserves special attention, which I shall give her later.

First, I pay tribute to what were probably the valedictory speeches of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). Given that they have been Members of this House for almost as long as I have been alive, I must pay tribute to them with appropriate humility. The whole House will wish to pay tribute to their length of service and their consistency of view and, in the case of my right hon. Friend, to his contribution to the good government of the United Kingdom in general and of Scotland in particular.

Those of my hon. Friends who spoke in this wide-ranging debate drew attention to the huge economic progress being made in this United Kingdom, including Scotland and Wales, particularly in the creation of jobs. Opposition Members called for vision, but were unable able to provide any; they called for more spending, but did not describe where they would find the money; and they called for a re-ordering of priorities, but did not say what the priorities should be.

Only two members of the official Opposition spoke. The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) referred to the merger of the Pembrokeshire and Derwen trusts, which the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), announced earlier today. I must stress that the merger came after proposals from the trusts themselves and after a long consultation period. That is different from issuing diktats, which is what the shadow Scottish Office team appears to be doing.

The real question about the health service, to which the motion refers, is that, given that the Government have guaranteed that in every year of the next Parliament we shall increase health spending over and above inflation, why do not the official Opposition give that guarantee? What are they trying to hide about their plans for the health service?

Mr. Morgan *rose—*

Mr. Hague: The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), whom we welcome to the debate, and whose recent haircut we welcome even more, now wishes to intervene.

Mr. Morgan: In spite of the Secretary of State's obvious jealousy at the proliferation of my hair, I put it to him that, far from being cast-iron, the guarantee about real terms increases in national health service expenditure in Wales has already been broken. The increase for next year is only 2.4 per cent. more than what is being spent this year, which is less than the Bank of England's projection for the rate of inflation.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman's hair style is the only thing about him of which I am jealous. I am not jealous of his arithmetic. Our plans for the coming year compared with those for the corresponding period last year provide for a like-for-like increase in spending on the national health service in Wales of £94 million. That increase is above the rate of inflation, and the hon. Gentleman does not promise to match it in the next Parliament.

The other speech by a member of the official Opposition was made by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). He said that a national minimum wage would be a landmark reform and would transform the situation of many people. His speech was all the more remarkable because he could not answer the most elementary questions about it, such as at what level it would be set. If we had been able to ask him, I have no doubt that he would not have been able to tell us how many jobs would be lost. He said that such issues would be considered by a commission. The deputy leader of the Labour party once said that a minimum wage would lead to a shake. Evidently not every fool knows that.

The hon. Gentleman said that, with such a huge amount of public expenditure, there was bound to be room for a re-ordering of priorities. He said that there must be scope to re-order priorities, given that the Government spend

[Mr. Hague]

billions of pounds. Where is that argument when we discuss local government spending? How come Labour wants the Government to give more money because there is no scope whatever to re-order priorities in local government?

The hon. Gentleman called for a long-term view and left in a great hurry to get on with his role as shadow Minister for election planning.

Mr. Wilson: On another aspect of the property debate, will the Secretary of State tell us whether any Cabinet Minister is holding out the prospect of a doubling of the rate of VAT on fuel to 17.5 per cent.? Is he going against the views of the Government and of the Conservative party? Yes or no.

Mr. Hague: As far as I know, no Cabinet Ministers are making announcements about that matter.

We have achieved a revolution in the job prospects of the people of this country. That has gone widely unnoticed by Opposition Members during this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) referred to the rise in living standards in recent years, and the performance of the United Kingdom economy in topping the league for inward investment. Do Opposition Members think that Hyundai would be coming to Scotland and LG to Wales if those companies thought that this country was the no hope wasteland that the Opposition often describe it as?

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I shall not give way any more: I am dealing with the points raised in the debate, as the Minister who winds up is meant to do.

We have the highest proportion of people in work of any major European economy. In Wales, we have more people in manufacturing employment than it was 10 years ago. Total employment is almost 100,000 higher than 10 years ago. None of those points was acknowledged by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). He spoke about the financial position of local authorities. Local government in Wales receives 88 per cent. of the money it needs from the Welsh Office. It gets a higher level of assistance than local government elsewhere in the United Kingdom. It has had an increase in line with inflation, which adds up to £64 million for the coming year. Local authorities should explain to their electors how they are spending the money.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy complained that the link between pensions and wages had been broken. If that link were to be restored, it would, at a stroke, cost the taxpayer more than £8 billion a year. How would Plaid Cymru finance that in an independent Wales? It is all very well to behave like a pressure group, writing cheques that it knows will never be cashed, but some of us have to deal with the practical realities of government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) referred to our success in attracting inward investment, and pointed out the dangers of the social chapter. Opposition Members have not grasped the fact that the Government are addressing those issues by extending opportunity for people. The new generation in Britain today has a greater opportunity to go on to higher and further education than any previous generation, and a wider choice of career than any comparable generation in Europe, because new jobs and investment are going to Britain. When young people start a career, they have the freedom to join or not to join a trade union, which was not previously possible. In the past few years, it has been easier and cheaper for them to buy a first home than at any time for 35 years. When they have their own children, they will be able to choose how they will be educated. Opposition Members do not believe in giving people that choice.

This is a curious motion to put before the House: some hon. Members have actually read it. It bears all the hallmarks of having been written by a committee. It mentions almost any subject that anyone could think of, and throws in a variety of terms that are not defined, and which were not defined in the debate. It ends up with a mixture of pious hopes and vague wishes, rather like a composite motion at a Labour party conference, which probably explains why most Labour Members have not been present.

The hon. Members who introduced the motion have not said where they would get the money from to meet their pious hopes. I said that I would comment on the opening speech of the hon. Member for Moray. The most memorable moment in her speech was the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett–Bowman), who said that people have to take responsibility for themselves and their families, and that they want to do so. My hon. Friend said that individuals, as well as the Government, should ask what they can do about social justice.

The hon. Member for Moray said that people no longer talk about visions and values. Conservatives talk about visions, which is why we have launched a new vision of the pension system. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who has just come into the Chamber, should welcome that. The Government have a vision of rising living standards and increased personal freedom. We value freedom of choice in education rather than the hypocrisy of denouncing choice and then exercising it oneself, as practised by some Opposition Members.

The hon. Lady said that we must have vision, and then gave a list of issues on which we must have vision. She asked, "Where does the European Union go?" Imagine John F. Kennedy standing up to announce his vision and saying, "Where do we go?" She said, "Is the United Nations as respected as it should be?" Imagine Martin Luther King saying, "This is my vision: is the United Nations as respected as it should be?" She said that we should be involved in a plethora of international organisations. She may not have noticed that we are involved in a plethora of international organisations. She said that we should reach out and show that the political body still has a vision. If the debate is anything to go by, the political bodies sitting on the Plaid Cymru and Scottish National party Benches have no vision.

The hon. Lady complained that people were cynical about politicians. People become cynical about politicians when they raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled and present misleading information. What is the real vision of nationalist parties? Insular Governments in declining countries with bankrupt economies. That is what they

offer to the people of this country. They have come to the House with unsubstantiated assertions, out-of-date statistics and futile wishful thinking. They have called for justice and equality without defining it, for spending without saying how they would finance it and for jobs while pursuing policies that would destroy them.

The Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru have reminded us that the distinction of being wrong about every major issue of the late 20th century does not belong to the Leader of the Opposition on his own. They share that distinction. Being wrong about every issue that they have raised in the debate, and, most important of all, being wrong about their wish to destroy the United Kingdom, means that their motion deserves to be emphatically rejected by the House.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 26, Noes 281.

Division No. 90] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Salmond, Alex
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Welsh and
Mr. Elfyn Llwyd.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*

Rice, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shersby, Sir Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mrs. Jacqui Lait.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given that Members from Northern Ireland voted for the motion that we have just debated, can you arrange to have the seating arrangements in the House reconfigured to allow new Labour to be positioned to the right of the Ulster Unionists?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is a bogus point of order, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

Building Societies Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

7.12 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Bill changes the balance of power and the relationship between building societies that converge and those that remain mutual. Three or four major societies, including the Halifax, are in the process of conversion. That is going to mean that a lot of money will go to members of those societies. Is it not in order to ask Members speaking on the Bill, if they are going to benefit from a building society's conversion, which is going to give them free shares or money, to declare that as an interest?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members are, I am sure, aware of the rules of the House.

7.13 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It gives me great and long-awaited pleasure to ask the House to give the Bill a Second Reading. I understand that the opposition parties are prepared to co-operate fully in passing it into law in good time and, if that is true, I thank them for it.

There have been two years of consultation on the Bill. It is one of the first Bills ever to be produced in draft form. The benefits of that have been seen in changes that have been made to the Bill as a consequence of the consultation. Everyone who has been involved has been pleased by that process.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The Minister says that there has been extensive consultation. With whom has the consultation taken place? Is there not a problem in that some building societies have wanted to convert from their mutual status so that the directors can receive share options? That has been one of the big driving forces. Whom has she consulted other than those who will make a considerable amount of money out of selling the trust that members have built up in those societies?

Mrs. Knight: Those are points that I shall come to later, but, if I may answer the hon. Gentleman briefly, the consultation has involved all building societies and all financial institutions. I am delighted that a considerable number of others with an interest in those matters, both individuals and groups, have also given their comments on the Bill. It has not been a confined consultation in any way. It is one of the broadest-based consultations that has taken place.

Mr. Field: I am a member of a number of building societies. I have not once been asked by the leadership of those societies what my views are. If political parties asked for or were involved in consultation and did not consult any of their members, there would be a lot of flak in a debate such as this, yet it appears that that is precisely what has happened with members of the building society elite. They have all talked to the Minister, but none of the members has.

Mrs. Knight: That is not quite correct. We have heard from mutual building societies and from building societies

that propose to convert, but we have also heard from the associations that represent them, from the associations that represent the employees of the building societies, of which there is more than one representative group, and from a range of individuals who are members of societies—both ones that are converting and ones that are staying mutual. We have also heard from organisations such as the Consumers Association. That is why I say to the hon. Gentleman not only that this is one of the widest-ranging consultations that has taken place, but that we published at an early stage a draft Bill, which enabled individuals and all those groups to go through it in considerable detail—in far greater detail than would otherwise have been the case. We therefore have answers and comments that we would not otherwise have had. For those reasons, I believe that we have before us a Bill that is wanted by the mutual organisations, perhaps in particular, as they are seeking that level playing field in which to operate in future.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: If the consultation has been so long, and it is certainly true that much of the review work began in January 1994, if the Bill has been ready for so long and if the societies are so interested in it, why is it being introduced now in this scuttle-like fashion in the dying days of a dying Parliament?

Mrs. Knight: The Bill was first published in draft form in March last year. There was then, if you like, the last stage of consultation and it was published in its final form in the autumn of last year. I am sorry, too, that it was not possible to include it in the Queen's Speech, but the hon. Gentleman will know that some legislation was required, particularly that relating to the tragedy at Dunblane, which meant that something had to give way.

I always said that, if it were possible to find a slot towards the end of this Parliament, which is when slots come up, I would introduce the Bill. A Treasury Minister and a shadow Treasury Minister are taking part in the debate. We have only just come out of the Committee that considered the Finance Bill, the last stages of which are tomorrow. It is difficult to see any earlier point at which this legislation in its final form could have been introduced.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid–Sussex): I whole-heartedly agree with the decision to present the Bill in this Session. Many building societies such as the Alliance and Leicester and the Halifax are about to become plcs and it is good that societies should know the precise form for doing that. The Bill makes more evident the changes in the building society world.

Mrs. Knight: My right hon. Friend is correct. Those organisations have been involved as much as the mutual societies in the consultations not only after the Bill was published in draft form but before that.

The Bill is strongly supported by a wide range of people. The Building Societies Association has said that societies warmly welcome its proposals and the Portman building society has said that it could not have come at a better time. The Bill will ensure that societies which choose to remain mutual can develop their business as they wish without the unnecessary constraints of the current legislation.

The Building Societies Act 1986 was a liberalising measure. For example, it enabled building societies to become banks if they wished to do so and it allowed mutual societies to provide more services while remaining mutual. As a consequence of that Act, societies have thrived and developed. Some have decided that their future is as banks. The 16 million people who are due to receive a windfall as a consequence of the Halifax, the Alliance and Leicester, the Woolwich and the Northern Rock building societies converting would not have been able to benefit in that way without the 1986 Act.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made some of those points quite clear in a Sunday newspaper. I was surprised to find, in that same newspaper, that my right hon. Friend's remarks—that it would enable building societies to convert to publicly quoted companies—were taken to be the Bill's prime aim. That is incorrect. My right hon. Friend made it quite clear that the 1986 Act enables that conversion to take place. Although much is made of the four converters, 72 societies will remain mutual. The 1986 Act prevents them from offering the range of financial services that their competitors, such as banks, can offer. That means that that Act unfairly restricts the mutual sector.

The Government are not in the business of wishing societies to choose one route or another. We aim to change the legislation so that a society can make its own decisions about its future. To use that rather hackneyed expression, we seek to give societies a level playing field because, currently, it is tilted against them. The Bill will introduce permissive legislation because none of us can second guess the future, especially in the financial sector, which is a fast moving market. I expect that, as a result of the Bill becoming law, the mutual societies will flourish and develop and will continue to have close ties with home ownership and with local communities.

The Bill will preserve the unique characteristics of building societies as mutual organisations that are owned by members and that look after savings, ranging from small amounts towards Christmas or a holiday to the larger sums built up over a long time for retirement. Their primary purpose will be to enable people to make the most important purchase in their lives—the purchase of their homes.

As I have said, the Bill is the result of a long consultation process but its objectives are simple. It aims to increase the commercial freedom of societies and bring in increased competition and wider choice for customers. It will also update the prudential supervision of societies by the Building Societies Commission, and it will bring societies even closer to their members and underline their mutual identity.

Building societies are renowned as safe havens for money and are rightly popular with their members. At present, even with gradual deregulation, societies are not free to plan for the medium to long term in the way that their business requires. They are constrained by legislation because they have to wait for new powers to be added. Under a permissive approach, societies do not run the risk of being shut out from new developments, such as considerable technological changes. The Bill will sweep away the qualifying assets holding which places strict limits on societies with commercial assets of £100 million or less. Further freedoms will be created by widening the scope of the lending limits and the principal

[Mrs. Knight]

purpose so that lending to finance rented housing will, for the first time, be part of a society's core business, if it chooses.

Preventing societies from developing their full potential and preventing customers from getting the friendly and efficient service in the wide range of retail financial services that they have come to expect from savings and mortgages does not make sense in 1997. Societies have a proven track record for prudence and performance, and should be allowed to use their financial experience and expertise to compete with other institutions to provide people with the services that they want. The Bill provides that a society can carry on any business that is set down in its memorandum, subject to keeping within the nature limits, and to the Building Societies Commission's prudential supervision.

There will still be a few restrictions. Societies will not be permitted to trade in commodities or currencies or to be market makers in securities for transactions over £100,000. As with the lending limit, the Bill provides a power to vary those restrictions if that becomes desirable in future. The Bill makes some improvements to the ombudsman scheme. Every authorised society is required by law to belong to an ombudsman scheme that meets the requirements of the 1986 Act and the Bill. The supervisory body is the Building Societies Commission. Its functions include promoting the protection of funds that people have placed with societies and the financial stability of building societies generally.

The framework of day-to-day supervision has stood the test of time. Under that system, the building societies are healthy, well capitalised and well managed and investor funds have been protected. No regulator can be complacent and we see scope for sharpening the commission's power to deal with problems if and when they arise. Everyone knows that a stitch in time saves nine.

Accountability to members will also be improved. Societies are already accountable. Many customers enjoy and appreciate their position as members and the extra relationship with the society that that brings, which is more than simply being a purchaser of goods or services. However, Parliament and societies can improve on that. During the consultation, the champions of mutuality often pointed out that in a building society there is no interest apart from that of the customers: they and they alone are the people for whose benefit a society is run. Directors are the custodians of the society for its present and future members and owe no allegiance to any outside group. Improving the availability of information for members and enhancing their ability to have a say in what they think should happen will strengthen those bonds of mutuality. Borrowing members will have broadly similar rights to a say in the running of a society as investing members.

Mr. Renton: Perhaps my hon. Friend can inform my ignorance. She is rightly talking about the importance of members in societies that continue to be mutual. What rights or possibilities have those members if, given the examples of the Alliance and Leicester and the Halifax, they would prefer their societies to convert into plcs so as to have the sort of windfall that members of the Halifax and the Alliance and Leicester building societies will receive?

Mrs. Knight: In terms of accountability, members of societies which wish to remain mutual will have a far greater amount of information about their societies, and that is good. Equally, it is undoubtedly correct that members will be able to make their views known to the directors of their societies. Of course, only the directors could propose to a society general meeting or annual general meeting that it should convert and become a public limited company.

I should tell my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Renton) that those are serious decisions. Some societies see their future as banks—we know their names only too well—but many others have undoubtedly served very well as mutuals. In recent articles, mutual societies have very clearly made the case for the benefits that they can offer to borrowers and savers by remaining mutual. I think that any member of any society must not only consider what might happen tomorrow but take a long-term view of their mortgage or savings with a society and attempt to attain benefits over the long term and not in the short term.

Accountability is part of the overall package, and it was a part of the points made by my right hon. Friend. It is important that a society should not change its strategic direction without consulting its members. Any proposal to expend more than 15 per cent. of a mutual society's own funds on the acquisition or establishment of a business outside the society's core activity of mortgage lending will require members' approval.

There are some changes to the mechanisms of conversions and of takeovers, although the broad framework and required threshold for voter turnout and support remain intact. Furthermore, if a society intends to transfer out of the sector and simultaneously to increase the remuneration of any director or other officer of the society, the members should be able to vote on that proposal separately from the main transfer resolution.

A special and important feature of mutual organisations is that customers are the members, with the right to vote on the society's resolutions. The Bill will provide that, in future, any individual who saves with a society will have a membership account. Societies will still be able to use deposit—non-membership—accounts for corporate accounts and, if they choose to, for those who want current accounts, deposits at overseas branches, qualifying time deposits or certain other services.

During the consultation and before the introduction of the Bill, there were calls for changes to the rules on distributions of bonuses on a conversion or takeover. The 1986 Act forbids distributions of cash bonuses to shareholding members of less than two years and to borrowers, although the courts have held that the Act does not rule out certain flat-rate distributions of free shares to members of less than two years. Societies and some others have asked that Parliament revisit and change that to rule out any bonuses for members of less than two years—which is often referred to as strengthening the two-year rule.

The Government do not propose to make that change, and I shall say why we have taken that decision. First, a society that wishes to convert or to be taken over already

has a discretion, if it so chooses—by choosing the qualifying date for bonuses—to rule out recently arrived members. It is not for the Government to dictate to a society which members it should rule in and which it should rule out. It is for the society to make those decisions, and we have given societies the freedom to do so.

Secondly, the law as interpreted by the courts has now stood for almost eight years. During that time, a number of societies have proposed to convert or to be taken over. In terms of member numbers, a bigger shift has already occurred than is likely to recur in future. A change made now affecting any possible future conversion or takeover would be seen as unfair and incomprehensible by a society's members. I say in all seriousness that, if the Government made a change now to rule out any future distribution to members of less than two years, and in future should another society convert or be taken over, the Government of the day would be under unstoppable pressure to reinstate the current law.

A part of the Bill affects the position of building societies that become public limited companies by transferring their business to a specially formed company—by conversion rather than by takeover. Clause 40 abolishes the priority liquidation distribution right—the PLDR. The reason for abolishing it is that it is no longer valid, as the situation in 1986 is not the current situation.

Clause 41 deals with the so-called "five-year protection period" for converting building societies. The 1986 Act states that, during a five-year protected period after a building society has converted to plc status, the successor company is required to prevent any one shareholder from holding more than 15 per cent. of shares, effectively protecting the company against takeover. At the time that that provision was made, the situation in financial markets was very different from that of today. Moreover, the converting societies are substantial and strongly capitalised, and three out of four converters are likely to be in the FTSE 100 index.

I realise, however, that a converted society may need to take time to become established in its new form as a bank. We have therefore decided on a middle approach. I propose in most circumstances to leave in place the five-year protection. However, if a converted society, which is of course a new bank, wants to acquire other authorised financial institutions—such as another bank, building society, insurer, friendly society or investment business authorised under the Financial Services Act 1986—it will lose its protection. It quite clearly would be unfair on other financial institutions if one type of institution which is protected is uniquely allowed to go on the acquisition trail of another financial institution that is not protected.

The Bill is one of the first to be published in advance as a draft, and I believe that the benefits of that practice have been shown. I thank all those who have taken an active part in contributing to it. The legislation is an endorsement of mutuality, and it will take into the next century the best elements of self-help—which were the basis for the movement in the past century. The Bill gives mutual building societies an assured future, and I commend it to the House.

7.36 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): Labour welcomes the Building Societies Bill, which is at last before the House. It will benefit millions of consumers and building society members across the United Kingdom. For that reason, the Bill deserves—indeed, commands—widespread support, both inside and outside Parliament. Labour would not have drafted particular aspects of the Bill in the same way as the Government, and I shall outline those differences later. Overall, however, we want the Bill, amended or unamended, to become law before the general election. We will give it a fair wind in this debate on its Second Reading, and we will support its broad principle next week in Committee and in the debate on Third Reading.

Labour's position on conversion is that it is for members to decide whether they want their building society to convert or to remain as a mutual. Many new shareholders have substantially benefited from conversion. Of course we wish them well, if that is the course that they want to take. We also wish the converted building societies well in their new endeavours as banks.

The conversion process has also—perhaps paradoxically—helped mutuals, as it has awakened in them the need to be in close contact with their members. In recent years, the overall philosophy of mutuality has been revived—after some building societies had undoubtedly become a little remote. Therefore, the conversions, bonuses to members and changes in the market have had important benefits beyond providing a stimulus to the economy. However, there is a need for balance, and that is what the Bill is all about.

There is a public interest in maintaining choice in the market. The great strength of the British financial services industry is its diversity and choice. It provides access to investment and savings opportunities to millions of people. That choice currently includes the option to join a mutual building society, and it would indeed be regrettable to lose that choice.

Mutuals do not have to pay dividends to shareholders, and they therefore have an opportunity to use their assets to offer cheaper mortgages and better interest rates on savings. Some mutuals are already doing so. A recent survey in *What Mortgage* suggested that, of 72 building societies, the 25 best opportunities were with mutuals. One of the large mutuals—I will not advertise its name—told me that on a range of products it is offering 0.7 per cent. higher savings rates than its main high street competitors. Its standard variable mortgage rate is 0.2 per cent. below that of other market leaders.

Many would argue that mutuals play a unique part in securing good value for the consumer as well as the opportunity to join a self-help organisation and tap into the important heritage of mutuals. Of course, converted societies have their strengths too, but mutuals can arguably play an important part despite their smaller proportion of the building society sector.

Today, many believe that mutuality is in danger. Last week, I heard a speaker on, of all things, the "Thought for the Day" spot on Radio 4's "Today" programme graphically warn:

> "We may be selling a great cultural heritage for a mess of pottage".

The warning was that there may be large bonuses for individuals now, but that that may reduce the choices for all savers and borrowers in the future.

Building societies were one of the great successes of the self-help movement among working people in Victorian Britain. Indeed, the first recorded building

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

society, the Kettley building society, was set up in Birmingham in 1775, many decades before Queen Victoria, in what is now my locality. Like friendly societies and co-operatives, their motivation was mutual self-help rather than profit, although, of course, the profit was the way to pay good interest rates on savings. They served local communities and were accountable to their members. Most of us in the Chamber, like the vast majority of the British people, bought our homes with the help of a mutual building society. However, their success produced problems.

As markets became competitive, societies merged to reduce overheads. In 1900, there were 2,286 building societies; by 1950, the number had fallen to 819 and, by 1990, it was down to 80. The amalgamation of societies sometimes made them more remote from members. They had huge assets but could be unadventurous in using them. Their very reliability and stability were advantages in attracting customers but, in a few cases, constrained innovation.

Societies were also operating under a prescriptive regime, introduced initially in legislation in 1874 and then amended by the Building Societies Act 1986. That legislation restricted their operations under an out-of-date and highly restrictive regulatory framework. It prevented them from taking advantage of the new opportunities of an expanding financial services market.

In the late 1980s, some societies began to believe that mutuality had become a straitjacket. They wanted to provide a wider range of services for their members, and conversion was seen as the only option. Two thirds of the building society sector has converted. The process began in 1989 with the Abbey National flotation. However, one third of the sector remains mutual. It has £120 billion-worth of mortgages and 17 million customers and accounts for a quarter of the mortgage market. It should be protected from predators.

The good news is that many mutuals have risen to the new challenge. They are back in contact with members, offering competitive mortgages and savings rates. They are rediscovering the spirit of mutuality, and we should encourage that process. However, they still need greater freedom to serve their members. That means that the prescriptive regime of the 1986 Act needs to be amended.

Three years ago, Labour warned the Government that the future of mutuals would be in doubt unless they were freed from the shackles of the 1986 Act introduced by the Conservatives. We warned that choice and diversity would be lost, but the Government prevaricated and dithered. Promises of a new Bill were broken, but let me pay tribute to the Economic Secretary who, when she took on her current role, tried to press the idea of a new Bill.

The Government said that the Bill would be included in the Queen's Speech last November—indeed, they had promised it the previous November—but it was dropped at the last moment. Why? I suspect that someone decided that there were no votes in it and, at that point, Conservative leaders were interested only in trying to revive their sagging fortunes. However, there was always public interest in the Bill. The Economic Secretary recognised that. Labour forced the idea back on to the political agenda and demanded an explanation of why it had been dropped.

To her credit, the Economic Secretary also fought for the Bill. It has been revived, but why has it taken so long to get to the House? We were told that a time slot was needed, but everyone knows that the House's business has been finishing early, certainly since Christmas, so why the mysterious delay? I do not doubt that the hon. Lady wanted the Bill. We both continued to press for it and now, at last, it is with us. It is very welcome.

The price of delay, however, has been uncertainty and the undermining of the mutual sector. One aspect has been long queues outside many building societies as speculators open accounts to bet on the next conversion. In response, some mutuals have put up their minimum account rates to £1,000 or more, thus freezing out the small investor. That cannot be satisfactory. Of course, it must be up to members to decide whether a society should convert: we would want them to have the choice, but long-term members should not have the decision made for them by mere speculators.

The Bill has its drawbacks, but we need to get something on the statute book soon. Labour wants to free mutuals to compete in the market. We regret the delay; we want the Bill passed, but we are disappointed by the failure to discourage speculation, which is not fair to long-standing members who have stood by their societies for years. We will give broad support to the Bill, and we want it passed before the general election.

Labour will support the Bill, but the question is, do the Government? Of course, the Economic Secretary has sponsored it—I do not doubt that she supports it—and we presume that the Government understood the inadequacies of the 1986 Act and sought to change it. Our understanding of the Bill was that it was intended to put mutuals on a level playing field with other organisations so that members would not need to vote for conversion, if only because the Building Societies Act 1986 imposed a prescriptive regime on them which denied them access to particular investment opportunities and new capital.

The Minister told us today that the Government did not seek to encourage building societies to convert or not to convert, but yesterday, the day before the Treasury introduced the Bill to protect mutuals from takeover and to reduce the need to convert to banks, the Deputy Prime Minister announced that he supported the 1986 Act and wanted to support conversion from mutuals to banks.

Writing in *The Mail on Sunday*, the Deputy Prime Minister says that it

"makes sense to make the ownership of building societies more transparent; to give the members—the lenders and borrowers who have always owned those societies—the direct rights of ownership which shareholding offers . . . These have long been central tenets of Conservative philosophy."

The Deputy Prime Minister endorses the 1986 Act, which the Minister seeks to amend. He describes the transition from mutuals to plcs as "extraordinary and exciting", despite the fact that the aim of the Bill is to make it less necessary because, presumably, the Minister wants to see diversity and choice maintained, and that includes mutual building societies.

The Deputy Prime Minister, however, seems to be challenging the very basis of the Bill. *The Mail on Sunday*, hardly a Labour newspaper, calls it

"an extraordinary rebuff to building societies on the eve of the Bill designed to protect them."

Perhaps we have here an answer to the mystery of why it has been such a struggle to get the Government to bring forward the Bill.

Mrs. Angela Knight: The hon. Gentleman should stop reading headlines and read the articles. If he reads the article written by the Deputy Prime Minister, which is headed "Deregulation the way to greater financial freedom", all will become clear to him. My right hon. Friend rightly points out that 16 million people are benefiting from conversion, but he is also very much in favour of the mutual sector. The hon. Gentleman should read the article.

Mr. O'Brien: I shall give way to the Minister again if she can tell me where in the article the Deputy Prime Minister says that he is very much in favour of mutuals.

Mrs. Knight: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman does not realise that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is one of the backers of the Bill.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Lady has not answered the question; nowhere in the article is there any endorsement of mutuals—quite the contrary. The hon. Lady is suggesting that I might somehow be misleading the House about what the Deputy Prime Minister says. I shall read out some more of the article so that the House can judge for itself.

The article says:

"the extraordinary changes now taking place in the building societies come as a direct result of the Government's deregulation initiative."

The Deputy Prime Minister claims that the conversion process is part of the deregulation initiative. He goes on:

"In 1986 our building societies legislation enabled building societies to convert from their mutual status to plcs—in practice, to become banks."

I do not deny that that is a statement of fact. He says further on:

"with today's massive availability of funds it now makes sense to make the ownership of building societies more transparent; to give the members—the lenders and borrowers who have always those societies—the direct rights of ownership which shareholding offers and to allow the societies to compete more effectively in the modern world. Hence the legislation to give the building societies the ability to convert themselves"—

he is endorsing the 1986 Act—

"into publicly quoted companies.

Hence the extraordinary and exciting changes we are now seeing.

During the conversion process a large number of people have qualified for free shares. The Abbey National flotation took place in 1989."

I am reading Conservative propaganda. I am waiting for a reference to how important mutuals are, but it does not come. The Deputy Prime Minister tells us that

"Now the floodgates are opening",

but still he has not mentioned mutuals. He seems pleased with the floodgates opening to conversion. On he goes:

"As I write, the Halifax, Alliance and Leicester, Woolwich, Norwich Union, Northern Rock and Scottish Amicable are all poised to float on the stock market."

He goes on about the £1,000 that people are getting and how 16 million people are benefiting. He says:

"This outcome flows directly from the Government's policies, its determination"—

the hon. Lady has been engaged in some sort of altercation with others on the Back Benches, but she should hear this—

Mrs. Knight: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: In a moment. Let me just finish, then I shall give way to the hon. Lady, because she has a lot of explaining to do. The Deputy Prime Minister talks about the Government's

"determination to deregulate business and promote competition".

All the way through the article, he seems to be endorsing conversion. *The Mail on Sunday* regarded the article as extraordinary. I regard it is bizarre. The Deputy Prime Minister thinks that conversions are

"giving people more choice, new opportunities and better service. These have long been central tenets of Conservative philosophy."

Surely all that is an attack on mutuals and a promotion of the idea of converting.

Mrs. Knight: The hon. Gentleman is being extraordinarily silly. He is not normally this silly, but we have seen him silly before. He is reading an article about some of the societies that have converted or are converting and the benefits that that has brought and will bring to 16 million people. The object of the Bill, of which the Deputy Prime Minister is a sponsor, is to ensure that mutuals can compete on a level playing field. It is deregulatory. The Government are in favour of societies making their own choices on which way to go. The hon. Gentleman's interpretation is silly.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Lady cannot have read the article properly. I am not relying merely on my interpretation. The headline in *The Mail on Sunday*—normally a Conservative-supporting newspaper—calls it "Heseltine's snub for die-hard mutuals". If the Deputy Prime Minister did not understand the Bill, one might appreciate his comments, but he appears not to want to reduce the need to convert. He does not want to preserve for the consumer the choice of mutual status. He wants all building societies to be converted. That is what the article is all about. He says that conversions came about as a direct result of the Government's deregulation initiative.

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: Let me answer the hon. Lady first.

The Deputy Prime Minister advocates conversion. That is what the article is all about. The timing and the tone of the article, on the eve of a debate on the Bill, are a slap in the face for the Bill and, in many ways, for the hon. Lady. Why are the Government sponsoring a Bill of which the main purpose is to reduce the need for what the Deputy Prime Minister thinks that the Government want done? Why did he choose to launch his plea for more conversions yesterday, unless he intended to dissociate himself from the Bill? Why did he attack the core objective of the Bill? The truth is that, like rats in a sack, the Tories are at each other's throats again.

Mr. French: I am not sure whether it is worth intervening, because the hon. Gentleman has clearly made up his mind and put his own construction on the article.

[Mr. French]

While he has been speaking, I have re-read the article. The Deputy Prime Minister is clearly writing about societies that are choosing to convert. It is an article about conversion, not about mutuality. If it were about mutuality, he would be saying something quite different.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman has made my case. The Deputy Prime Minister does not mention mutuals. He endorses conversion, claiming that the move away from mutuality is part of the central tenets of Conservative philosophy. I give credit to the Economic Secretary. She understands what mutuals are doing and wants the Bill passed, but I do not think that the Deputy Prime Minister has the same view.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: Not at the moment.

That explains the mystery of why it took two years to bring the Bill forward. Why, despite promises, was it dropped from the 1995 legislative agenda and from the Queen's Speech last year? Why was there such resistance to the Bill? I know that the hon. Lady supported it, but why has it taken until now, since her announcement last November, for the Bill to be reintroduced? There has been more than enough time. Parliament has hardly been overburdened with work. Members of Parliament have been going home early. The reason is now exposed; the Deputy Prime Minister does not support the Bill.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman is being a little disingenuous. He knows perfectly well why the Bill has taken a long time, as does anyone who takes an interest in the matter, including all the members of the all-party building societies group. There has been a delay, because various people who were consulted were not able to agree. The mutuals have not all been able to agree; nor have the converting societies. Other financial institutions, such as banks and insurance companies, have taken different views. It has been necessary to reconcile all those views to get a Bill that everybody can support. That is what has taken time, as the hon. Gentleman knows well.

Mr. O'Brien: Three years? It takes three years to consult? It takes three years to find out what people think? That is nonsense. The consultation period has lasted much too long. Enormous pressure has been put on mutuals to convert, which has been damaging. The hon. Gentleman's excuses do not stand up. There has been so much delay because there have been internal rows in the Conservative party. We have seen that on Europe and on bovine spongiform encephalopathy. On all aspects of Tory policies, there are internal rows and public attacks on each other. Now the splits have been exposed on the Building Societies Bill.

Let me defend the Economic Secretary and the Bill against the Deputy Prime Minister. The right hon. Gentleman was wrong not to endorse mutuality. It must be left to members to decide whether to convert. That is what the Bill is supposed to be all about. There is a public interest in keeping choice and diversity in the market. That requires a healthy building society industry that includes mutuals. Ten million people remain satisfied mutual members. That figure rises to 17 million counting all those with links to mutual building societies. The Deputy Prime Minister seems to want to let that vital mutual sector wither on the vine. As well as demonstrating further Tory disorder, that also explains why the Bill was delayed for so many years. Let us get on with the Bill and get it through with no more prevarication. It is good for mutuals and good for the consumer and will strengthen Britain's financial services industry.

7.58 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary for the assiduous and vigorous way in which she has promoted the Bill and brought it before the House. The House owes her a debt of gratitude. The task has not been easy. There have been considerable divergences of view throughout the financial services industry. We have all been subject to the lobbying of the various interest groups that have taken different views. The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) knows that perfectly well. That is why it has taken longer than I would have liked to bring the measure before the House. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has done a splendid job, and I hope that the Bill speedily becomes law.

The origins of the building society movement demonstrate that it is a uniquely valuable British institution. The hon. Member for North Warwickshire was quite right to say that it developed out of the self-help that working people created to enable them to own their own homes and to save and borrow money on a mutual basis. It is a uniquely valuable asset and I am quite confident that we would all be sad if it were ever to disappear.

It was, however, quite right that, when we decided to liberalise the movement in 1986, significant restrictions were placed on the activities of building societies. At the time, many of us who supported a degree of liberalisation were quite nervous about going too far because of the nature of the societies. They had been constrained into a narrow sector of activity: accepting deposits from savers and lending them on to those who were purchasing their homes. That did not give them much experience in the wider range of financial services. I shared the fear that was expressed in the House that, if they were allowed to go too far, problems might arise and that management expertise was not always adequate and there might be ill-advised lending. That is why, quite properly, restrictions were imposed on the amount of unsecured borrowing that societies could undertake among other activities.

Since then, however, the world has moved on. There have been significant changes in the way in which building societies are run. Most of them are now managed extremely professionally and are eager to offer a much wider range of services, and it is quite right that the Bill should allow them to do so.

On the other hand, it is worth remembering that, even under the Bill, building societies are still not permitted to engage in all the activities that banks and other financial institutions can undertake. Indeed, part I of the Bill imposes severe restrictions on them. Primarily, they can lend only on residential property and, quite advisedly, they are not allowed to engage in some of the more sophisticated financial instruments that have brought problems to more sophisticated institutions. So the balance is right.

The 1986 Act also provided the two-year rule. Frankly, I am sorry that it is not included in the Bill. It would be a valuable power for building societies to possess, because there is undoubtedly rather undesirable speculation in building societies at the moment. The fact that some societies found it necessary to raise the threshold of deposits before conveying membership rights is undesirable, because it undermines a principle that building societies will take the widow's mite and provide a savings vehicle that quite poor people find useful. It would be a sad day if that principle were undermined.

Similarly, the 1986 Act gave protection to societies that, having built up their businesses, decided that they wished to convert. It is known as the five-year rule. That was absolutely proper too. As many societies were quite unsophisticated in the world of financial services, it was quite clear that they could be vulnerable to more sophisticated institutions. The need for that rule has diminished over the years. As my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary said, many converting societies are quite large businesses in their own right. Nevertheless, the need for that protection has not disappeared altogether. I am slightly disappointed that my hon. Friend has not included an element of protection in the Bill. It would be quite wrong if converting societies could then be predators on other mutual building societies. None of us would wish to see that happen, as we all want mutual societies to continue to prosper.

I would have preferred an arrangement whereby any converting society that took over a mutual society—whether by hostile bid or by consent as we all know that consent sometimes involves an element of coercion—would lose its protection under the five-year rule. However, to say that to take over any other financial services business, or almost any such business, will lead to the loss of that protection is going much too far. It means that converting societies will be limited in the sectors in which they can expand their businesses without risking losing that protection.

I know that my hon. Friend will say that it would be unfair to insurance companies and banks who will not be under the same constraints. However, the five-year rule never applied to them as they were never building societies. It was never designed to cater for their circumstances, so that would be something of a non sequitur. Far more important, they are not subject to the constraints that have applied historically to building societies. Before the 1986 Act, since then and even under the Bill, there have been significant constraints on the activities of building societies. Therefore, it is still appropriate that some degree of transitional protection should be available to converting societies, otherwise there is a danger that we shall end up with a two-tier market: we shall have very large banks and other financial institutions, a much smaller group of smaller bodies—the mutual societies—because everything in between will have been gobbled up by the big boys. We shall end up with four or five major lenders for those who wish to buy their homes or make a deposit and a dwindling band of mutual societies which will be very much at the small end of the market.

That would be entirely undesirable. Some means by which we can have a middle layer of converting societies that are temporarily protected from predation seems to be desirable in providing the maximum choice to the consumer. I very much hope that, as the Bill progresses, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will go some way towards my point of view on that and on the two-year rule. I very much look forward to the Bill proceeding and succeeding, as it is an admirable measure.

8.8 pm

Mr. Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): I am pleased to have the opportunity to support the Bill, particularly in my role as chair of the Co-operative group of Members of Parliament. I shall be brief as others are waiting to speak and I shall concentrate purely on the mutualities.

The co-operative movement understands mutuality better than most as it was founded by people who needed to band together to protect themselves against the difficult circumstances that they faced in the 19th century. In many cases, the monopoly suppliers—often their own employers—insisted that they bought their basic supplies from them. The building societies came later, but helped the same people. They provided a solid base of reliability and trust that enabled people with small savings—a small excess of income over expenditure—to invest and save with security. They of course also provided capital for the purchase of houses which was so necessary in those days, as it is today.

As a young person, I tended not to trust banks. In saying that, I have not forgotten the contribution that the clearing banks have made to the functioning of Britain's financial industry and to industry and commerce itself. We were probably all misled by that famous "bank manager in your cupboard" television advert of 20 or so years ago. It did not take the public long to realise that that bank manager was not necessarily their friend and was beginning to be controlled from head office by computers and faceless people. People also began to realise that the bank manager had a different incentive—he was being pushed and pressed to produce profits early, quite often losing the good will of his own bank in the medium and long term.

Despite the fact that I was very sad over the loss of mutuality, the movement of some of the mutuals into the banking sector gave well-needed competition to the clearing banks in an area where there had been little real competition. I am not being critical of the banks in a destructive way. I am mentioning them to try to highlight the difference between mutuals and the banks, with shareholders to satisfy. It is quite enjoyable to attack the banks, but that is not what I want to do in this debate.

The contribution that the building societies have made can be understood fully only by those who have lived in working-class communities, where the surplus of income over expenditure was very small and people searched to find somewhere that could be trusted to put their money. Building societies provided such small investors with that trust. There is no doubt that those investing in building societies were greatly affected and influenced by mutuality. It gave them the feeling that they were among people who cared for each other. At the same time, they had the satisfaction of knowing that they were helping to put a roof over other people's heads. It was probably an example of a do-good factor as well as a feel-good factor.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) said, even after the current conversions, building societies will have assets of £120 billion and serve 10 million customers, which is quite an achievement for any organisation. Although I agree that mutuality

[Mr. Alan Keen]

gained trust, the ability to compete in the open market has enabled building societies to continue to flourish. Mutuality does not mean the loss of the ability to compete.

I shall not repeat the detailed arguments in support of the Bill—I support it very strongly. We want to get the Bill through the House as quickly as possible. I follow my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire in praising the Economic Secretary for her efforts. Let us get the Bill through. Let us allow building societies to compete on equal legislative terms with other corporate organisations in the market. The British people need building societies and the British economy certainly needs a flourishing building society mutual sector to look after the small savers and draw money in with trust as they always have done.

8.13 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): In the spirit of the intervention of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), I declare an interest as a modest customer of several building societies and as the chairman of the all-party building societies group, which is of course unremunerated.

I greatly welcome the Bill, which is very important for the future of the building society sector. I greatly hope that it will pass through the House without delay. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary on her persistence in bringing forward the Bill. I certainly dissociate myself totally from the conspiratorial interpretation of the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien). I assure him that, had my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister been against the Bill, there is absolutely no doubt that we would not be here trying to give it a Second Reading because he would have made certain that his views had been properly heard.

I regard the Bill as a natural and logical step in building societies legislation. The original Building Societies Act 1962 prohibited building societies from offering almost any service unless it was a savings scheme or a mortgage. The legislation was developed in the Building Societies Act 1986, which introduced partial deregulation—allowing diversification into many other services including current accounts, credit cards, life assurance and unit trusts—and paved the way for societies to convert to public limited company status, without which the public would not be about to enjoy share distributions and would not already have received bonus distributions from societies' conversions.

Now that we are ready for a further tranche of deregulation, it is perfectly natural to get away from the still rather prescriptive nature of the 1986 Act and adopt the principle that a society can do more or less what it wishes—apart from that which is specifically excluded by the Bill. That is why, quite correctly, the Bill prohibits societies from trading in commodities, making markets in securities and involving themselves in derivatives—all of which we know are very risky, likely to lose money, likely to place depositors' assets at risk, and therefore not appropriate for a building society to engage in.

I very much welcome the retention of the special operating characteristics of some societies. It is perfectly right that they should still have to raise at least 50 per cent. of their funds from individual retail investors; it is perfectly correct that 75 per cent. of their assets will still have to be invested in loans on housing—although not necessarily for owner-occupation. That opens the way for more building society funding of the rented sector, which is a very sound judgment. The remaining 25 per cent. of their assets can be invested anywhere that they choose, subject to the overseeing of the Building Societies Commission—to ensure that the management of a building society has the necessary skills and financial expertise to make competent decisions and to ensure that it keeps out of areas in which it ought not to be because it does not have the skills.

I also welcome the fact that, to accompany the wider powers, there will be greater accountability of societies to their members. I noticed that, in the recent experience of building society conversions, there was much confusion among building society customers about the rights of those who had a proper share account and those who simply had a deposit account. It is desirable that that confusion should be cleared up. I am also pleased that there is confirmation in the Bill that, in future, borrowing members will have broadly the same voting rights as investing members. That helps to bring legislation into line with public expectation.

Another point about accountability which I welcome was made by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary. If a society transfers its business to a public limited company, the proposals for enhanced remuneration of the society's directors will be subject to a separate resolution for members' approval. That will address the concerns of those who felt that to accept conversion to plc status, it was necessary to accept the whole package, including what some people might regard as robust consideration for the directors of the society when they become directors of the plc.

The most controversial provision in the Bill is the five-year protection from takeover, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) mentioned. I have thought carefully about the subject. Some people believe that the potential loss of the protection if a newly converted society embarks on a takeover is unfair. I cannot come to the same conclusion. Newly converted societies do not need the same protection as when the 1986 Act was passed. Such protection would create two classes of public limited companies—those that enjoyed the five-year protection after conversion and those that did not. My hon. Friend would argue that it is necessary to provide some transitional relief because building societies would be going out into the big wide world without having had long enough to establish their services on a level footing with the banks. However, protection from takeover for five years would place the newly converted building societies in a different position from banks that have not been through the process, and would add a new unevenness between newly converted societies, some of which are large and substantial, and banks that could not claim the same protection.

Mr. Butterfill: Can my hon. Friend name a bank or major insurance company that has been subject, in the

past few years, to the constraints that we imposed on building societies' activities by the 1986 Act and will impose in the Bill?

Mr. French: I cannot, but that is all part and parcel of the risks that a society has to weigh up when making the decision to convert. If societies that may convert believe that the competition that they will encounter as plcs is greater than they can cope with, they should not convert. I cannot agree with my hon. Friend on that point.

It is not right if that conversion gives societies a protection that is not available to other institutions. A building society that does not enjoy the protection could be taken over by a predator, such as a former building society, which does enjoy the protection. That creates an uneven playing field between the newly converted building society, now a bank, and building societies that have not converted. In an extreme case—although I admit this is a theoretical example—the abandonment of mutual status could be a way to fend off a takeover. That is not acceptable.

The Alliance and Leicester has argued that protection should be lost only after a takeover of another building society, and not in the case of a takeover of any other financial institution. I have discussed the issue with the Alliance and Leicester, and I cannot see that such a halfway house would provide a satisfactory formula. The company that wishes to make a takeover bid, of a mutual or other institution, should not be immune from receiving a takeover bid itself. Again, that would create an uneven playing field. It would also mean that the business that was being acquired attracted immunity from takeover by yet another institution, because it came under the umbrella of a new bank that already enjoyed the protection. However one approaches the issue, it creates an uneven playing field and an illogical situation.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The Halifax building society, which will shortly become a plc, has accepted that it will not enter into a takeover of a mutual building society on the principle of the five-year rule. In its application, the Halifax says that it would be wrong to have the right to take over a mutual building society after becoming a plc. Does that influence the hon. Gentleman's views?

Mr. French: No. The Halifax building society is in a unique position because of its size. It is easy for the Halifax to choose voluntarily not to avail itself of the protection for five years because the number of institutions that would have the resources to take over the Halifax could be counted on one finger. The Halifax has not given up a practical protection that it would otherwise have enjoyed.

The Alliance and Leicester seems to be arguing that it would be retrospective to make the protection for five years conditional on not taking over another institution, but it should accept that the possibility has been under discussion for a long time. It is easy when changes are made on the introduction of new legislation—we see it with the Finance Bills—for those who are affected to jump to the conclusion that it has a retrospective element. All institutions that make significant decisions need to keep their eyes and ears open and anticipate possible policy developments. They should not base their decisions on guesses that something is never likely to happen.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The hon. Gentleman will recall that the Alliance and Leicester acquired the Girobank. The members of the Girobank, who are now customers of the Alliance and Leicester, have not shared in the windfall payments that it has made.

Mr. French: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point and I will come in a moment to the subject of windfall payments.

My broad approach to the Bill is that mutuals need the legislation. It will give them greater operational flexibility. They will be better able to compete properly with the banks and will be better placed to respond to customers' needs. The Bill underlines the advantages of mutual status, which have been placed under pressure lately. Many people have expressed the view that the mutual movement is in its death throes, but the Bill will make an important contribution to ensuring that mutuality has a future. I support those who feel that the mutual movement, and building societies in particular, make a vital contribution to the financial services sector.

Some four or five, perhaps six, major societies have converted or will convert. It is reassuring to note that the remaining large mutuals have reasserted their absolute commitment to mutuality, including the Nationwide, the Bradford and Bingley, and the slightly smaller Portman and Birmingham Midshires societies. I take those commitments not only as statements by today's chief executives, but as commitments on behalf of those societies in the future. They have all said that they cannot envisage circumstances in which they would abandon mutuality, and they are committed to it. The Nationwide, for example, is committed to demonstrating to its customers, and prospective customers, that mutuality offers customers tangible benefits through more competitive mortgage rates and better-priced savings products. It is seeking to feed the benefits of mutual status directly back to its members—exactly the way of conveying to the public and to members of societies that mutuality in practice delivers tangible results.

The feeding back of the benefits of mutuality needs to be accompanied by a growth strategy by societies. Unless they can foresee an expansion of their business, the feeding back of benefits will in essence amount to giving back to members some of the profits that the society would otherwise have registered. The more societies dilute their profits in that way—even for sound commercial reasons—the cheaper they will be to a predator wishing to take them over. There needs to be a strengthening and a growth in the size and activities of mutual societies.

None of the societies which have declared their commitment to mutuality has made any statement that they would not at some future stage merge, because the merging of societies may well be a necessary requirement to ensure that they are strong and able to protect themselves against future predators.

Another benefit of the Bill is that it will make the relative attraction of plc status rather less. It gives operational freedom but makes the relative attraction of operating under banking legislation less obvious, as more can be done under the building society legislation. That is very important.

[Mr. French]

Issuing shares by societies which convert may be very good if one wishes to go on the acquisition trail, but it is not good if one is seeking to offer competitive mortgage and savings products. Typically, a bank pays about one third of its profits in dividends to its shareholders. In a society with a normal business profile, that is equivalent to about three quarters of a point of margin between mortgage and savings levels. That means that if a mutual society does not have to pay dividends to shareholders, it is able to offer products more competitively than might otherwise have been the case. In future, customers of mutual societies will be able to look forward to competitive deals on all products.

Mutuality is a trading status that we should never allow to perish, and I emphasise that the Bill does a great deal to reinforce it.

I would like to say a few words about the manner in which some building societies have chosen to convert to public companies. It is sad that some of the societies currently converting—in what seems to be a headlong rush to become plcs—seem to have forgotten the very ethos of mutuality which, for more than 150 years in some cases, has brought them commercial success and has given them their enviable image. Some societies seem to have forgotten that they started life trying to look after smaller savers, making sure that they treated all customers fairly and trying to return to members the benefits of membership of a mutual society.

As a prime example of such an offender, I cite the Halifax building society. I very much hope that no society seeking to convert in future will approach the task as the Halifax has done in the past few months. When the Halifax prepared its flotation, it decided to leave out of the distribution several million of its customers, including people who were disabled and who could not sign their own accounts. This was a fundamentally flawed judgment. It was deeply offensive to those left out and, indeed, to some who were included, and who as a result would get more than they would otherwise have received.

The Halifax first tried to justify its extraordinary decision by blaming the existing state of the law. That was incorrect, because nothing in the Building Societies Act 1986 would cause it to take such action. It went on to say that the disabled people—who were second-named account holders—were not members and therefore could not be included in the share distribution. That again was incorrect, because the 1986 Act gave a converting building society the power to include in a share distribution whoever it decided to include. The next excuse was that it was too difficult, administratively complex and would present practical difficulties that the society could not solve. In truth, however, there were a number of simple ways in which the dilemma could have been avoided.

When the Halifax was asked if it felt that its formula was unfair, it replied that it regarded the scheme as perfectly fair. Incredibly, it tried to justify the formula on the grounds that no one should pick out the disabled as a group that had been left out because, in truth, the society had left out a number of other categories as well—as if that somehow justified the sad judgment. To cap the insults, the society went on to claim that many disabled people had been included under the distribution formula, and any change to the arrangements would mean that some 8.5 million people would be upset by a delay.

The Halifax then announced 97 per cent. support for the scheme—almost universal support—when the only people whose votes it was counting were those likely to be recipients of the distribution. Those not likely to be recipients did not have a vote, so it is hardly surprising that the proposal received near-unanimous support. What is so distressing about the conduct of the society was that its directors—who are doing nicely out of the conversion—seem to have forgotten that they are today's guardians of the assets of that society, which have been built up from the loyalty of customers over 150 years. The directors have a duty to pass benefits to customers and to be fair. In short, the Halifax building society has betrayed its founding fathers and the ethos of mutuality.

Even at this stage, the Halifax could redeem itself by making a statement of intent that it will put on the agenda of the new board of the public company a resolution to allow the shareholders to decide whether they wish to make an ex gratia payment to the disabled people left out of the formula. Company law allows for that to be done now, and I very much hope that the Halifax will come to the right decision. It could follow the lead set by the Northern Rock building society and set up a charitable foundation to ensure that the very people left out of the distribution are helped via a donation to relevant charities. It is not a substitute for ensuring that all customers and members receive their rightful distribution, but it would at least go some way to making up for the appalling judgment exercised by the Halifax building society. Certainly, the Halifax directors ought to recognise that they should do something, not just maintain a stony silence. They might like to follow the example of the Alliance and Leicester, which, shortly before this evening's debate, wrote me a letter as follows:

> "It is intended that an item will be placed on the Agenda of the PLC Board after flotation, to seek approval in principle for the provision of funding for an appropriate charitable donation to disabled persons, or to a charity or charities on their behalf, subject of course to the approval of the company's shareholders."

That shows a willingness to do the right thing which has thus far been manifestly lacking on the part of the Halifax.

If the Halifax continues to act like a hard-nosed bank before it has even become one, and continues to spoil the good reputation that building societies have enjoyed for so many years, I for one hope that its customers will decide in their millions to move their accounts elsewhere, on the grounds that it is not a society in which they would wish to continue to hold their savings.

8.40 pm

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): Like the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), I declare my interest—in my case, as vice-chairman of the all-party building society group. I also have various other interests in building societies. I certainly associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the five-year rule and the future of mutuality.

There may be arguments over whether we should have had a new Building Societies Bill somewhat sooner, but I begin as others have done by congratulating the Economic Secretary on getting the Bill to the Floor of the House in this form. Despite what was said earlier, hon. Members

know that there was consultation with a wide range of people. First, we had a draft version, then more consultation, then another draft before Christmas; finally we had the Bill as it appears today.

That is in stark contrast with what happened to the Bill that became the Housing Act 1996. The day before we were due to discuss part of it, the people behind the security of loans for social housing suddenly discovered what was going on, faxes began to fly to and fro, and there was a great threat to the whole financing of some social housing projects. That is why I pay tribute to the Minister for her work to avoid the same happening again, and to come up with a Bill with which all parties are in broad agreement.

Many of us were disappointed to find that the Bill, contrary to expectations, was not mooted in last autumn's Queen's Speech. Thereafter, however, the Minister promised to do all that she could to find time for the Bill—if she could get agreement on its contents. She has been as good as her word, on which I congratulate her. We may not know the whole truth, but I suspect that she may have had some difficulties with the Deputy Prime Minister. At least she won—that is the main thing.

My one objection is to dealing with the final stages of the Bill all at one time next Monday. There should be a gap between the Committee and Report stages, however well the Bill's contents have been dealt with. There ought to be more time for consideration on a Bill as large as this.

Why do we need another Bill 10 years on from the last one? If we examine the role of the building society movement, and what has happened in the financial world in recent years, we can see part of the answer. That movement has tremendous strengths and brings great strengths to our economy. Its traditional function—matching savings to housing finance—remains predominant: it does the job very well. For millions of savers and home buyers, building societies are the trusted one-stop shop.

Over the years, the building society movement has taken care to protect its customers from the effects of society failures, which have been extremely rare. Building societies are also of great importance to the regional economies of Britain, not just because of the employment in their branch networks but because their headquarters, like those of the major insurance companies, are to be found not in London but in our provincial cities and towns. They act as a welcome counterbalance to the centralisation of financial affairs in London.

Shortly after I entered this House three years ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), at that time financial affairs spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, was asked to address the annual lunch of the Building Societies Association.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Exciting stuff.

Mrs. Maddock: In fact, we did create some excitement at the meeting. Anyhow, my right hon. Friend described some of the problems to which the Bill today offers some solutions. For instance, he mentioned the problem, during the recession, of the over-promotion of credit which led to a lot of people ending up with negative equity. Some of them still have it.

My right hon. Friend also said that building societies often help first-time buyers instead of looking after their current members' interests. He also raised the accountability of building societies to their members—an element of the Bill that we all welcome. My right hon. Friend ended by saying:

> "The British people have invested a lot of their money and a lot of their trust in the building societies, and the results have included wider home ownership than in many other countries and a building society movement which is without equal. It is time for some public reflection on how the industry can build on these strengths."

That reflection has continued in recent years.

I was particularly struck by Will Hutton's comments in *The Guardian* in July 1995, when he stated even more forthrightly:

> "One of the great bequests of the last century to the modern world is withering before our eyes. British building societies, owned and run for the mutual benefit of their members, were a tangible expression of a form of common ownership. Now they are being cannibalised into becoming the latest standard bearers of the public limited company, complete with stock options and a lord on the board—and a credulous public is being offered a sweetener of some hundreds of pounds to offer its assent."

Listening to the hon. Member for Gloucester saying how he thought building societies should think carefully before becoming public limited companies, with the attendant large payouts, I pondered Will Hutton's comments. I must tell the hon. Gentleman, though, that some of his Conservative colleagues are hoping that many people will get their feel-good factor before the general election, in the form of the massive payouts coming their way later this month.

Mr. Butterfill: The payouts are likely to happen after the general election, not before it.

Mrs. Maddock: There is some dispute about that.

As I was saying, many of the concerns expressed in recent years about mutuality have been dealt with in the Bill.

The Building Societies Association welcomes the Bill, as do many of us who are in favour of mutuality. It will preserve the unique characteristics of building societies and ensure that their record of safety continues. All of us welcome the fact that the legislation is to be permissive rather than prescriptive.

The new legislation will place building societies on the same footing as other organisations, in that they will be able to do many more things that will be of interest to their members. However, many us believe that their concentration on the requirements of personal savers and on housing is important. I welcome the fact that they will be able to invest in rented housing. The need to do something to make lending for renting stack up has become obvious to me in my time as housing spokesman for my party. We have a problem in trying to expand the private rented sector, because the different tenures are so concentrated in one form.

I especially welcome the measures designed to approve societies' accountability to their members. Election to the board will be more transparent, borrowers will have votes and, for many societies, fewer people will be required to nominate members for election. There will be a legal requirement to hold special general meetings at request, members will have to vote in favour if a society wants to make significant acquisitions of business not related to mortgages and savings, and if a society decides to transfer to plc status, it will have to ballot its members and have

[Mrs. Maddock]

an additional advisory vote on any proposed enhanced remuneration packages for directors. I welcome all those measures on behalf of my party.

We want to enact the legislation quickly, partly because we are about to embark on a general election. Because of the problems that we have had in the rapidly changing financial world and because so many building societies have started to move towards plc status, we must move as quickly as possible to safeguard the mutuals that many of us want to flourish. That is why my party is happy for the Bill to proceed.

At the same time, I hope that the private Member's Bill to which the hon. Member for Gloucester referred will reach the statute book. All of us have received many letters in recent years about people who were named second or not included for one reason or another. That is one reason why many people will be in favour of the Bill. I associate myself entirely with the hon. Gentleman's comments about the sad situation of disabled people being left out, and my party and I fully support the Bill.

8.53 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I hope that the Bill will receive Royal Assent before the general election, because it represents the best way of preserving the building society movement and the concept of mutuality.

I declare an interest as a member, but not an officer, of the all-party group on building societies. I am also a member of several building societies. I voted no to the National and Provincial takeover by the Abbey National and to the Leeds takeover by the Halifax, and I was one of the 3 per cent. who voted no to the conversion.

At the appropriate stage, I shall take the advice of the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) and remove my custom, but, if the shares are to come, I may as well take them first; I make no bones about that. I have been a Halifax customer for many years and I feel that I may as well take the shares even though I disagree with what has been done.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) referred to the Building Societies Act 1986. He underlined the view of those of us who were in the House when that legislation was passed: we thought that it was a bold step forward and a challenge to the general concept of building societies at that time. Indeed, I remember saying that I was conservative on building societies and wanted them to remain as they were, because they had a good record over many years of service to both lenders and investors. I wanted banks to be banks, and estate agents to be estate agents.

Times have moved on rapidly, however, and I accept that we are in a different world, so I fully support the view that we must change and that, if building societies are to be able to compete and indeed to remain as mutuals as we move forward to the 21st century, we must enact the Bill.

I share many of the views and concerns about the Halifax expressed by the hon. Member for Gloucester. According to its figures, 3.5 million of its customers are not entitled to a handout as a result of its conversion, and I have heard that it could be as many as 4.5 million. Even 3.5 million is far from an insignificant number.

In 1986, the Halifax gave various briefings to Members of Parliament, and there was no doubt that, if we had had to bet on which building society would be the last to consider conversion, we would have chosen the Halifax: no society was more committed at that time to the spirit of mutuality. I do not know whether the board is guilty or whether it is Mike Blackburn, whom I criticised for leaving the Leeds and then taking it over in a so-called merger while at the same time recommending conversion, but, at the end of the day, the chief executive cannot act alone and must secure the board's approval. I greatly regret what has happened.

The Bradford and Bingley building society rightly says:

"The legislation will create a more permissive regulatory regime and is welcomed by those societies which, like the Bradford and Bingley, intend to continue operating as mutual organisations. It will provide societies with greater operational flexibility and enable them to compete on a more equal footing, as mutual organisations, with banks and other institutions."

The briefing also mentions that there are 13 million building society members, 2,500 branches and that many staff are employed, especially in the provinces.

It has been rightly said that the Building Societies Act made the banks more competitive and responsive to customer needs. The hours that banks open may have been influenced by the fact that they have to compete with building societies; they have had to change their approach. Some building societies were complacent, sat back and assumed that things were all right. The 1986 Act, what is happening now and the way that things have moved, may also have made building societies shake off the dust and recognise that, if they are to survive, they must be competitive in the marketplace. No harm has been done from that point of view.

The Building Societies Association states that it and the

"remaining 72 building societies have welcomed the introduction of the Bill."

The association makes an important point on competition and notes:

"A survey in the March edition of *What Mortgage* found that out of 72 lenders, the top 25 in terms of offering best value for money to customers were all mutuals."

It is significant that the mutuals led the way with better deals for mortgages and for investors.

I regret that the Bill does not, as several hon. Members, have said, deal with the two-year rule. It is not unreasonable that people should have been members for two years before they can benefit from a conversion. The Nationwide says:

"Although, in principle, we would support a move to amend the Bill by inserting a two year clause to protect societies against speculators, our over-riding concern is for the Bill's passage to be eased so late in the parliamentary session."

We all recognise that time is short and that the Bill must get through the other place if it is to get Royal Assent before the general election. I hope that an attempt will be made next Monday when we debate its remaining stages to introduce the two-year rule. I would support that. If such an attempt fails, I, like the Nationwide, would accept the Bill as it stands.

Clause 41 deals with protection, the 15 per cent. rule and the five-year rule. If societies convert and become predators, they should lose protection. The protection is not dissimilar to that which existed for the Trustee Savings bank. Share dealing in that commenced on

10 October 1986. The Trustee Savings Bank Act was passed in 1985. The initial threshold imposed a maximum holding restriction of 5 per cent. of the company's equity. After 29 September 1991, that was allowed to rise to 15 per cent. There are parallels. There were originally many small shareholders, but, when protection went, that changed rapidly. As soon as the 15 per cent. rule came in, it was not a question of when it would be taken over, but of who would take it over. Ultimately, it became part of the Lloyds group, which had already taken over the Cheltenham and Gloucester building society.

The biggest predator to date must be the Abbey National building society, which made an unfriendly bid for the National and Provincial building society. I know that society well because it was formed by the merger of the Burnley building society and the Provincial building society. It was supposed to be a merger, but it was more like a take-over, because everything was cleared out from Burnley in only a few years.

The National and Provincial society rather lost its way. At one stage, it was going for conversion; then it was to merge with the Leeds—funny that the Leeds should come into it yet again. Finally, it said that it was committed to mutuality. It sent its customers many documents about mutuality. It held a meeting across the road for Members of Parliament so that Alistair Lyons and Lord Shuttleworth could brief us on its commitment to mutuality.

Then, suddenly, out of the blue, came the bid from Abbey National. The National and Provincial did not want to accept that bid and said that it wanted to consider other bids. Nobody ever got to know what those other bids were and, ultimately, the Abbey National was allowed to take that building society over. It is funny, is it not, that Alistair Lyons is now the executive director of Abbey National and chief executive of its subsidiary, Scottish Mutual Life, while Lord Shuttleworth is the deputy chairman? They did all right out of it, but was it what the customers wanted?

I said at the time of that vote that it was bound to go through. The hon. Member for Gloucester hit the nail on the head, because when so many people face the chance of getting £1,000 or whatever it happens to be, it is only realistic to accept that they will vote yes. At the time of the Abbey National takeover, more than 46,000 of my constituents were entitled to a pay-out in cash or in shares because of the Burnley building society connection. I have no doubt that they voted yes for obvious reasons.

I believe that we want to see building societies remain mutual. I believe that the Bill represents a fair balance, which allows building societies the freedom to move into the markets in which they need to compete in order to survive. I recognise that they must provide customers with the services that they want and must be able to compete with others who are already able to provide such services. I believe that the Bill will enable those societies to remain mutual if they so wish, and I hope that the 72 which are mutual will choose to remain so.

I support the Bill. As I said earlier, I hope that we shall amend it to bring in the two-year protection, because it is totally wrong that people should travel around the country and invest money in societies here, there and everywhere, when their only interest is in trying to get a windfall payment. They have no interest in the respective building societies and what they do.

9.6 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I should begin with a declaration of interest, although given that it concerns a building society, I calculate that the rate will be fairly low.

I tried to raise a serious point at the start of the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, when I asked your predecessor in the Chair whether hon. Members about to benefit from distributions should declare that in their speeches. He replied that hon. Members know the rules of the House. It is not a rule of the House to declare building society accounts. Nor is there a rule about declaring distributions that hon. Members have not yet got, but they could have a vital bearing on the debate.

The Alliance and Leicester, for example, wants clause 41 to be modified so that it can be protected if it takes over anything but a building society. That building society is about to embark on a major distribution from which many hon. Members will benefit. I suspect that more Labour Members than Conservative ones will, because we are more likely to put our money in building societies than are Conservatives, who are prepared to go for the bigger returns. The distribution by the Alliance and Leicester could have a bearing on hon. Members' judgment about whether clause 41 should be modified. I therefore think that it is right to declare such an interest, especially as the total distribution is estimated at about £18 billion. It is so big that, at one time, the Conservatives hoped that it could be expedited because they believed that it could influence their election chances. It will obviously influence hon. Members' views on the Bill.

I should like to declare my interest in the Halifax building society. My parents came from Halifax, so it was a tradition that their children should be given a Halifax share account, as it was called then. I have had that account ever since. I will now benefit from that local association. However, in common with my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), I voted against demutualisation, and voted against merger with the Leeds.

It was a sad day when I saw all those solid Yorkshire folk shuffling into the meeting, looking like people at the "Antiques Roadshow" who had just been told that their antique was worth a thousand quid. They had all been bought by the lure of the money. The ancient Halifax cry, first popularised by Wilfred Pickles, went up: "Give us the money, Barney." Their desire to get their hands on the distribution coloured their judgment. It did not colour mine. I shall keep my account in the Halifax until I get the money; I shall then transfer all the money in the account to the Bradford and Bingley building society, which will stay mutual and which is doing far more to provide an effective service to the benefit of its customers. That is my declaration of interest.

I hope that my withdrawal of the Mitchell millions from the Halifax will bring that building society to its knees to punish it for betraying the mutual principle. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley, I deplore the rush to demutualisation. I should have liked the Bill to do more about that and to retard and penalise the rush to abandon mutual status because the mutual principle is good. I am one of only two people in the Chamber to have survived the Standing Committee on the 1986 Bill, where the principle was described as "socialism in action". It might have been old Labour in action, but it is a good principle—a principle of local self-help and of support for members to purchase houses.

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

The strength of building societies was built on those roots—the involvement of members and local self-help—and that strength remains. It has been built up over the years—100 or, in some cases, 150 years—by the investment of previous generations of members and it is simply being dissipated as shareholders are effectively being bribed with their own money to accept the principle of demutualisation. They are encouraged by the example of the gains made by people who bought shares in privatised utilities. That has produced a culture of shareholder greed in which shareholders have no loyalty to the building society or company but "Give us the money, Barney" becomes the universal cry.

That culture is encouraged by the top brass of building societies—the directors and top management—who see light at the end of the tunnel. They see that they can do well for themselves: they can become survivors in a merged organisation and, more important, they can put up their own salaries to levels in other enterprises. They feel that mutual status is a drag, especially on their salaries. They want that drag eased, so they encourage the move to demutualise. That move is also encouraged by the example of the directors and top management of privatised utilities. The greed that stems from that privatisation procedure has permeated and undermined the culture of the mutuals.

No good can come of this. Good can come to the City, which takes huge fees for advising on the process of demutualisation and the launch of shares, but no good can come of it from the point of view of building society customers, who will have to pay higher rates—albeit only slightly higher—for their mortgages. Moreover, those who invest in demutualised societies, as is the tradition in the Halifax, will receive slightly lower rates of return on their investments. The dividend drain that will now be embarked on by those companies must be financed. It is a steady and remorseless drain on all British companies. In order to buy support from the market and increase the value of their shares, building societies will be forced to embark on a dividend drain from which mutuals are free.

The Nationwide says that it is committed to

"passing on to its customers the money that would otherwise be used to pay dividends to shareholders".

If the money is used for that purpose, customers will get a better deal from a mutual society than they will from a demutualised company.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) said, it is important to note that the top 25 of the 72 companies that, according to a *What Mortgage?* survey, offer better value, are mutual companies. Their customers—members, shareholders and people taking out mortgages—get a better deal, and demutualisation undermines that. It means new status, new dangers.

Building societies that have demutualised are wandering away from what they are good at, what made them strong and what they know well: the housing market. I agree with the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) that building societies should provide support for rented accommodation, because they know the housing market. They are good at that, and if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

There is a remorseless drive towards diversification. Diversification is a risky business. The 1993 research by McKillop and Ferguson showed that societies that diversified the most had the lowest return in profits, because diversification was a drain. It has led to several disastrous mistakes, which could have been avoided by sticking to the principles of mutuality and the business that building societies are good at, rather than trying to play big bankers.

I agree with the fears that were voiced earlier. Building societies will be lured away from their provincial roots and status in places such as Halifax, Leeds, Bradford and Burnley to play bit parts in the City of London. They want financial gain and they want to be big players in that market. They will lose out, because they will be battered and skinned by the competition.

Building societies that are considering demutualisation or have demutualised, and their shareholders who vote for it, should take what happened to the TSB as a warning of the dangers involved. It was a virtual disaster. We passed privatisation legislation in 1985 and the TSB received a huge dowry, which it promptly squandered. It was the most ruinous process, because it tried to play a game that it was not used to, was not equipped for and had no skills in, and the bank and its shareholders lost out disastrously. The Bill should have done more to protect mutual status.

I was inclined to object to the speed with which we are passing the Bill, because I hate rushed legislation. When the pressure groups, as well as the spokesmen for the three main parties, say that we must pass the legislation with speed, I get suspicious and think, "Hang on, what's at issue?" However, I have been persuaded by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire that the Bill should be supported, because it will slightly ease the pressure to demutualise, which is now so strong in the movement.

Building societies that are considering demutualisation will think twice if, once they are demutualised, they will be deprived of the ability to be protected if they take over another financial organisation. A building society that is thinking of demutualising will be a plc and will be a small player in the new market, so it will need to merge with others. Even then, it will still not have the critical mass and will be vulnerable to takeover, especially by foreign banks and financial institutions that are trying to get a foothold in this country. I think that clause 41 will be a deterrent. The Halifax, of course, is too large to be worried, but the provisions will weigh with some of the building societies that are currently considering demutualisation. It certainly weighed with the Alliance and Leicester, which is now trying to amend clause 41 in a way favourable to its interests.

Because of that, I feel that—somewhat reluctantly—we should support the Bill. I would have liked us to devote more consideration to it: I would have liked us to consider what could be done to protect mutual status. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley, I would have liked a two-year rule to act as a deterrent to those who wished to take advantage of the tides of money that are currently washing around looking for accounts in companies that might demutualise where there is a quick profit to be made. The essence of investment should involve a wish to stay and work with the company involved, rather than just rushing in and out to get a quick buck. I think that two years' membership should be the minimum requirement before people benefit from the distribution.

Unfortunately, the deepest instinct of British shareholders is to take the money and run. The two-year rule would check that tendency, and we should bear that in mind in our consideration on Monday. I favour that modification above all because it would help the mutual societies to compete by allowing them more flexibility. It will provide a slight deterrent to demutualisation, and I believe that we should encourage building societies to believe that the mutual principle is vital. That is why I am delighted that 70 building societies are determined to remain mutual. I hope that they will be encouraged. That system is crucial to a diversified, pluralistic lending sector and to competition in the market from all kinds of institution.

I think that mutual building societies can give their customers a better deal—including those who take mortgages—and, above all, conserve the interests of their members, including the smaller members in their locality, far better than huge, impersonal institutions that try to play at being banks.

9.21 pm

Mr. Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): Like a number of other hon. Members, I shall speak in defence of the principle of mutuality, for a number of reasons. First, let me pay tribute to the Economic Secretary to the Treasury who, I believe, firmly intends to restore the balance—or, at least, to establish a level playing field between the mutual building societies and public limited companies.

I wish to speak—even if I do so only for a few minutes—for a number of reasons. First and most important, as a putative Yorkshire nationalist, I must point out—as my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) might have done—that many building societies were born in Yorkshire and developed great financial strength there, particularly in my home sub-county of the West Riding. I still insist on using that term. Building societies such as the Leeds Permanent, the Halifax, the Bradford and Bingley and the Leeds and Holbeck—there are a number of others—provided much-needed support for working-class people living in difficult circumstances, and enabled them to acquire their own homes. They also provided a significant amount of employment in large cities in the West Riding. That is much appreciated, especially nowadays, when many of the more traditional industries are dying.

My second reason for speaking is that, in a sense, the building societies represent a peculiarly British solution to the problems involved in home ownership, and I think that every hon. Member would applaud that. About two thirds of people in Britain today own their homes: I am told that about 15.9 million homes are either owned or in the process of being acquired. As a society, we can take pride in that, and I think that we are well advanced relative to countries in Europe and elsewhere.

The building society movement and, above all, the principle of mutuality, allowed our people to make significant gains over the decades in acquiring their own homes. Building societies were the people's solution to the problem of how to acquire their own homes, and possibly to escape from some of the worst excesses of slum landlordism, particularly before the first world war.

My third reason for rising to defend mutuality is the principle of mutuality itself. Much has been said about it. I do not wish to add to what has been said about the co-operative principle—that each account holder and customer in a building society shared, through the mutual principle, in the direction of that society—save perhaps to claim, or to lay stake to the claim, that that perhaps was one of the first examples of the stakeholder society in practice. I shall return to the principle of mutuality or stakeholding in what I say about the Deputy Prime Minister's recent tirade, which has already been referred to.

The fourth matter I wish to raise can be demonstrated with some precision: the financial advantage that mutuality offers to people who own accounts. Examples have already been mentioned this evening. A *What Mortgage?* survey demonstrated that the top 25 of 72 surveyed mortgages were offered by mutual societies—a significant factor. *The Mail on Sunday* was able to demonstrate even more graphically the significant differential that is offered by a mutual society relative to a plc. There was a £200 benefit to be gained from taking out a £50,000 mortgage in the past year with the Yorkshire building society—as a Yorkshire nationalist, I probably should refer to a Yorkshire building society—relative, for example, to the National Westminster bank. That is not an insignificant amount of money. The difference in price must be to do with the fact that plcs must provide for dividends to be remitted to shareholders. The mutual principle demonstrates, even today, the advantages that our forefathers and foremothers probably were able to identify when they created building societies.

I worry, too, about the mutual ethos to which many of the mutual societies have declared they will remain attached when they move to plc status. Some hon. Members have said that they wish to conserve the mutual ethos that has been so important to the building society movement over the decades. Every customer is a stakeholder in a mutualised building society; ultimately, the driving force behind a plc is the shareholder. When a building society is demutualised, every stakeholder is given shares but, significantly, there is a rapid, almost cataclysmic, diminution in the number of stakeholders immediately after the shares have been issued.

We have discussed the Abbey National building society. At the date of conversion, there were 5.5 million shareholders. Every stakeholder was given shares and put on the register. In February, their number had effectively halved to 2.7 million. That was a rapid diminution in the number of people able to give direction to that building society.

Financial institutions are looking to the accretion of larger and larger shareholdings. My office was in contact with the Alliance and Leicester today. It estimates that 25 per cent.—a quarter—of all the stakeholders who receive shares will dispose of them immediately. The word immediately is being used from day one. That means that 2.4 million people with a stake in that building society and the ability to give it direction and secure its objectives will immediately dispose of their shares. That constitutes significant disinvestment.

Mr. Pike: Under clause 41, which replaces a section of the 1986 Act, 15 per cent. of those shares can immediately be acquired by institutions, which will look to the future potential of converted societies.

Mr. Trickett: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. I am worried that institutions are already circling over

[Mr. Trickett]

the no doubt juicy prospect of demutualisation. I am also worried that our generation, the so-called me generation, is able to dispose of assets that were built up over many generations and which were supposed to be passed to future generations.

The Minister says that she wants to establish a level playing field and to restore the balance between the mutual societies and the plcs. I take her at her word.

I am as worried as my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) about the article by the Deputy Prime Minister in *The Mail on Sunday*. The right hon. Gentleman is supposed to be the great communicator. I understand that part of his job description states that he is to co-ordinate presentation of Government policy. He is the great presenter, the great communicator. On the eve of the Second Reading of a Bill that is supposed to defend the mutual principle, how can he write an article lauding the process of demutualisation and not mention the mutual principle, its defence or the Bill? That is quite extraordinary. There is either a clear conflict in the Government, which would explain precisely why the Bill has been significantly delayed, or the great presenter, the magnificent communicator, has somehow failed to communicate precisely what the Government are doing.

I have said that mutuality is a prime example of stakeholding. I draw the attention of hon. Members to a sentence, which has not been read to the House, from the article by the Deputy Prime Minister. He states:

"We don't have to put up with phoney Left-wing jargon about stakeholders."

That is a direct attack on the principle of mutuality and building societies. How else could that article be represented and how could the delays be explained other than by tension and possible conflict within the Government?

Despite the reservations that I have described, I have no doubt that the Bill, timid as it is, is worth supporting and that, on Monday, we can have detailed discussions in Committee.

9.33 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I had not intended to take part in the debate; I have listened to the contributions and support much of what has been said and I hope that the Bill has a smooth passage. However, a couple of issues give rise to concern.

Almost every hon. Member who spoke referred to the five-year protection period. The Minister said that there has been extensive consultation on that matter. Many people have been involved in the consultations or have been approached for their views on how the Bill should proceed. I imagine that the five-year rule was one of the most controversial matters to be debated. In meetings of the all-party building societies group, we have heard speakers from building societies and twice from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, and the issue of the five-year protection period has always featured high on the agenda. We must consider that matter.

I hope that sufficient time will be allowed to examine the five-year protection period in greater detail when we consider amendments dealing with it. Some hon. Members fear that, once we reach the later stages in the Bill's passage, either the guillotine will come down or the Government will use steamroller tactics to push through their proposals without allowing a fair opportunity to debate any amendments.

In its briefing material, the Building Societies Association states that the fate of the five-year protection period is one of the most important issues. I think that the association is more aware than many others of the causes of and remedies for the problems dealt with in the Bill. I therefore take great note of its briefing material.

The two-year rule is another controversial issue. It has been discussed widely, and views on it were expressed during the consultation period. I hope that we will also be allowed sufficient time to consider the implications of any amendments tabled on that matter. I think that the rule should be continued, to obviate the progression of carpetbaggers—who have gone from one building society to another to make a quick buck and windfall—should more societies lose their mutuality, as has happened more than once.

We should be fair to those who are genuine members of building societies and who believe in mutuality. My colleague, the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), who is chairman of the all-party group, explained the importance of mutual association in building societies. I believe that the two-year rule will give comfort to those who, like me, believe in building societies. I also believe that it will ensure that we are not taken for a ride, and that the 72 remaining building societies are not used to extract easy money should future demutualisation occur.

I hope that the Minister will take note of the concerns expressed in this debate by hon. Members from all parties, and that sufficient time will be allowed in Committee to consider the two key issues in depth: the five-year protection period and the two-year rule.

9.39 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): We have had an extremely good and interesting debate on issues of importance to the future of building societies and, indeed, mortgage lending. I add my voice to all those who have paid tribute to the important contribution that building societies have made over the past 150 years or so to enhancing opportunities for people to obtain houses and finance for those houses, thus supporting the extension of home ownership to a level approaching 70 per cent. of the population.

That important contribution has made it possible for people of modest means in all parts of the country to obtain the advantages of owner-occupation which would otherwise not have been available to them. That particular contribution grew out of the commitment of building societies to meet the needs of people in their area when those societies were small, local organisations representative of their small communities. Gradually, over the years, the building societies have grown in size and inevitably their role has changed. Nevertheless, there has been that consistent commitment to meet the needs of the population, which has found its expression in the principle of mutuality. Tonight, we have heard hon. Members express their strong support for that principle and its maintenance. I think we can all echo that belief in the importance of mutuality.

We are especially concerned that societies that are seeking to change from mutual status to, essentially, the status of a bank should be free to do so, but not on terms

that give them an unfair advantage over societies that remain mutual. One of the important changes proposed in the Bill is in clause 41. It is an amendment to the five-year rule which creates a proper and fair balance between the interests of societies that have chosen to convert and those that have chosen to remain mutual. It is clearly insupportable for societies that have chosen to remain mutual to find that they can be picked off by societies that convert and seek to defend their interests by acquiring mutual societies during the five-year period in which they themselves cannot be challenged.

Mr. Butterfill: I do not think that that has been suggested by any of the converting societies. They are happy to concede that they would lose that status if they were to bid for a mutual society, on either a contested or an uncontested basis. Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the five-year rule, which was thought to be very important in 1986, is no longer relevant and, indeed, no longer desired by his party?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the situation has changed considerably in the intervening 10 years. During that time, the number of societies considering conversion has increased, while the number that might choose to remain mutual has decreased significantly. The hon. Gentleman is familiar with the subject, so he will know that many societies are clear about the fact that, if the five-year rule were not to be amended as proposed, there would be a serious erosion in the number of societies, which would be picked off for precisely the reasons that I outlined. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will give his full support to clause 41 which, in its current form, will ensure fairness so that societies that choose to remain mutual may do so and those that choose to convert may also do so, but without obtaining an unfair advantage during the transitional period. The provisions of clause 41 create that framework. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support them.

During the debate, we have heard some interesting conjecture about the Deputy Prime Minister. Why he chose the opportunity of a column in *The Mail on Sunday* the day before the Bill was due to have its Second Reading to set out a straightforward paean of praise for the act of conversion is a curious mystery that only he can answer. It has not gone unremarked, and cannot have been unnoticed by the Economic Secretary who, just when she is presenting a Bill to ensure proper protection and support for mutual societies, suddenly finds the ground cut from under her feet by her deputy leader.

I remind the Economic Secretary of the Deputy Prime Minister's language in the article, talking about the windfall gains from conversion. He says:

"16 million people will benefit from these windfall gains. This outcome flows directly from the Government's policies, its determination to deregulate business and promote competition".

The Deputy Prime Minister is unquestionably setting out a prospectus for conversion. Nowhere in the article is there the slightest reference to the virtues and merits of mutuality.

The hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) said that, if the Deputy Prime Minister had really opposed the Bill, it would not be before the House. The Deputy Prime Minister has proposed a number of measures in the past that he no longer proposes so enthusiastically. He used to propose the use of capital receipts to get more housing investment: he urged that councils should plough back their capital receipts into building more houses; he has changed his tune on that. We have heard of his support for Europe and his enthusiasm for a move towards a single currency; he has changed his tune on that, as well.

I do not know the explanation for his curious antics, but what is set out in *The Mail on Sunday* is very poor fare for the Bill's advocates. The defence of mutuality is in far safer hands with the Economic Secretary than with the Deputy Prime Minister, who, in an article published the day before the Second Reading debate, could not bring himself even to mention the word "mutuality", let alone to praise it.

We have had a useful and valuable debate, with excellent contributions from a number of hon. Members. I single out in particular the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen), for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike), as well as those of the hon. Members for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) and for Gloucester.

The Bill is necessary and timely. It is unfortunate that it is being rushed through in the last minutes of this Parliament, but it is necessary to ensure the future of mutual building societies. It sends a powerful message that the principle of mutuality is too important to be sacrificed in the interests of the Deputy Prime Minister. We must defend mutuality. The passage of the Bill will be an important statement of the House's commitment to that principle.

9.47 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight: With the leave of the House, I should like to speak a second time in this important debate.

I congratulate all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. I am pleased that they all support the Bill. I should like to pick up on some of the points raised, starting with the speech of the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), who made a number of extraordinary comments. After giving us a history lesson, he waxed lyrical on a subject on which other Opposition Members have concentrated—the article in *The Mail on Sunday* by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

I can only presume that Opposition Members concentrated on the article because they had nothing decent to say about such an important Bill. They should read the article because, quite frankly, their interpretation of it, or their spin, in the modern parlance, is misleading. I can only conclude from the points that they have made that they are against the decision to convert by the members of converting societies. Therefore, they are against 16 million people receiving shares in converted societies.

I can only say that the message that has come loud and clear on a number of occasions from the hon. Members for North Warwickshire and for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) is that the Labour party is clearly against 16 million people receiving a windfall.

Mr. Mike O'Brien *rose—*

Mrs. Knight: On a number of occasions, I have heard from the hon. Gentleman and from Opposition Back

[Mrs. Knight]

Benchers those exact comments misinterpreting the contents of the article by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. O'Brien: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, as I would not want her to misrepresent our position. In no way have we criticised those who have decided that their building societies should convert. That is a matter for them. We have always adopted that position and we wish them well in that conversion. The hon. Lady should stop throwing around little bits of abuse, as she did earlier, and deal with the points in the article, which was an attack on mutuals. It was a call for conversion and the Minister must deal with it.

Mrs. Knight: The article was not an attack on mutuals. If the hon. Gentleman maintains that position, he is misleading the House and the country.

I found it surprising that that was all the hon. Gentleman had to say on the subject, except that apparently the Government have taken too long in bringing the Bill to the House. We have carried out a first-stage consultation and made changes accordingly under the powers in the 1986 Act. We have continued listening to the societies in order to make the changes that they want in the Bill. The Bill was introduced the day after it became clear that the Opposition parties would co-operate. We have moved very speedily and I look forward to continuing co-operation in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) made his usual useful speech on a subject of which he is a well-known master. We have one or two disagreements which we have discussed before. Let me expand briefly on the two-year rule and the five-year protection that were mentioned by most hon. Members who spoke in the debate.

Let me turn first to the two-year rule. At present, converting societies can distribute shares to members of less than two years, but they do not have to do so: the choice is theirs. The Act operates in that way not because Parliament passed it that way but because it was changed as a consequence of cases taken by societies themselves. That is why the two-year rule exists in its current form.

The key issue is how best to help societies with the problem of speculation and carpetbaggers. I am sure that no hon. Members are in favour of carpetbagging, which results in the societies feeling destabilised in some respects and overcome by the number of people queuing up outside their doors. However, one chief executive recently told me that the influx of customers was the best free advertising that the society had ever had.

At present, societies have powers to react and many have taken a range of measures to minimise the disruption of business caused by a flurry of new customers. They can take two principal actions against speculation: first, they can say loud and clear that they plan to remain mutual and, secondly, they can take the simple steps available to them to prevent speculation from continuing.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: The third method that the hon. Lady did not outline is to up the level at which people can invest. Some societies are demanding minimum investments of £1,000. Why is it not possible to put an overall rule in the Bill that people can participate, decide and vote on such issues only on the condition of two years' membership?

Mrs. Knight: I shall answer the hon. Gentleman briefly, as he will be aware that time is ticking away rather quickly. It is quite correct that, when societies have been faced with speculation, some have increased the limit that an individual has to subscribe in order to become a member. They have then dropped the limit back down. They have also restricted membership in some instances to a very localised basis, but then relieved those restrictions. That is the normal operation of the marketplace. I do not want to interfere in their business practices.

Mr. Butterfill: How can a mutual society protect itself—whatever it does—from a hostile bid via shares?

Mrs. Knight: If my hon. Friend will bear with me a moment, I shall come to that point. At this point, I want to answer his earlier questions relating to five-year protection, which was raised by several hon. Members.

A converting society does not automatically lose its five-year protection. It loses such protection only if it takes certain specific steps. Thus, if it feels that it requires time to stabilise itself in its new form as a public limited company, it is protected for up to five years. If, however, it feels that it is strong enough and wants to go on the acquisition trail of another authorised financial institution, it is only fair on it, and indeed other participants in the marketplace, that it should lose its protection. The question relates not only to other mutual societies but to insurers and banks. The converting societies are big organisations. The Halifax will be the fourth largest bank in this country. Indeed, the Alliance and Leicester and the Woolwich would both be larger than the Royal Bank of Scotland and Guardian Royal Exchange, a well-known insurance company.

The key proposals in the Bill will allow societies to develop their financial services in the way they want while staying mutual. There will be more competition in the high street, which means better rates for savers and borrowers. Building societies will still have the unique close relationship with home owners and local people. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mrs. Angela Knight.]*

Question agreed to.

Committee tomorrow.

BUILDING SOCIETIES BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Building Societies Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under the Building Societies Act 1986; and

(b) the payment of any amounts into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

Question agreed to.

POLICE AND FIREMEN'S PENSIONS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90(6) (Second Reading Committees), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

POLICE AND FIREMEN'S PENSIONS BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Police and Firemen's Pensions Bill, it is expedient to authorise—(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of such money under any other act; and (b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable into the Consolidated Fund under any other Act.—[*Mr. Knapman.*]

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall take motions Nos. 6 to 9 together.

Motions made, and Questions put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Local Government Finance (England)

That the Special Grant Report (No. 24): Special Grant for Asylum Seekers' Accommodation (HC 257), which was laid before this House on 11th February, be approved.

Government Trading Funds

That the draft Driving Standards Agency Trading Fund Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft The Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre Trading Fund Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 17th February, be approved.

Town and Country Planning

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Compensation for Restrictions on Mineral Working and Mineral Waste Depositing) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 19th February, be approved.—[*Mr. Knapman.*]

Questions agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

Court of Auditors

That this House takes note of Official Journal No. C340 of 12th November 1996, the Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors concerning the financial year 1995, together with the institutions' replies, and Official Journal No. C395 of 31st December 1996, the Court of Auditors Statements of Assurance concerning activities financed from the general budget for the financial year 1995 and of the sixth and seventh European Development Funds for 1995, together with the associated special reports and the institutions' replies; and supports the Government's continuing efforts to improve financial management and control within the European Community.—[*Mr. Knapman.*]

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Government Trading Funds

That the draft Medicines Control Agency Trading Fund (Variation) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.—[*Mr. Knapman.*]

Question agreed to.

WASTE PREVENTION BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Waste Prevention Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which under any other enactment are payable out of money so provided.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

PETITION

Health Care (Cambridgeshire)

9.59 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I beg leave to present a petition which has been sent to me by some of my constituents. The petition is from the community practitioners and health visitors associations of Huntingdon and Cambridgeshire and residents of the area. The petition has more than 3,000 signatures, collected in a short time, and it declares:

That the proposals of the Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority to reduce the budget for health visitors and school nurses by £300,000 in 1997–98 are deplorable and will result in a marked deterioration in the standard of services that could be offered by health visitors and school nurses, frustrating their ability to fulfil their responsibilities to deliver primary preventive care and health promotion throughout the community.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Health to review the proposals of Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority to reduce its expenditure on health visitors and school nurses by £300,000 for 1997–98 and to take any necessary steps to ensure that the provision of primary preventive care and health promotion in Huntingdon and Cambridgeshire remains at least at current levels.

And the Petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Street Children

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

10 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Those hon. Members who have left the Chamber are, almost without exception, on their way to a warm house and—usually—to their own beds. Those of us who have that privilege do not always understand the completely different lives led by the street children of the world.

Those children have been abandoned or have run away, and are at risk of suffering the most appalling individual disasters. They are always at risk of theft or exploitation, both sexual and commercial, and many of them live in conditions that we in this so-called compassionate country would not accept for animals. It is therefore important that countries such as our own, which have access to large sums of money and influence in international organisations, should use both to affect the lives of children.

It is a sad fact that it took a long time, even in the House, for people to accept that women are an important focus for overseas development aid. It is even more depressing that we are in the same situation with regard to children. Children are not at the forefront of our decision-making processes. We sit here and talk in detail about legislation that affects our constituents, but we sometimes forget that we have an impact on the lives of children across the world.

I am privileged to represent a constituency in which the railway was an important industry. A railway town was created from a green-field site, and the men and women who work in the railway industry have some important traits. They care desperately about the railway system, and they are committed to providing a service. They also understand the need to care for others. It is therefore not an accident that my constituency is home to a charity called the Railway Children.

The project grew from the response from various railwaymen and women—particularly a remarkable man called David Maidment, who spent his working life with British Rail working on safety. In his capacity as a qualified engineer, he travelled the world and saw to his considerable dismay children living on railway stations. Some were sleeping on luggage carts or in corners, while some were begging, stealing and doing anything they could to stay alive. Some of these children were as young as five.

It is only when one translates that into one's own life that one understands. I am a happy, if poor, grandmother of 10—some of whom are quite tiny. I have only to think of those children being abandoned by their parents and being left to the vagaries of this bitterly cruel world to realise the circumstances in which those railway children live. David Maidment came to the House of Commons to talk to me about helping to create a charity to provide support for those children. He was particularly concerned with the children of India, as he had seen large numbers of them in Calcutta and elsewhere.

As soon as Mr. Maidment began to talk to other railwaymen and women, he realised that they too were concerned about the problem. They brought to the matter not only a strong commitment to human rights, but

compassion and a desire to change those intolerable circumstances. So the Railway Children was born as a useful and important charity. We are still aiming to have an exhibition in the House of Commons, showing some of the more poignant pictures taken by a photographer who had travelled throughout India to see those children. We have not yet come up in the ballot, but I am hopeful that we shall in the future. The Railway Children then grew and became part of a greater consortium of charities concerned with the children of the streets.

One reads case histories of children on Mexican or Indian stations, or children abducted in time of war in Africa and incorporated into an army they neither understand nor wish to be a part of and forced to follow a large number of armed men and women to survive. No matter what kind of circumstances those children live in, every one of them needs help urgently—they need it today and tonight. Therefore, why do the Government tell us that there are a number of important measures, but never give us the specifics?

I feel that it would be useful for the House to know some of the statistics. Obviously, some are the result of informed guesswork because, after all, no one knows how many children are in these situations. In Lima, the capital of Peru, there are 850 children living on stations, and possibly 2,000 nationwide. In Mexico City, the figure is 11,000 children. In Guatemala, it is 5,200. In Romania, Albania and Bulgaria, it is 12,000. In Manila, there are 50,000 children living in stations and perhaps 75,000 living on the streets, often working in slave conditions. There are 20,000 such children in Bombay, 10,000 in Dhaka and more than 5,000 in Khartoum. These are appalling figures, demonstrating world misery and unhappiness that we should be doing something about.

I want to ask the Government a simple set of questions. First, can they tell me how many special projects they can identify within their vote are targeted towards children? I would like to call such a programme "Children First". Any number of marvellous social service terms could be used, but what projects can the Minister tell us about that are directed specifically at children and make sure that children receive the money?

How many NGOs, when they approach the FCO or the ODA, are given special help? How much support do bodies that help children receive? How much of our money, outside the direct support that we give via the European Community, goes into child-based subjects? How often does this country demand transparent child-based priorities in these forums? We want action this year, not next year or the year after. We want to tell those carrying out the good work with tiny amounts of support that we share their sense of urgency and want to do something about the problem.

The Minister may say, of course, that the Department has been involved. There seems to have been an unfortunate incident when one of his colleagues gave the House the impression that the Government had come to the conclusion that there should be special child-based projects and that they were already working on them. I will not go into detail, save to say that a letter from the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) offered a long explanation, as follows:

> "You asked whether the Oral answer, as recorded in Hansard of 27 February 1995, reproduced the advice of officials or whether it was a freelance offer by the then Minister . . . It was neither."

The Minister

> "made a mistake when he said that ODA was providing financial support over a five year period to the Consortium. In answering a question on ODA help to street children in Kenya,"

the Minister

> "inadvertently confused support to the Consortium with support of a Joint Funding Scheme project which had been approved for a five year cycle. I agree entirely that this was a most unfortunate error."

It most certainly was—most unfortunate for the children who could immediately gain from the support of the child consortium if the Minister were prepared to accept that that should be one of his priorities.

The Minister could do several things this evening. He could come to the Box and say that he will designate within the FCO and the ODA certain desk officers with responsibility, in particular regions, for child-based projects. That might include Africa and Asia, where the enormous growth in numbers of these children is taking place. It could also include other parts of the world that desperately need help. The Minister could say that he has set priorities and targets for those officers, and that he will ask them at the end of the year to report to him.

Norway decided that it was not doing enough; the Government initiated an assessment; after five years they looked at what had been done and at what needed changing. Why cannot we do the same? We are quite capable of it, and we should be prepared to do it.

Above all, the Minister knows how easy it is for us all to go away to a warm and comfortable room and close the door, forgetting what is happening on the streets—and not just in the third world, either. Part of the consortium's money goes to the Suzy Lamplugh trust to support a telephone service in one of the mainline stations of our capital city. Let us not therefore think that it is only other countries that have the problem. Every time we close the door and forget these children, saying that tomorrow will do, we contribute almost as much to their doom as do those who are abusing them. This very night children will be getting off trains at our larger stations, and they will need support and help.

We must understand that, unless such help comes from the British Government, there will be very few people to care about what happens to these unfortunate young ones.

10.13 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am most grateful to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) for allowing me a couple of moments of her well won time to discuss this important subject and to say a few words on behalf of the all-party street children group.

I have been amazed by the influence that a small number of Members of the British Parliament can have in trying to prick the conscience of countries throughout the world and to encourage them to solve the problems. Our friendship and advice are valued, and the small number of people working on the issue in the various countries are extremely grateful for our support.

I know that the Government have been very active in many issues of this nature, and I believe that, the more they can use their enormous influence in international bodies, the better it will be. I do not want in any way to detract from the appeals that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich has made, and I am sure that the Minister

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

will respond to those, but I know that many people are keen for a special place to be created in the United Nations for dealing with the problems of street children. I appreciate that that is often a wide definition of the types of children who need help, and I would not want to understate the needs and difficulties of children living in poverty within families.

I urge the Minister to consider the possibility of appointing a rapporteur in the UN specifically for street children, or finding another way to reinforce the voice of street children within the UN and all its agencies.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Dr. Liam Fox): First, I thank the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) for bringing this subject to the notice of the House. It is a distressing and upsetting subject that too many people, sadly, would rather not know about.

I know from my own recent visits to some of the places that the hon. Lady mentioned, especially India, how distressing it can be. I do not know how many hon. Members read the article in the *Observer* recently about street children in Madagascar, which painted a distressing picture of some of the horrors that may await tourists in some parts of the world.

I had an unfortunate experience that will have been shared by many hon. Members. I was confronted with children who had had limbs amputated, and I wondered whether to give money to the parents; having given them money, I wondered for the rest of the day whether they might have another limb amputated simply to increase their ability to get money. It is a most distressing subject.

The needs of children have always been at the heart of the United Kingdom's development assistance programme. As the hon. Lady correctly said, street children face particular problems, finding difficulties in gaining access to health and education, and suffering sexual abuse and a lack of human rights. Even so, for some, the sad reality is that life on the streets may be more attractive than life elsewhere.

The hon. Lady asked at the outset the total number of programmes targeted at children. We adopt an integrated approach to children's needs in our development assistance programme, so we cannot specify the number of projects of benefit to poor children, but I should like to answer some of the specific points about some of the projects that can be identified.

Street children's needs vary. Some live entirely on the streets, while others work on the streets but go home to their families. In responding to their needs, we must ensure that children are given a voice in decisions that affect them. that is why we support several relevant non-governmental organisations through our joint funding scheme in Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, Kenya, India and the Philippines.

While some of the projects provide safe havens for the children, the main common thread throughout is access to health care and education. Skills training to give the children the opportunity for a better future is particularly important.

Some of the larger NGOs that receive block grant support from the Overseas Development Administration, including Save the Children Fund, also respond to the needs of street children in their country programmes: for example, in Brazil, Angola, India, Bangladesh and the Philippines. We have also supported various initiatives of the Consortium for Street Children UK.

We gave £30,000 in 1994–95 and 1995–96 for the production of a resource directory; £16,000 for a pilot project on girl street children; and £12,000 for a legal handbook. At the international level, the United Kingdom has taken a prominent role in promoting the rights of street children.

In 1992, we produced a resolution on the plight of street children to the United Nations General Assembly. We followed that up at the UN Commission on Human Rights in March 1993, and we continue to take every opportunity to ensure that children's rights are at the forefront of the international agenda. In particular, we have encouraged all countries to ratify the UN convention on the rights of the child.

I regard this issue as very important, and I raise it at every meeting that I can in the countries I visit. As the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) said, the issues must be raised by western politicians to keep them up the agenda of developing countries, and to make it clear that we have not forgotten about them.

Perhaps I can clarify the situation relating to the inadvertent mistake of my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry). My officials have discussed the matter at length with the director of the consortium, and she accepted that it was a genuine mistake. The consortium knows that we do not provide core support. As a general principle, the ODA does not provide funds for core activities such as staff salaries and overheads for non-governmental organisations in the UK. We consider the funding of specific projects with time-bound activities that complement the ODA's policy and programmes. We believe that that is a more appropriate and worthwhile use of development assistance.

On future support to the consortium, the ODA remains happy to consider project proposals from it. The outline proposals for 1997–98 are already being seriously considered by my officials. Individual members of the consortium can make proposals for consideration under the ODA's joint funding scheme.

We have already provided comments on the consortium's briefing paper to its director. I have read the paper in depth, and have much sympathy with the issues raised. Many of its proposals cover areas in which the ODA is already active; others involve actors and organisations outside the scope of the ODA's day-to-day work. We agree that the needs of children, including street children, must be addressed in an integrated way in our aid activities. The ODA's policy on children in development is evolving in the light of growing experience in the field, and it will continue to do so.

The ODA already has a strong commitment to a strategic, integrated policy on children, which regards them as positive actors in development and not only as passive recipients of aid. We support several NGO initiatives through our joint funding scheme. They include two ChildHope projects in Brazil. The one at Casa de Passagem aims to strengthen and develop various educational mechanisms to improve local NGO activities that provide information on health, reproductive health, gender and human rights to young girls on the streets.

In Salvador province, ChildHope is working with the Ibeji management committee to provide street children with a safe haven, where they receive shelter, medical attention and skills training. The aim is to provide children with income-earning opportunities for the future.

We are also tackling the problems of street children through our main bilateral programmes. Our urban poverty project in Kenya involves specific support to street children. Another urban poverty project in Kingston, Jamaica, will help street children more generally by improving livelihoods and living conditions in deprived, inner-city areas. Young people are encouraged to become involved in discussions on community planning, reducing conflict and violence, and the provision of better access to leisure and informal education services. In our poverty reduction project in Cochin, India, the provision of safe havens for street children in poor areas is a priority for this identified vulnerable group.

Several specific recommendations were made in the consortium's briefing paper. I should like to deal with them, because both the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset raised them. First, there is the question of a special rapporteur for street children. The idea of creating one has been raised in the past. It is important to consider existing mechanisms to avoid duplication. Sadly, in too many aid programmes, there is still too much international duplication.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child monitors the progress of states parties in implementing their obligations under the convention on the rights of the child. The convention has near-universal ratification, so the committee's monitoring role has wide application. In considering states party reports, it can examine problems such as street children and make recommendations. The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, is also active in that area. The UN special rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography addresses issues of direct relevance to street children. The most recent report makes recommendations at local, national and international level.

Countries seeking practical help can approach the UN Centre for Human Rights in Geneva, which runs a technical assistance programme. In addition, since 1992, the European Union has sponsored resolutions in the General Assembly and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights that call on all countries to seek comprehensive ways to address the root causes of street children and to bring to justice those responsible for acts of abuse. Sadly, as the hon. Lady said, we are not even aware of scale of such abuses. The more information we can get on that, the better. I am grateful to her for bringing the matter to the attention of the House.

It is worth pointing out that such resolutions were originally a United Kingdom initiative. We continue to take a prominent role among our partners on the issue. Therefore, the plight of street children will be more effectively addressed using a combination of the mechanisms, rather than concentrating functions in a single individual. That is our current belief.

The hon. Lady also alluded to the proportion of aid allocated specifically to children's issues. As I said earlier, most ODA projects cover the wider population, and it is not possible to isolate expenditure on specific target groups within it. Although the data may be readily available for those projects that are designed specifically for children, given the expenditure on all areas that impinge on children, and given what I said about different projects, such a number is involved that they cannot be separated from the more general expenditure. I shall look at the figures to see whether I can provide the hon. Lady with better and more particular information.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset also mentioned the possibility of a children's desk officer in the ODA. The ODA now has about 30 social development advisers based overseas and in London with specific responsibility for carrying out social appraisal in project design, monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the needs of people, including children, are taken into account in aid activities. All countries where we have a development assistance programme are covered from a social development angle. I believe that, in that broad sense, we are covering the need for such a desk officer.

I should like to touch on two issues which the hon. Lady mentioned briefly—child labour and sexual exploitation of children.

A recent International Labour Organisation conference in Amsterdam on child labour has played a significant part in furthering international consensus on the issue of combating the most intolerable forms of child labour. Those are seen as comprising slavery and slave-like practices; forced or compulsory labour, including debt bondage and serfdom; the use of children in prostitution, pornography and the drugs trade; and their employment in an type of work that is dangerous, harmful, or hazardous, or which interferes with their education. When I read the briefing provided by the Department, frankly, I found it hard, as does everyone in this country, to imagine that children are subject to child labour anywhere in the world in 1997.

It is also important that we differentiate between the abuse of children in child labour and the child labour that occurs in many poorer parts of a country, which acts as a supplement to low-income families and does not fall into the category of child labour. I am pleased that that definition has been understood more widely in the world debate on the matter.

The conference was hosted by the Dutch Government as a contribution to the ILO's programme to develop a new convention to deal with combating the most intolerable forms of child labour. It is hoped that that will be ready for submission to the ILO's annual conference in 1999. The United Kingdom supports the intention to develop such a convention, and we will be a full and willing partner in the preparatory discussions.

It is worth stating that poverty is a root cause of child commercial sexual exploitation in developing countries. Income from child sex work is often seen as a way out of poverty for many families. Therefore, it is extremely important to tackle poverty. Children, particularly girls, are often completely powerless in such situations.

The ODA funds a number of projects, including support through NGOs, which help to provide alternative income opportunities, education and improved health care for children who have been forced into prostitution. I was involved in discussions on child prostitution in Thailand just a few weeks ago. We also provide funding to UNAIDS and to UNICEF. Support is also given to programmes that address the sexual needs of commercial sex workers—for example, in India, where I also had recent discussions.

[Dr. Liam Fox]

In the follow-up to the World Congress Against Commercial Exploitation, which was held in Stockholm in August 1996, the ODA organised a meeting with NGOs working in the United Kingdom and developing countries. We have invited the Coalition on Child Prostitution and Tourism to let us have a proposal for data collection and information gathering.

There are many factors which force children on to the streets throughout the developing world—for example, poverty caused by population growth and increased numbers of people seeking a new life in urban centres. The hon. Lady mentioned Calcutta and Dhaka. I recently visited those cities, and saw children on the streets, which is a distressing sight.

Other causes that force children on to the streets include conflicts and war, which cause loss of family or separation. Poor education and health provision are also factors, as well as the need for children to make money to support themselves and their families. Another simple fact could be that home life may be so difficult and terrible that street life is preferable.

In many developing countries, the issue of street children can be very sensitive. We need to support ways in which to promote changes in public attitudes towards children to show that they have rights and the ability to play an active role in their communities. Health education programmes are also important for street children, especially in relation to HIV-AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and drug abuse. The ODA addresses all those issues in our development assistance programme. We have a strong commitment to a strategic and integrated policy on children, which sees them as positive actors in development, and not just passive recipients of aid.

This is an extremely important subject, and I am sorry that more hon. Members were not present to hear such an important debate. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 March 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

IMPERIAL COLLEGE BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Tuesday 18 March.

LEVER PARK BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 18 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Defence Export Services Organisation

1. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the work of the Defence Export Services Organisation. [18035]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): The Defence Export Services Organisation helps the United Kingdom defence industry to export its products and services. Provisional figures show that Britain's defence exporters achieved around 25 per cent. of the world market in 1996, attracting more than £5 billion to this country.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on that excellent news. Does he agree that, put in a different way, that means that Britain's defence exports have increased by 50 per cent. in the past two years? Does he also agree that it is hard for any other sector or country to match that success story? There is another perspective, however. Does he agree that 360,000 jobs in the defence industry could be put at risk by the Opposition's defence review—their cut-and-slash programme to cut defence spending by £5 billion, which would undercut our defence procurement and defence sales?

Mr. Portillo: Everything my hon. Friend says is right. First, it is indeed the case that, in 1994, our share of defence export sales was 16 per cent. of the world market and that today it is 25 per cent., so there has been a 50 per cent. increase. I cannot think of any other industry that has matched that performance, either in this country or elsewhere. My hon. Friend is also right that we can have that level of defence export sales only if we have reliable home markets. The Labour party is now committed to a defence review with, as its spokesman said, all the painful consequences that would follow. Every time we have challenged Opposition spokesmen to say whether one project or another would be exempted from that review, we have been denied any answer, so we must assume that all defence projects are at risk from Labour's defence review. If our home orders are at risk, obviously our export sales are at risk too.

Mr. Llew Smith: How can the Minister justify subsidising arms manufacturers who sell weapons of death to the most odious dictators, who use them against their own people—as was done in Indonesia, where hundreds of thousands of people from East Timor were murdered?

Mr. Portillo: We carefully observe the United Nations and European Union embargoes. Our country has one of the strictest regimes in the world for the control of arms sales. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making it so clear that, in the event of there being a Labour Government, many Labour Members would like the industrial success story to be choked off. They would like jobs to be lost in Britain, not because of anything that the UN says or any treaty that we have entered into, but because of their political bigotry towards other countries.

Sir John Cope: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, at our last defence debate, 21 Labour Members were against all arms exports and defence sales of any sort? Their policies would be extremely damaging right across the board to the jobs to which he referred.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend is right as far as he goes, but the number was as low as 21 only because the frighteners had been put on tens of others. In previous years, a far higher number of Labour Members have said that they wanted to ban defence export sales and were in favour of unilateralism and cutting our defence budget. Each year, the frighteners are put on them.

The point is that if there were to be a Labour Government, those people would be able to exert influence. People know that our defences would not be safe under Labour because of the pressure that would be imposed on Front Benchers by Back Benchers, and because the Front Benchers themselves are at best new converts to defence; I do not believe in them at all.

RAF (Establishment)

2. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the estimated establishment of the Royal Air Force at 1 April 1999. [18036]

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): The requirement for trained Regular uniformed manpower for 1 April 1999 is forecast to be 52,200.

Mr. Cunningham: Does the Minister agree that, under the Conservatives, the Royal Air Force has received a 40 per cent. cut? Is not that the true legacy of the Tory Government?

Mr. Soames: That is a fluent and telling question: the hon. Gentleman is clearly well on top of the subject and

has a deep knowledge of matters relating to the Royal Air Force. Of course, he is completely wrong: the Royal Air Force has had to go through a difficult period and has reconfigured itself for the new world order, to deal with the challenges that will face it, in common with all our allies and, indeed, our foes. All armed forces have been through a period of downsizing, but the Royal Air Force remains the benchmark against which all other air forces in the world judge themselves. It is highly rapidly deployable and extremely well equipped.

Mr. Wilkinson: May I remind my hon. Friend that 1 April 1999 will be the 81st anniversary of the foundation of the Royal Air Force and the second anniversary of the absorption by the Royal Auxiliary Air Force of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, forming a Reserve force that will be capable of expansion in time of war and extremely cost-effective in time of peace? Will it not, in short, be an 81st anniversary of which the founder of the Royal Air Force, Lord Trenchard, would be proud? It will be a good basis for taking the service to a glorious future in the next century.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is of course completely right. As he knows, because he spoke in the Royal Air Force debate, I announced on that occasion our intention to recruit up to 60 Reservist air crew over the next two years and that the training of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force helicopter support squadron was going well. We shall consider all possible ways of expanding and enhancing the role of the Reserves in the Royal Air Force.

Departmental Art Collection

3. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many works of art are missing from his Department's art collection; and if he will make a statement. [18037]

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): As a result of inadequate record keeping and controls in the past, 105 works of art are missing from my Department's collection. New control procedures have been introduced and efforts continue to try to find the missing works.

Mr. Banks: I did not realise that there were so many art lovers among the armed forces. I thought that their job was to go around shooting at people, not nicking paintings. The National Audit Office identified 190 pictures as stolen or missing. Is the Minister telling us that some have been recovered? Where were they recovered from? He said that efforts were being made. Will he describe those efforts? For example, has he been visiting Ministers' pieds-à-terre to see whether any paintings have ended up there? Why does not he declare an amnesty so that we can at least recover the paintings, which are worth something like £100,000 of taxpayers' money?

Mr. Arbuthnot: It beats me how the hon. Gentleman, of all people, has the gall to ask such a question. It was he who in 1986 purloined £50,000 worth of silver from the Greater London council. He asks where I have been looking: I should have been looking in his loft, which is where the GLC silver ended up. It absolutely astonishes me that he has the gall to ask that question.

Mr. Tracey: My hon. Friend knows that only the best security can protect works of art, as the Public Accounts Committee investigation proved. Is he aware that the artefacts that disappeared from county hall during the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) have still not been recovered? Only code marking could have ensured their recovery.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is no doubt right, although I have not kept track of the GLC silver; perhaps I should have. Perhaps the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) should instigate a search of his loft so that he can tell us what has happened.

Defence Exports

4. **Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the defence industry's output was exported in the last year for which figures are available. [18038]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Although definitive output figures are not available, I estimate that, in the recent past, the percentage of defence goods exported was in the region of 35 per cent. That represents an outstanding success for British industry, and one that is envied worldwide.

Mr. Allason: Will my hon. Friend confirm that a large number of British jobs emanate from defence exports, that there is the most rigorous scrutiny of British export contracts, and that no British export is made in contravention of European Union or United Nations embargoes?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I confirm what my hon. Friend says. We have probably the most rigorous control of exports of any nation. We export responsibly and we shall continue to export responsibly. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House that we take 25 per cent. of world market share—an astonishing achievement. Those exports bring many benefits to Britain, not only in jobs, but in increased influence overseas and in the reduction of costs to the Ministry of Defence in buying equipment. If we were to put those jobs at risk by introducing a strategic defence review, we would undermine the stability of the defence industry and damage not only jobs but our influence and MOD costs. We must be careful about that as we move towards a general election.

Mr. Gunnell: Is the Minister aware of the proposed closure of IMI Yorkshire Alloys in my constituency and in Smethwick? That company contributes to defence exports and sells directly to the US Navy and to others. Its products are not made by any other company in Britain. Our position will suffer a net loss if the proposed closure goes ahead. Will he look into the closure and its strategic significance for the defence industry to ascertain whether he can make any suggestions to help those who want at least some part of the company to remain in existence?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I was not aware of that proposed closure. We deeply regret job losses following the closure

of any part of the defence industry. In view of the hon. Gentleman's comments, I shall look into the matter in the way that he suggests.

Mr. Day: Is my hon. Friend aware that while the defence industry is important to the nation as a whole, it is of particular importance to the north-west of England, in respect of both the defence and aerospace industries? Has he a message for the many thousands of people in the north-west whose jobs and livelihoods depend on the continuance of present defence policies about the attitudes of the Government and the Opposition to the defence industry?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I do have a message. The defence industry of the north-west is very valuable, and the Government recognise its value. Our defence industry is successful because of the policies that the Government have followed. We have followed policies of competition and privatisation, both of which the Labour party abhors. We have followed policies that improve exports and we have provided stable defence funding. We do not want a strategic defence review that would undermine defence exports and the strength of our defence industry. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the importance of the industry in the north-west.

Mr. Spellar: Does the Minister agree that overseas sales depend on orders in the home market? If so, is it not a shame that he did not think about that when ordering the Army field ambulance? We had to mount a massive campaign to save it for Land Rover from the Austrians. Does the Minister comprehend that his comments and those of the Secretary of State will be widely welcomed in Paris, Los Angeles, Fort Worth and anywhere our competitors seek to create uncertainty and to undermine Britain's position? This close to a general election, why does he not stop playing party political games and start backing Britain's defence industry? It all goes to show: "You can't trust the Tories on defence."

Mr. Arbuthnot:—it says here. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question lies in his own hands. If he is complaining about uncertainty, perhaps he can tell us which of the projects that we have ordered would be exempted from his defence review. For instance, will the replacement maritime patrol aircraft, the Nimrod 2000, be exempted from the defence review? No? I take it, then, that it would not be exempted. Instead of exempting certain elements from a defence review, a more responsible attitude would be to recognise the long-lasting damage that the entire review would do to our British defence industry, and to abandon it lock, stock and barrel.

"Options for Change"

5. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recommendations arising from "Options for Change" are yet to be implemented. [18039]

Mr. Portillo: All the restructuring arising from "Options for Change" has been completed.

Mr. Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our services have dealt admirably with the changes that have resulted from "Options for Change"? Does he agree that a peace dividend can be spent only once, and that we have spent it? The last thing our services need is a review such as the one threatened by the Labour party, should it form the next Government. We all know what a review means: it is new Labourspeak for cuts, cuts and yet more cuts which would savage our services and wreck procurement jobs in the north-west and elsewhere, decimating defence manufacturing industry in this country.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend speaks with real feeling because jobs are at risk in his constituency and in other constituencies throughout the country. He is absolutely right to say that the armed forces led through the "Options for Change" exercise—and led brilliantly. That enabled our armed forces to adapt to change better than those of any other country. That has now been done; we are now adapted to the new world in which the cold war is over.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the defence dividend cannot be taken again and again. Because we have kept our defence strategy fully up to date, there is no need for a strategic defence review. The only reason for the review proposed by Labour is to initiate defence cuts. The attitude of Labour Members shows that they do not care about defence. Even if there were a Labour Secretary of State for Defence who cared about defence—I do not see one in prospect—he would get no support from his Back Benchers and would thus be naked in the struggle to defend the defence budget.

Dr. Reid: That is priceless, coming from the man who instigated the biggest cut in, and the most shambolic continual restructuring of, the armed forces every year for the past decade. Does he realise that any review that we carried out, unlike his efforts, would start by involving the chiefs of staff? Unlike his, it would guarantee two years of financial stability, as we have already made clear. Unlike his, it would interleave foreign affairs and defence, giving us some form of strategy. And unlike him, we would avoid the annual big-bang restructuring.

Have not the right hon. Gentleman and the Government been incoherent in strategy, incompetent in finance and indifferent in welfare? We have always known that the Tories cannot be trusted with the health service; we now know that they cannot be trusted on defence either.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman leads with his chin. He has no authority whatsoever from the shadow Chancellor or from the Leader of the Opposition to say that there will be stability under a Labour Government. He has authority to say only that there will be a defence review, and that is why at no time will any Labour Member say what we need to hear: that any of the projects that this Government have ordered are exempt from the defence review. They will not say it because they are not authorised to do so—they are under the thumb of the shadow Chancellor and of the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* that it would be dishonest to claim that Labour would restore defence to its former level, so the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) should not risk being dishonest with the House today.

Mr. King: The necessary changes in "Options for Change" were designed to achieve lower manpower levels but ensure that that manpower had the best equipment available in the world at that time, and I congratulate my

right hon. Friend on the way in which that programme has been carried through. I was struck by one particular feature during the period in which the changes were introduced—I was conscious of the united concern of Conservative Members that our defences might be put at risk. Is he aware that, in contrast, no such concern was expressed by Labour Members? All we heard was exactly what we have heard repeated this afternoon—Labour Members pleading for individual equipment orders and pretending that they are in favour of defence, but actually calling for cuts in overall expenditure on every possible occasion.

Mr. Portillo: The strategy conceived by my right hon. Friend has been carried through with great success, and I pay tribute to him for that. We in this country have been willing to undertake difficult changes involving the reduction of numbers and the reduction of the number of bases from which we operate. As a result, we have been able to put more and more money into defence equipment. A rising proportion of the defence budget goes into the sort of equipment that would enable Britain to triumph in future conflicts. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that, throughout that period, he faced legitimate concern from Conservative Back Benchers and no concern from Labour Back Benchers, and that it is the same today. I have been sustained during my two years as Secretary of State for Defence by the tremendous support that I have had from behind me. Any Labour Secretary of State for Defence would know that what his Back Benchers wanted was savage defence cuts to bring us down to the European average—but Britain is not of the European average.

Army (Establishment)

6. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current establishment of the Army. [18040]

Mr. Soames: The current trained manpower establishment of the Regular Army, including Gurkhas but excluding the Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service element), is around 106,000.

Mr. Hogg: Is it not true that the Minister spent £500 million and reduced the Army by 50,000, but wound up with a 5,000 shortfall? How did the Minister get misled into such a muddle?

Mr. Soames: I saw the hon. Gentleman being given a run-through of his question—he did not look overly confident then or as he asked it. He is correct when he says that the Army is currently under strength by 5,339 men and women; however, I have some bad news for him, which means that there is good news for the Army. The Army has already recruited 664 officers from a target of 730 for the year and 13,650 soldiers from a target of 15,100—a 50 per cent. increase on the year. We are devoting huge and valuable resources to recruiting; we have a lot more to do and the hon. Gentleman may be assured that we will do it. The Government are hugely proud of the Army. We have throughout had the clear objective that the Army should be brilliantly trained and properly equipped for future wars and operations, and I am glad to say that that is now the case.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my hon. Friend give me the assurance this afternoon that the Cheshire Regiment is safe under a Conservative Government, and that there is every chance that the Cheshire Regiment would be in jeopardy under the review that the Labour party would carry out?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. No cap badge in the British Army would be immune from the type of defence review that the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) plans; indeed, the hon. Gentleman has already said that such a review would not be free of pain.

I give my hon. Friend the following assurance: for as long as I am Minister of State for the Armed Forces, for as long as there is a Conservative Government, the Cheshires will be a valued and valuable part of the order of battle of the British Army. Opposition Members would have been proud if they had been able to see, as I did, the way in which the Cheshires conducted themselves in Bosnia.

Dr. Hendron: The Secretary of State is aware of the difficulties for young soldiers patrolling the streets of Northern Ireland, and of the brutal murder by the IRA of Stephen Restorick. Bearing that in mind, does he agree that, difficult as it is for soldiers in Northern Ireland, it is extremely important that at all times they do not inadvertently in some way act as recruiting sergeants for the Provisional IRA in their treatment of young people in the streets?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman makes an important and valuable point. In my judgment, the British Army's conduct in Northern Ireland during the past 25 years will be one of the most glorious chapters in the annals of this country's military history. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the British Army has comported itself with great discipline, great skill and great courage on the streets of Belfast, and I wholly endorse exactly what he said.

Mr. Key: Does my hon. Friend agree that it has always been more difficult to recruit for the Army at times of prosperity and falling unemployment? Will he accept my congratulations on the superb advertising campaign run by the Adjutant-General in cinemas and elsewhere? Will he take it from me that, on my last visit to the Army careers office in Salisbury, it was up to target and recruitment was going very well indeed?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—as always—for his support for the armed forces and the Army in particular. I agree entirely that the recent advertising campaign has been a great success. It has won many awards in this country and abroad and we are extremely pleased with it.

I am glad to hear how well recruiting is going in Salisbury. My hon. Friend is right that it is hard, in the south particularly, to recruit when unemployment is falling. We must make greater efforts to give people who enter the Army qualifications that they can use when they leave. We have still a great deal to do, but we shall do it. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support.

Mr. Murphy: Why cannot the Minister accept that although, since the last general election, the Government have spent £500 million on recruitment schemes and £1.5 billion on making service people redundant, he still

manages to get it all wrong, with a shortfall of more than 5,000 in the Army alone? Does not he personally accept responsibility for that fiasco, or is it all the fault of some nameless civil servant?

Mr. Soames: No, it is not the fault of a nameless civil servant; it is the result of a combination of circumstances and events. Recently, we have been in a demographic trough. When the Government came to power, one in eight young people went on to further and higher education; now, one in three do. We are fishing in a much smaller pool, and we need to work much harder to get the high-quality young men and women we need.

For all the hon. Gentleman's bleating and harping on about the failure to recruit the numbers, if he could see the quality of the people we are getting, he would revise his view and understand that we need to continue to invest in giving those young people the skills that they need in the Army, and train them in the Army so that they can go out into a useful civilian career afterwards.

Cadet Forces

7. **Sir Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the services' cadet forces. [18041]

Mr. Soames: The cadet forces continue to play a sterling role in the nation's voluntary youth movement, giving young people their first experience of the armed forces and their way of life and encouraging the development of such qualities as self-reliance, self-confidence and good citizenship.

Sir Colin Shepherd: We in Hereford are proud to have active units of the Navy, Army and Air Force cadets, which are using service concepts of training and discipline to give young people experience and to develop their powers of leadership and responsibility. Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the many thousands of volunteer adults who give up their time to lead training activities?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. In this respect, Hereford is no different from many other parts of the country. Cadet forces are booming and are playing a vital role in the community. I am glad to hear that they are doing so in my hon. Friend's constituency. I willingly join him in paying a warm and wholehearted tribute to the thousands of adult volunteers, including parents, who freely give of their time to enable young people to acquire the important skills that they learn in the cadet forces. The future of the cadet forces hinges entirely on our being able to attract high-quality volunteers.

Mr. Barry Jones: How will the Minister help the excellent HMS Tuscan in my constituency? Is he aware that when I recently gave awards to this superb unit at Connah's quay dock it was clear to me that the building in which it operated was in urgent need of refurbishment? It was especially in need of efficient heating. Will the Minister assist by supporting my application, and that of the unit, to the national lottery's small charities sector so that the urgent need for heating can be met?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman is a loyal champion and supporter of the armed forces. I shall gladly support his project in whatever way I can. He is a regular visitor to the Ministry of Defence and if he would like to talk to me about the matter, I shall be happy to see him.

Sir Cranley Onslow: Will my hon. Friend assure the House that members of the cadet forces will continue to be able to shoot at targets with full-bore weapons?

Mr. Soames: I am happy to give my right hon. Friend that assurance and I am grateful to him for raising the matter. It would be unthinkable for the cadets not to be taught to shoot properly and to learn the disciplines that relate to weapons and the respect that must be shown in skill-at-arms training. Cadets without weapons would constitute a pointless and meaningless operation. We shall ensure that they are properly equipped and properly taught in the vital disciplines that will do so much for them in later life.

Mr. Dalyell: If the cadet forces are, to use the Minister's word, "booming" and are increasing in numbers, what is being done about the necessary increase in the number of rifles, and particularly the security of the armouries in which rifles are kept? Do the cadet forces have the wherewithal to offer the security that, post-Dunblane, people obviously need and want?

Mr. Soames: I share the hon. Gentleman's anxiety about the proper security of weapons. I assure him that the Ministry of Defence takes the matter extremely seriously. We are satisfied that our arrangements for the security of weapons are adequate; indeed, they are excellent and are regularly reviewed. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point. More cadets are learning to shoot, and in learning that skill they will use deactivated rifles. They will use full-bore rifles only when firing on ranges.

Equipment Expenditure

8. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the defence budget in the next three years he plans to spend on defence equipment. [18042]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Expenditure on equipment in the current financial year is estimated to be 39 per cent. of the defence budget. On current plans, this percentage will increase steadily over the next three years.

Mr. Brazier: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Amphenol in my constituency on being the largest and most successful manufacturer of electrical connectors for the defence industry throughout Europe? Does not this go beyond the constituency point? Are not companies such as Amphenol playing a vital part in maintaining our defence base? Would not Labour's threatened defence review, which would turn companies' plans and their tooling up and design capability upside down, be just as bad for the companies concerned as it would be for the armed forces?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning Amphenol, which is a valued supplier to the Ministry of Defence. We are delighted with the work that it has done for us. We have plans under a Conservative Government to increase spending on major defence

equipment by 15 per cent. by the year 2000. That would be put at risk if it were not exempted from the strategic defence review proposed by the Opposition. Unless they can say that the Brimstone missile, the Storm Shadow missile and the Nimrod 2000 aeroplane will be exempt from the review, those projects will all be at risk. Britain cannot take that risk. We know not only that we cannot trust Labour on defence, but that the entire country cannot trust Labour on defence.

Ms Rachel Squire: It is clear that the future of Britain's defence industry is at risk. I draw attention to the letter in the *Financial Times* this morning from senior industrialists, including the chief executive of British Aerospace, in which they express their concerns about the consequences of the Government's policies for industry, especially in their approach to Europe and the single market. Does the Minister agree that during the lifetime of the Government, the number of jobs in Britain's defence industry has halved, the Government's contribution has been cut by a third, the industry's success has been due to the industry, in spite of the Government's attempts to wreck it and the Government's—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have noticed today that responses from Ministers have been inordinately long. The hon. Lady will be heard in the House. Come to a conclusion, Ms Squire, but your final words will be heard. Come on.

Ms Squire: Thank you, Madam Speaker—and the Government's refusal to work in partnership with the defence industry and draw up a strategy for a secure and long-term future?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. The reason I do not agree is that the success of British industry has been shown by the fact that we have been able to take 25 per cent. of the world market share in the past year. That has been due to the competitive policies pursued by the Government, and to the fact that the Government and British industry have worked together to ensure that we succeed in exports. It is also due to the fact that we have privatised defence industry—privatisation that has been opposed every step of the way by the Labour party.

Eurofighter

9. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the number of Eurofighter aircraft to be ordered by the Royal Air Force. [18043]

Mr. Portillo: We will buy 232 Eurofighters to replace the Tornado F3 and the Jaguar. We may need more in future if Eurofighter proves to be the best replacement for other types of aircraft.

Mr. Lidington: Is my right hon. Friend aware that his answer today will be warmly welcomed by the Royal Air Force, and in particular by my constituents in Halton and at strike command? Does he share my fears that Labour's refusal to exempt the European fighter aircraft from its proposed defence review bodes ill for the future of the Royal Air Force?

Mr. Portillo: It is dismaying that we have been through an entire Question Time and yet again Labour Front Benchers have been unwilling to say that any of the projects that have been mentioned—projects on which thousands of jobs and our armed forces depend—would be exempt from Labour's defence review. People will draw their own conclusions. The prospect should not be as discouraging as my hon. Friend suggests, because if people draw the right conclusions they will ensure that there is not a Labour Government.

Dr. David Clark: May I make it crystal clear yet again that Labour is fully committed to Eurofighter and will order it in office? Why does the Secretary of State persist in playing party politics over Eurofighter—an aeroplane that is so vital for the RAF and for Britain's aerospace industry? Does he not understand that, by doing so, he is giving succour to Eurofighter's enemies at home and abroad, putting at risk thousands of jobs in Britain and threatening the country's security in years to come?

Mr. Portillo: How many Eurofighters is the hon. Gentleman committed to? Is he committed to the stand-off missile, the amphibious assault ships and the frigates? Why does he not answer those questions? Why does he not tell us to what other projects he is committed? The British people know that he is not committed to those things, and they will draw their own conclusions.

Mr. Atkins: What does my right hon. Friend think will be the painful consequences for Eurofighter, British Aerospace, Leyland Trucks and anyone else who provides defence equipment to our armed forces of a defence review as suggested by the Labour party?

Mr. Portillo: After two months of internal struggle, today the Opposition defence spokesman, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), gave a half-hearted promise about Eurofighter that is not worth the paper that it is not written on. He said nothing about the replacement maritime patrol aircraft, the Leyland orders that my right hon. Friend mentioned or the amphibious assault ships, the missiles, the frigates or any of the other projects that the Government have ordered.

There is time before the general election for people to wake up to what a Labour Government would mean: the destruction of jobs and the elimination of orders that are essential for the defence and security of this country and for the deterrence of threats to this country.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 March. [18065]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Hendry: Does the Prime Minister agree that parents everywhere will welcome today's publication of league tables for primary schools? Does he understand their very real anger at those who would deny them the right to know how their children's schools are

performing? Whether or not schools are doing well, parents have an absolute right to know how their children and their local authorities are performing. We understand that, but Labour does not.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of the tables. For the first time, parents will have the information they need to help to choose the appropriate primary schools for their children.

Mr. Foulkes: In Orkney?

The Prime Minister: They do—

Madam Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: It is interesting to note that any prospect of choice or information is an appalling proposition for Opposition Members—no wonder they propose to do away with this information if they ever get the opportunity. The tables expose under-achievement and high truancy, and where they occur: in authorities run by the party of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes).

Mr. Blair: Is the Prime Minister aware of the correspondence from the Association of Meat Inspectors sent to Ministers and the Meat Hygiene Service that shows that, contrary to what we were told last week, serious concern about contamination was being expressed to Ministers and others over a nine-month period and that contamination in abattoirs is getting worse, not better? Those are serious allegations. Will the Prime Minister institute immediate inquiries and ensure that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food publishes a full account of the state of abattoirs, of what warnings were given to Ministers, and of what action was taken?

The Prime Minister: In the past few hours I have seen the letter to which the right hon. Gentleman refers since it attained some notoriety on the lunchtime media. I entirely share the concern of the right hon. Gentleman and the Association of Meat Inspectors to ensure the highest standards of hygiene in slaughterhouses. I am surprised by the contents of the letter for two reasons: first, I am surprised because the AMI is responsible for the enforcement of hygiene rules, and I understand that extra staff have been provided to the Meat Hygiene Service, including at least 250 staff who are responsible for inspection. Secondly, I am surprised because the vice-president of the Association of Meat Inspectors, who is a vet—unlike the general secretary to whose letter the right hon. Gentleman referred—said today that he is

"fully supportive of the Meat Hygiene Service and everything they have achieved in raising standards".

Notwithstanding that point, I have not yet fully had the chance to investigate the letter, but I will most certainly do so.

Mr. Blair: I thank the Prime Minister for that, but will he ensure that we are given a full account of exactly what was said to Ministers over that period of nine months and what the state of abattoirs is? Is there not an unanswerable case for ensuring that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food does not look after the interests of the industry and consumers together, and that we set up a proper, independent food standards agency that can look into these matters and monitor them on behalf of the public?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman raises two important points. Let me try to answer him in some depth on both of them.

As to the importance of what Ministers have been doing, I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary have had a total of 22 meetings on hygiene matters over the last year to deal with abattoirs and related matters. That series of meetings continues, which shows the extent of the Government's concern. I will, of course, look personally at what has happened about those meetings.

I share the right hon. Gentleman's view on the need for independent advice. The point of distinction between us is whether it should come from an agency, or independent advice from scientific experts, but not necessarily an agency—*[Interruption.]* I will explain why not necessarily an agency, and I will use the words that are often used by hon. Members when criticising agencies that exist. Hon. Members often say to me that agencies do not stand at the Dispatch Box; that they are not answerable for what is happening. On a matter such as food safety—the right hon. Gentleman just asked that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food be held accountable—it is, perhaps, right that there should be independent advice. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about that and we have set it in train, but a Minister should stand at the Dispatch Box and answer for the advice that he receives.

Mr. Blair: I thank the Prime Minister for that, but I would just point out to him that, in the letter written last Wednesday, the Association of Meat Inspectors said that

"far from being encouraged to enforce stricter hygiene standards, MHIs are being actively encouraged to ignore breaches of regulations and in some cases threatened if they try to take action".

I understand that inspectors have a responsibility, but surely Ministers do as well. I therefore ask the Prime Minister whether, as a result of his previous answer, he is prepared to look again at the possibility of an independent food standards agency—not to commit himself to it today, I understand that—as a better way to deal with these issues.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for the way in which the right hon. Gentleman poses his question. Let me deal with the first part of it and what instructions were given to inspectors.

Inspectors have been given clear instructions to apply the rules firmly: for example—to pick up one of the points in the letter—if they see signs of any form of contamination, not to stamp meat as fit for human consumption. Their job is to stop such meat reaching the consumer. Abattoir managers and owners who flout those rules face prosecution. The right hon. Gentleman will know of the monthly report on observance of bovine spongiform encephalopathy rules. In addition, members of the AMI—the inspectors—know that they face disciplinary action if they fail to enforce the rules properly. That is a real threat. The Meat Hygiene Service has dismissed a number of employees and disciplined rather more for inadequately carrying out the public safety responsibility of careful examination of abattoirs, and that is right.

Of course I will look at the question of independent advice, but for the reason that I set out a moment ago I do not favour a food standards agency.

Q2. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 March. [18066]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gallie: Does my right hon. Friend welcome, as I do, the high level of investment in the electronics industry in central Scotland? Does he recognise the importance to that industry of manoeuvrability of components and products? Will he consider the requirements of fifth freedoms, which could benefit that industry, particularly by using Prestwick airport as a gateway?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend will know, I visited Prestwick airport 10 days ago to look at its excellent cargo facilities. Granting fifth freedom rights to foreign airlines using Prestwick is attractive, provided United Kingdom airlines are given a fair opportunity to compete and there are matching rights for UK airlines overseas. I shall certainly ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is aware of my hon. Friend's comments. I share my hon. Friend's belief that good transport links are vital to that success.

Mr. Ashdown: If, as the Government claim—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Welcome to the role of grandparent.

Mr. Ashdown: Yes, we hope that we shall be.

If, as the Government claim, today's primary school league tables are a fair and accurate judge, will the Prime Minister consider two facts? Of the top 20 local education authorities, eight have Liberal Democrat control, three have Labour control and only two have Conservative control. According to the tables, Britain's primary education system is now, in the words of *The Express*, the worst in the western world and a national disgrace. After 18 years of Conservative government, does the Prime Minister take any responsibility for that, or is it the fault of the teachers and the Opposition parties?

The Prime Minister: If it were not for the fact that we introduced this information, nobody would know precisely what was happening in schools. As to standards in secondary and primary schools, the fact is that, across the board, it is long-standing Conservative authorities that have the best results, certainly not Labour authorities. The 20 worst secondary schools and the 10 worst primary schools are in Labour authorities. The schools for which the right hon. Gentleman takes credit have been Conservative run for many years, and have only recently been run by the Liberal Democrats.

Q3. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 March. [18067]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Chartered Insurance Institute on its centenary year, which is marked by a major international insurance conference at Westminster today? Are not Governments throughout the world increasingly turning to the private sector to help to meet long-term social costs? Does my right hon. Friend agree that a partnership between insurance companies and the state is the best way of ensuring that future generations can meet their pension needs?

The Prime Minister: If we wish to enshrine the welfare state for our children and our grandchildren, it is necessary to look again at how we can ensure that the provision that is made today is still affordable in years to come. That is why we produced the plans on basic pension plus. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health yesterday announced our partnership scheme for long-term care, and that is why further plans will be announced tomorrow. We are seeking to ensure that the welfare state is enshrined for the long term by taking decisions that every hon. Member knows need to be taken if we are to ensure the continuation and improvement of welfare provision.

Mr. Ashton: As we are only three or four weeks away from the official start of the general election campaign, will the Prime Minister tell us whether, a few weeks before the last general election, the Conservative Government did a deal with the tobacco companies, in which several hundred hoardings were given to the Conservative party in return for an agreement that there would be no ban on tobacco advertising? Is that true? Will he confirm that that deal will not be done again?

The Prime Minister: I confirm that no deals are being done, although I have noticed one: the substantial advertising campaign by the trade unions. Those trade unions fund the Labour party when the deputy leader is not abroad raising funds for the party before denouncing the Conservatives, whom he claims do the same thing.

Q4. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 March. [18068]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Butler: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Church primary schools on their exceptional performance, as shown in the league tables that were published today? Is that not further and conclusive proof that traditional teaching methods, employed in an atmosphere in which achievement is expected and there are strict rules and discipline, are not only the most successful but the only proper methods?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to point to the excellent performance of the Church primaries. About 60 of the 100 best-performing schools in the tables are either Church or grant maintained. They show the success of a policy of promoting choice and diversity in our education system if we wish to promote excellence.

[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I note the hatred of diversity and excellence on the Opposition Benches. I note Opposition plans to abolish grant-maintained schools, to undermine Church schools and to give local education authorities unprecedented control over them. It is very interesting indeed that members of the Labour party would like to deny other parents the opportunities that they exercise themselves.

Q5. **Ms Walley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 March. [18069]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Walley: Does the Prime Minister recall that, five years ago yesterday, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer promised in his Budget speech that he would not increase VAT on fuel? Are we not entitled to know now why the Government did not go ahead with that?

The Prime Minister: I think that we are entitled to know by what amount a windfall tax will add to the cost of fuel for people—and the cost of water, and the cost of all the other utilities. We are promised such a tax; we have not been given any information about the impact of that tax on either the consumer—

Ms Walley *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: There is no point in the hon. Lady's shaking her head; this is the fact of the matter. We have not been given any information about the impact of the tax on either the consumer or the dividends of hundreds of thousands of investors in those industries.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During Defence questions, the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) made a statement that was unfortunately untrue. He suggested—in fact, he did not suggest; he stated—that the silver that I had removed from county hall for safe keeping, to prevent it from being stolen—which, if I may say so, was more than Defence Ministers were able to do for their paintings—had not been returned.

The silver was, of course, handed over to the London residuary body, and was all accounted for. We will get it back when the new Greater London authority is set up. I ask you, Madam Speaker, to invite the hon. Member for Surbiton to correct the record, withdraw his statement and apologise.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. You will have noted that I made no mention of silver; I said "artefacts". I certainly did not say that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) had taken them. I said that they had disappeared from county hall, and, as far as I am aware, they have still not been returned.

Madam Speaker: Those are not points of order. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has certainly made his case, and the matter must rest there.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I understand that the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who asked the Prime Minister a question about the insurance industry, is a paid consultant to the Institute of Insurance Brokers, and a director of an insurance company. Should not that interest have been declared?

Madam Speaker: Not during parliamentary questions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Order. The House determined some time ago that it was not always possible for an hon. Member putting a parliamentary question to declare his interest. Of course, we expect it at the very beginning when any hon. Member makes a speech.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have not finished yet. Hon. Members must sit down. I think that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has made his point, and that the House fully understands it.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Before the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) leaves with his electronic device, could you confirm, Madam Speaker, that there is a ban, enforced by yourself, on electronic devices? When an hon. Gentleman has a message from the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) on his electronic device, which he reads at the Dispatch Box, I suspect that that is a new departure for the House.

Madam Speaker: I would not know who is on the electronic device, but I have requested that electronic devices—which make noises, of course—are not used in the Chamber, and I want to see that carried out.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Are you, Madam Speaker, like me disturbed at the question of interest that was raised by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who himself failed to declare an interest yesterday, a point that I drew attention to in my speech? I find it astonishing that he should come to the Dispatch Box on the following day to make a point about interest, when he himself failed to declare an interest in a speech.

Madam Speaker: I was not aware of that, but I repeat that all Members who have an interest must declare that interest as soon as they rise to begin a speech.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My concern is that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who rose to the Dispatch Box just now, did not declare £100,000-worth of grants to his company from the Highlands and Islands development board. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) made that point yesterday. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North was in full knowledge of that point, and could have said at the Dispatch Box that he himself was guilty of a non-declaration in a speech yesterday.

Madam Speaker: I have replied to that point of order, which was put to me by the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker).

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Could I have your guidance? I tabled a question to the Secretary of State for the Home Department asking what representations had been received from the German Government in relation to bail for Roisin McAliskey, through what channels, and when they were received. Those must be matters of record in that Department; they have been going on for the past four months. The reply is:

"I will reply as soon as possible."

Will you give a ruling that, where information is readily available in a Department, it should be available to hon. Members in answer to parliamentary questions?

Madam Speaker: I have no comment to make on that. The hon. Gentleman has had his response from the Minister, who says that he will reply as soon as possible.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I understand that, a few moments ago, when I had left the Chamber, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) alleged that I had failed to declare an interest in the question that I raised with the Prime Minister. All my interests with the insurance industry are declared in the Register of Members' Interests, and have been for many years, but I have no interest in the Chartered Insurance Institute. It is the main education insurance body in the world, is celebrating its 100th anniversary this week, and is not a commercial organisation.

The hon. Gentleman, who did not give me notice that he was going to raise that point, has demonstrated the extent to which the Labour party has a deep distrust of the insurance industry.

Madam Speaker: I dealt with the matter at the time, as the hon. Gentleman will see when he reads *Hansard.*

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North–West Durham): I wonder whether you can help me, Madam Speaker.

The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) declares in the Register of Members' Interests that he has a remunerated directorship in the AdScene Group plc, a newspaper company. Should he not have further declared that he is using that group's headquarters to telephone-canvass for the general election?

Madam Speaker: I have no evidence of that at all.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Would you, Madam Speaker, clarify your reply to a point of order that was raised a few moments ago? Is it appropriate, correct and permissible to use an electronic device in this House and use it while raising a point of order? You said that you deplored the use of electronic devices that make a noise; you did not specify whether you deplored the use of electronic devices that do not make a noise.

Madam Speaker: I do not think that such an incident has occurred previously. Personally, I do not like the use of such devices in the Chamber. I think that hon. Members should be aware and alert enough to determine for themselves what they are going to say. I should like to consider the point, if I may.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Further to the points of order raised about the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), Madam Speaker. Following what my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said, plainly the point made about him by the hon. Gentleman was factually inaccurate and wrong. Should not the House consider the point that the hon. Gentleman was receiving instructions from somebody via his pager—presumably the Labour party dirty tricks department? Should we not know who was giving him his instructions, and for whom he was acting merely as a messenger boy?

Madam Speaker: The House has heard what I have said. I will consider the matter, and will certainly rule on it at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Pursuant to the issue of pregnant women in prison raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), whereas you are of course right in saying that, if the Home Office response was that it had no information, it might be correct, it is nevertheless a widespread understanding of hon. Members that there is information in the Home Office. As a pregnant woman is in prison in such circumstances, should not the House of Commons dig a little deeper to find out the facts—if, as we are told, information in the Home Office is available?

Madam Speaker: As I understood it, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said that the Minister had replied that he would respond as soon as possible. That does not mean that the Home Office has no information. The Minister said that he would respond as soon as possible, and I expect him to do so.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Who is next? This is rather nice. I call Sir Michael Neubert.

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): Further to your statement a moment ago, Madam Speaker. Would you include in your review the possibility that, if messages are to be communicated to Members in the Chamber by means of the device you have in mind, they could equally be communicated by an earphone in the ear—which, in my opinion, should also be outlawed in this assembly?

Madam Speaker: This is a very difficult matter, but I will look at it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I have got an old-fashioned device here: it is a bit of paper. It says on it that the Tory party was bankrupt last year—by 19 million quid—but it now has a surplus of £40 million. The question is whether anybody will stand up and tell us where the Tories have got it from.

Madam Speaker: I will stand up and tell the hon. Gentleman that the House has had enough of this nonsense.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I will take only serious points of order from now on.

Mr. David Shaw *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I have already taken a point of order from the hon. Gentleman, and will not take another.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Are you sure that it is a point of order, Mr. Gallie? It is not just something that has just occurred to you?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Wait a minute.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Mr. Clifton-Brown has been bobbing up and down. I shall take a point of order from him.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): As we on the Conservative Benches clearly heard the bleeper being operated by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), do we have—

Madam Speaker: Order. Sit down.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will remember that a former Member of this House, who is now a Member of the upper House, had a device that enabled him to take part in debates and understand what was going

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

on. Will you in your ruling take particular care for our colleagues who are blind, deaf or disabled in some other way?

Madam Speaker: Indeed.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would not your difficulties be eased somewhat, Madam Speaker, if the general election were called now, to ease the pre-election atmosphere?

Madam Speaker: West Bromwich, West has been awaiting me for a long time. I should like it to be called as soon as possible.

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose—*

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has already made a point of order. He will resume his seat—one point is enough.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Very simply, I ask for your guidance. You said earlier that the matter of declarable interests on the Register was not relevant to parliamentary questions. However, the sheet for parliamentary questions says "tick". So what is the guidance?

Madam Speaker: Of course it does, but I do not expect an hon. Member who is asking a supplementary question to begin with a long preamble declaring his interests. That information is already declared. We would have to extend Question Time to three hours if I were to expect hon. Members to declare their interests before asking a question.

Mr. Ian Bruce: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Madam Speaker: Order. Let me hear the hon. Gentleman, as he is very anxious. He has already made one point of order, so this one must be very important.

Mr. Bruce: I wonder, Madam Speaker, whether you can give some help to a constituency Member. I am trying, on behalf of Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors, to get to the bottom of germ warfare tests that were conducted in my constituency 30 years ago. I have approached Ministers on the matter, but they have told me that they are unable to obtain the advice given to the then Secretary of State for Defence by his scientists on whether those tests were safe.

In Dorset, we cannot discover exactly what happened and who knew what. My point of order is to ask whether it would be possible for Lord Healey, who was Secretary of State for Defence at the time, to examine those papers and to report to me and to the House on what has happened to my constituents.

Madam Speaker: The activities of any Member of the upper House have nothing to do with me. The hon. Gentleman might have thought of the problem—which he has faced for a long time—rather earlier, and initiated a full Adjournment debate on it, in which he would have received a reply from a Minister.

Mr. Gallie *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Has the hon. Member already made a point of order?

Mr. Gallie: No, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Then he must.

Mr. Gallie: Bearing in mind Column 41 of yesterday's *Hansard*, the comment on the large sums of money paid to a company with which the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) is associated, the fact that he has returned to the Chamber, and your earlier comment, Madam Speaker, would it not be in order for him to apologise to the House?

Mr. Wilson: As a small business man, I am very proud of my association with that company. I am also very proud of the fact that, from the day that it was formed, I have both practised and preached openness about every penny that it should receive; if only Conservative Members would practise or preach the same. My association with that company is well known, and it is and always has been registered in the Register of Members' Interests.

What Conservative Members object to so strongly is that a very successful socialist newspaper is operating in that part of Scotland. It has been very influential, and it will continue to be very influential in making the highlands and islands of Scotland a Tory-free zone.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should have made the declaration yesterday.

BILL PRESENTED

Single Homeless Persons (Scotland)

Mr. Andrew Welsh, supported by Mr. John McAllion, Mr. James Wallace, Ms Roseanna Cunningham, Mrs. Maria Fyfe and Mr. David Marshall, presented a Bill to make provision about single homeless persons in Scotland; to make reforms of the laws on homelessness, social security and housing benefits; to set up a National Hostels Inspectorate and national standards for care; to make amendments to the Representation of the People Act; to give additional duties to General Practitioners; to amend the duties and powers of local authorities relating to young people in care; to cede to the European Union competence over specific matters relating to housing and homelessness; to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of homelessness; and related matters: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 May, and to be printed [Bill 133].

Warm Homes and Energy Conservation (Fifteen Year Programme)

3.48 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to draw up and facilitate the carrying out, over a period of fifteen years, of a programme of action to provide at least 500,000 households per year with a comprehensive package of home insulation and other energy efficiency improvements; and for connected purposes.

In the first two weeks of January 1997, 10,000 more people died than we would normally expect in the period at the beginning of the year. Those deaths coincided with a winter freeze, and they were overwhelmingly cold-related. Although that excessive number might have been extreme, it is difficult to say that it was unusual.

In that context, it is difficult to know whether we should be debating this as a scandal or a tragedy. Those deaths form part of the annual cull of the fuel-cold and old in Britain. They are caused by neglect, and are the price paid by the public for Britain's failure to have a serious programme to challenge and eliminate fuel poverty. The 50,000 avoidable deaths each winter are concentrated among those who have to make the difficult choice between eating and heating during the freeze. One could say, sadly, that at least their dilemma is resolved by death.

The situation is a scandal. Britain has poorer home insulation standards than those set by Scandinavia in 1945—more than 50 years ago. Some 8 million households in Britain today are fuel-poor, meaning that more than 15 million people shiver their way through each winter; they shivered through last winter, and they will shiver through next winter and all succeeding winters until we face up to the root cause of the situation—the problem of cold homes in this country.

Britain is not indifferent to the problem of the fuel-poor. A plethora of local initiatives make laudable efforts to tackle fuel poverty. A patchwork quilt of Government schemes attempt to do the same, but they are a piecemeal series of fragments, not a coherent policy. The Bill would reclaim the integrity of this House, which once was not afraid to engage in the joined-up thinking that we were then proud to call a housing policy. The Bill does not duck some of the difficult issues involved. It offers a serious programme, with a 15-year commitment to providing 500,000 households a year with a comprehensive package of home insulation and energy-saving materials.

Hon. Members of all parties have been involved in drawing up the Bill. They know that there are real costs involved. We have tried to provide background briefings that do not duck the issues. We know that there would be a net saving to the country over 15 years of more than £3 billion—a saving in health care costs, a saving in avoidable housing costs, a saving in the 50 per cent. of wasted energy that pours out of Britain's housing because of inadequate insulation, and a saving in lives. However, the programme has to be sustained on the basis of initial funding to launch it.

To reflect the diversity of those who are behind the Bill, we have tried to offer different ways to fund the programme, so that no party should feel unable to support it. However, we all recognise that the common starting point is that Britain must spend to save—to save on health care costs, to save on housing stock and administration costs, to save on environmental pollution, and to save lives. That is necessary to tackle the current scandal.

Britain is alone among European countries in having a long-standing problem of death through hypothermia in winter. In other parts of Europe, while people know that they may die if they are caught outside in a snow blizzard, they do not expect to die in the coldness of their home. I know of no pensioner in the land who looks forward to the bracing experience of shivering to death throughout the winter, but I know many who fear that they will face that reality.

We need to tell those pensioners that the House will tackle the dereliction of their housing experience. The root cause of that is the dereliction of our political obligations. Those derelictions are in the absence of a serious programme to tackle and eliminate fuel poverty.

The financing of the Bill would be an exciting prospect. I have had support from both sides of the House, and the Bill has brought together a gathering of the great and good outside the House. It is important to note that its supporters range from Age Concern to the Child Poverty Action Group, from local authorities to Neighbourhood Energy Action, from the Churches to the chambers of commerce and virtually every environmental campaign group. Each of those supporters expects not that the Bill will become law in the dog days of this Parliament, but that it will set the agenda for the Government who are to come, and the century to come.

The Bill is the declaration of the public expectation of what Parliament has to deliver sooner rather than later. I am pleased to be able to introduce the Bill with the support of hon. Members from all parties. Better still is the recognition that it is a Bill, not for all parties, but for all seasons. It is a Bill to restore to the people the right to enjoy our seasons, not to live in fear of them.

It is a Bill to eliminate fuel poverty and restore to people the right to know that they can face a winter without simply having to pray that they may hibernate through the coldest parts of it. On that basis, I am proud to present the Bill, and I hope that it will be given further platforms until it becomes an Act of Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Alan Simpson, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Harry Greenway, Ms Diane Abbott, Mr. Peter Temple-Morris, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Llew Smith, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Sir Robert Hicks, Mr. John McAllion and Sir Andrew Bowden.

Warm Homes and Energy Conservation (Fifteen Year Programme)

Mr. Alan Simpson accordingly presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to draw up and facilitate the carrying out, over a period of fifteen years, of a programme of action to provide at least 500,000 households per year with a comprehensive package of home insulation and other energy efficiency improvements; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Tuesday 18 March, and to be printed [Bill 132].

FINANCE BILL [*WAYS AND MEANS*]

Resolved,

Deductions in respect of annuity payments

That provision may be included in the Finance Bill about payments made in respect of annuities by companies carrying on life assurance business.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Resolved,

Transactions in futures and options etc

That provision may be included in the Finance Bill about the taxation of profits and gains arising from a transaction involving the disposal of—

(a) rights and obligations under a commodity or financial futures contract; or

(b) a traded or financial option or an option relating to such a contract.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

As amended (in the Committee and in the Standing Committee), considered.

3.57 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. By long-standing practice, you have the right to reject or accept new clauses and amendments for debate. I seek your guidance. You will have noticed that this morning I tabled new clause 7 for debate. It was signed by more hon. Members than any of the others—50, I think—and was the only one with all-party support. The new clause concerns transferable allowances, which are of vital concern.

From the provisional selection list, I see that you decided not to select my new clause. Without asking you to give your reasons, is it too late to ask you to reconsider, or to give me guidance on when I can raise the matter? From reading the list of amendments that you have selected for debate, it seems to me that there will be no opportunity to debate transferable allowances on the marriage care allowance issue on Report. If that is not possible, could I raise the matter on Third Reading?

I had hoped that, when replying, the Minister would agree that I had made a good point and say that he should produce a report. I am anxious to get the matter on the record and for there to be some debate on this important issue.

Madam Speaker: It is far too late for me to reconsider. I gave full consideration to the new clause this morning. The hon. Gentleman might try to raise the issue on Third Reading if he so wishes. I regret the fact that he has been disappointed, but he has answered the point of order himself: I do not give reasons for non-selection.

New clause 8

ANNUITY BUSINESS OF INSURANCE COMPANIES

'.—(1) In section 437 of the Taxes Act 1988 (extent to which payments in respect of new annuities are to be treated as charges on income), for subsections (1A) and (1B) there shall be substituted the following subsection—

"(1A) In the computation, otherwise than in accordance with the provisions applicable to Case I of Schedule D, of the profits for any accounting period of a company's life assurance business, new annuities paid by the company in that period shall be brought into account by treating an amount equal to the income limit for that period as a sum disbursed as expenses of management of the company for that period."

(2) In subsection (1C) of that section (interpretation of section), after "this section" there shall be inserted "(but subject to subsections (1CA) to (1CD) below)"; and after that subsection there shall be inserted the following subsections—

"(1CA) Where a new annuity ('the actual annuity') is a steep-reduction annuity, the income limit for an accounting period of the company paying the annuity shall be computed for the purposes of this section as if—

(a) the contract providing for the actual annuity provided instead for the annuities identified by subsections (1CB) and (1CC) below; and

(b) the consideration for each of those annuities were to be determined by the making of a just and reasonable apportionment of the consideration for the actual annuity.

(1CB) The annuities mentioned in subsection (1CA)(a) above are—

(a) an annuity the payments in respect of which are confined to the payments in respect of the actual annuity that fall to be made before the earliest time for the making in respect of the actual annuity of a reduced payment such as is mentioned in section 437A(1)(c); and

(b) subject to subsection (1CC) below, an annuity the payments in respect of which are all the payments in respect of the actual annuity other than those mentioned in paragraph (a) above.

(1CC) Where an annuity identified by paragraph (b) of subsection (1CB) above ('the later annuity') would itself be a steep–reduction annuity, the annuities mentioned in subsection (1CA)(a) above—

(a) shall not include the later annuity; but

(b) shall include, instead, the annuities which would be identified by subsection (1CB) above (with as many further applications of this subsection as may be necessary for securing that none of the annuities mentioned in subsection (1CA)(a) above is a steep–reduction annuity) if references in that subsection to the actual annuity were references to the later annuity.

(1CD) Subsections (1CA) to (1CC) above shall be construed in accordance with section 437A."

(3) After that section there shall be inserted the following section—

"Meaning of 'steep-reduction annuity' etc

437A.—(1) For the purposes of section 437 an annuity is a steep–reduction annuity if—

(a) the amount of any payment in respect of the annuity (but not the term of the annuity) depends on any contingency other than the duration of a human life or lives;

(b) the annuitant is entitled in respect of the annuity to payments of different amounts at different times; and

(c) those payments include a payment ('a reduced payment') of an amount which is substantially smaller than the amount of at least one of the earlier payments in respect of that annuity to which the annuitant is entitled.

(2) Where there are different intervals between payments to which an annuitant is entitled in respect of any annuity, the question whether or not the conditions in subsection (1)(b) and (c) above are satisfied in the case of that annuity shall be determined by assuming—

(a) that the annuitant's entitlement, after the first payment, to payments in respect of that annuity is an entitlement to payments at yearly intervals on the anniversary of the first payment; and

(b) that the amount to which the annuitant is assumed to be entitled on each such anniversary is equal to the annuitant's assumed entitlement for the year ending with that anniversary.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (2) above an annuitant's assumed entitlement for any year shall be determined as follows—

(a) the annuitant's entitlement to each payment in respect of the annuity shall be taken to accrue at a constant rate during the interval between the previous payment and that payment; and

(b) his assumed entitlement for any year shall be taken to be equal to the aggregate of the amounts which, in accordance with paragraph (a) above, are treated as accruing in that year.

(4) In the case of an annuity to which subsection (2) above applies, the reference in section 437(1CB)(a) to the making of a reduced payment shall be construed as if it were a reference to the making of a payment in respect of that annuity which (applying subsection (3)(a) above) is taken to accrue at a rate that is substantially less than the rate at which at least one of the earlier payments in respect of that annuity is taken to accrue.

(5) Where—

(a) any question arises for the purposes of this section whether the amount of any payment in respect of any annuity—

(i) is substantially smaller than the amount of, or

(ii) accrues at a rate substantially less than,

an earlier payment in respect of that annuity, and

(b) the annuitant or, as the case may be, every annuitant is an individual who is beneficially entitled to all the rights conferred on him as such an annuitant,

that question shall be determined without regard to so much of the difference between the amounts or rates as is attributable to a reduction falling to be made as a result of the occurrence of a death.

(6) Where the amount of any one or more of the payments to which an annuitant is entitled in respect of an annuity depends on any contingency, his entitlement to payments in respect of that annuity shall be determined for the purposes of section 437(1CA) to (1CC) and this section according to whatever (applying any relevant actuarial principles) is the most likely outcome in relation to that contingency.

(7) Where any agreement or arrangement has effect for varying the rights of an annuitant in relation to a payment in respect of any annuity, that payment shall be taken, for the purposes of section 437(1CA) to (1CC) and this section, to be a payment of the amount to which the annuitant is entitled in accordance with that agreement or arrangement.

(8) References in this section to a contingency include references to a contingency that consists wholly or partly in the exercise by any person of any option."

(4) Section 434B(2) of that Act (treatment of annuities paid by an insurance company) shall cease to have effect and accordingly—

(a) in section 76(2A)(b) of that Act (limit on expenses of management of insurance companies), the word "and" shall be inserted at the end of sub–paragraph (ii), and sub–paragraph (iv) (together with the word "and" immediately preceding it) shall be omitted; and

(b) in section 337(2B) of that Act, for "the references in sections 338(2) and 434B(2)" there shall be substituted "the reference in section 338(2)".

(5) In paragraph 9B of Schedule 19AC to that Act (subsection (3) inserted in section 434B in relation to overseas life insurance companies), for the words from the beginning to "An" there shall be substituted—

"9B. The following section shall be treated as inserted after section 434A—

'Treatment of annuities

434AA. An".

(6) In sub–paragraph (1) of paragraph 16 of Schedule 7 to the Finance Act 1991 (which makes transitional provision for annuities under contracts made in accounting periods beginning before 1st January 1992), for the words before paragraph (a) there shall be substituted—

"(1) In the computation, otherwise than in accordance with the provisions applicable to Case I of Schedule D, of the profits for any accounting period of an insurance company's life assurance business, an amount equal to the lesser of the following amounts shall be treated (if it is not nil) as a sum disbursed as expenses of management of the company for that period, that is to say—".

(7) Subsections (1) and (4) to (6) above have effect in relation to accounting periods beginning after 5th March 1997.

(8) Subsections (2) and (3) above have effect in relation to accounting periods ending on or after 5th March 1997 but do not affect the computation of the capital elements contained in any annuity payments made before that date.'.—*[Mr. Jack.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 20 and 21.

Mr. Jack: It is important to give the House some reasons why the new clause has appeared at a relatively late stage. That happened simply because it was only literally in the past few weeks that the Inland Revenue discovered what was going on. Tax avoiders cannot expect some sort of close season during the passage of a Finance Bill when, having discovered their tricks, we will not act to stop them.

A sharp-eyed inspector of taxes worked out that something funny was going on after investigating parts of a bank's tax affairs at which the company would not have expected him to look, and thereby discovered the basis of the new clause. His action clearly demonstrated the benefit of our "spend to save" initiative.

The trick that lies at the heart of the matter involves the bank buying a series of annuities from a life insurance company that are in theory to last for the life of bank employees in their 20s, but the pattern of payments is structured so that the capital paid is returned with interest within five years and after that a trivial amount is paid to keep the annuity going.

The tax rules on annuities have the result that nearly all the payment is classed as income, because annuities on the lives of younger people are deemed to consist mostly of income. If the person holding an oddly structured annuity of that sort were an individual, the effect of the rules would be to charge him to tax on far more income than was justified, so an individual annuitant would not take out such an annuity.

When a bank holds the annuity, because of the way in which it is taxed as a trader, it makes no difference to it what part of the annuity is treated under the tax rules as income, as the rules do not affect banks; but the insurance company gets relief for all the payments treated by the rules as income when in commercial reality they are a return of capital.

The new clause proposes that, when an annuity contract involves a substantial reduction in the amount of an annuity payment at any time, the annuity is treated for the tax purposes of the life insurance company as if it were two separate annuities, one short term with high payments and one long term with low payments. That will ensure that the life company gets relief for the income return inherent in the contract, but no more.

The new clause applies to payments made on or after 5 March 1997, when we announced the new measures. We thought long and hard before confining the measure to future payments. The House is rightly wary of retrospective legislation imposing a charge to tax on payments that have already been made, and we felt it right that in, for example, the leasing clauses, we applied the new rules only to payments made after Budget day; but, if companies continue to abuse the tax system in such blatant ways, I cannot say that we would never introduce retrospective legislation in appropriate cases. This case is on the borderline, and I have given it the benefit of the doubt, but the message to tax avoiders is: beware.

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): I am grateful to the Minister for that explanation and for providing an earlier briefing on the matter. I add my congratulations to his sharp-eyed inspector of taxes on spotting the abuse.

As I understand it, the new clause is in essence intended to prevent an abuse which has recently developed whereby a life insurance company gets favourable tax treatment by using a financial trading company, such as a bank, as the recipient of front-end loaded annuity payments. The tax position of the financial trader, the bank, means that it is taxed only on the difference between the amount paid for the annuities and the amount received from them, rather than on the total income.

The insurance company gains by making large early payments on an annuity to reduce its overall tax liability. It treats the payments as income, even though they are in effect capital, as they involve the payment of the bulk of the value of the annuity. That is, in essence, the nature of the abuse. Both the bank and the insurance company gain from the device and the only loser is the Exchequer or the taxpayer.

Although new clause 8 seems to be a sensible measure, I have several questions. Can the Minister say how many companies are taking advantage of the arrangement? Am I right in thinking that one particular insurance company has been at the forefront of this avoidance scam? What does he estimate the losses to the Exchequer to have been? What is the potential loss? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. More electronic devices. There is a ruling about that. Will the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) remove both himself and the device until it has stopped?

Mr. Milburn: We seem to be having a problem with electronic devices.

What will the introduction of new clause 8 mean in terms of protection for the Exchequer? I have a question about the means that the Government have chosen to close off the abuse. It is being stopped, as I understand it, by two means—most notably, by deeming annuity payments to be management expenses of insurance companies rather than charges, as, historically and economically, they have always been regarded. Insurance companies have more flexibility in respect of what they can do with surplus charges than with excess management expenses. For example, where there are surplus charges in an insurance company's purchase annuity business, the loss can be surrendered against profits in another part of the group. Although I cannot think of an example off the top of my head of an innocent insurance company that could be adversely affected by new clause 8, theoretically there could be. What consideration did the Minister give to targeting the abuse more precisely rather than changing the overall basis on which annuities rank for tax relief in insurance companies?

We must take particular care in dealing with insurance, because the Minister knows as well as I do that the insurance industry is a key part of the UK's financial services sector, which contributes about 18 per cent. of our gross domestic product and employs hundreds of

thousands of people. It is an important sector of the economy, and has been successful in recent years, both domestically and internationally. When we take action that affects the sector, wherever possible we must ensure that we are helping, rather than hindering, the industry's efforts. I seek assurances on that point.

I also seek an assurance that new clause 8 will have no repercussions for the many members of the public who take out ordinary annuities. I appreciate that the device that new clause 8 seeks to close down is not one that ordinary individuals use, but it is important that the Minister takes the opportunity of giving an absolute assurance to people taking out ordinary annuities that they will not be affected. Ordinary policyholders should not suffer as a result of misbehaviour in an isolated part of the corporate sector.

In essence, we welcome the measure and the prior briefings that the Minister was able to afford us on the matter. I simply seek reassurances on the points that I raised.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) for the way in which he supported new clause 8. His support for the sharp-eyed revenue inspector will be warmly welcomed; I add mine.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the number of companies that we have identified. So far, one example has been found and the action proposed in new clause 8 will save up to £100 million in tax loss alone. We estimate that the tax loss at this moment probably amounts to about £20 million; but, if we had not taken action, some £1.5 billion in tax might have been at risk.

Mr. Milburn: The Minister says that one company was taking advantage of this tax avoidance scam. Does he know whether the industry at large was contemplating following that company's initiative?

Mr. Jack: In the course of investigating one company's set of books, the Inland Revenue discovered the problem. Obviously, the Revenue will look at other examples if they come to light; in any case, we acted quickly, and the new clause should be a deterrent to others that might seek to follow suit. I cannot guarantee that no other such attempts were in the pipeline at the time of the first discovery, but as we moved swiftly—within weeks of the discovery—to close the loophole, I hope that we have ring-fenced this anti-avoidance measure.

The hon. Gentleman went on to ask about the mechanisms involved in ensuring that the new clause will put a stop to this sort of tax avoidance. It is important to distinguish between the ring fencing, as a result of this work, of the losses in this area of life assurance, to prevent them from being used elsewhere in a company, and another more specific element. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has a copy of the notes on clauses—if he does not, I apologise. Paragraph 31 shows that the object of the proposal—to divide the annuity arrangement into two and effectively to increase the amount in repayment, to capital as opposed to income—is subtly to remove the beneficial effects of this type of activity in respect of the I minus E calculation. That calculation is at the heart of the way life assurance companies are taxed on their annuity business. How the avoidance is rendered unattractive is described in some detail in the notes on clauses.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the innocent, at company or individual level, are protected. I can assure him that companies that are not seeking to contrive such arrangements will not, to the best of our knowledge, be affected. One of the difficulties of this sort of anti-avoidance work is that we cannot be certain how many people have attempted avoidance. In this case, we were lucky enough to have had a sharp-eyed inspector who spotted the problem, and we hope that the new clause will be a shot across the bows of anyone contemplating a variation on the theme. Nevertheless, I cannot guarantee that some who may look innocent but are actually up to their tricks will be caught by the measure. Still, the new clause, and the Opposition's strong support for it, will send out a powerful message.

The hon. Gentleman asked, finally, whether ordinary individuals with annuities will be affected in any way. The answer is no.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 9

CONSORTIUM CLAIMS FOR GROUP RELIEF

'. In section 410 of the Taxes Act 1988 (group relief not available in certain cases including those where a person, either alone or with connected persons, controls 75% or more of the voting rights in a company owned by a consortium), in the definition of "connected persons" in subsection (5) after "in accordance with section 839" there shall be inserted "but as if subsection (7) of that section (persons acting together to control a company are connected) were omitted".'.—*[Mr. Jack.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Jack: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I undertook to introduce the new clause in Committee in response to a new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg), to whom I am grateful for his assiduous efforts. The point that my hon. Friend and others have made to me concerned the genuine and potentially damaging uncertainty created among those considering whether to enter into joint ventures through consortium companies. Consortiums are an important and valuable business tool. That is reflected in the relief, similar to group relief, made available to certain consortiums. That relief must be protected by anti-avoidance rules.

The concern is that, following a Court of Appeal decision last year, one of those rules might deny relief solely because members of a consortium enter into a shareholders' or joint venture agreement as a normal part of their commercial activities. We have to take care here, because we are, after all, dealing with an anti-avoidance provision—which is why I could not accept my hon. Friend's new clause in Committee.

We have, however, found a way of removing the uncertainty from those entering these sorts of agreements without putting the Exchequer at additional risk. That is what the new clause does; I commend it to the House.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for introducing new clause 9 to deal with potential problems in respect of consortium relief. The new clause will deal

[Mr. Barry Legg]

with the concerns that I sought to address with the new clause that I tabled in Committee. His efforts will help a number of major consortiums and their shareholders to ensure that their funds are effectively and properly used.

I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend could offer some guidance in respect of the position of consortiums and their shareholders during 1996. I understand that the amendment to the legislation will be effective from Royal Assent. Can he tell me whether, following the decision in Steele *v.* EVC International NV, the Inland Revenue is likely to interpret the existing legislation in a way that would prejudice the 1996 consortium relief claims that might arise under the bona fide commercial arrangements which he has now put in place? Can he also assure me that this relief will be available in 1997 and in the future?

4.15 pm

Mr. Milburn: This important new clause is intended to clarify the rules governing consortium relief. Again, I am grateful to the Minister for alerting us to the background to the issue, which was raised in Committee by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South–West (Mr. Legg), who tabled his own new clause. At the time, the Minister expressed concern about that new clause being potentially open to abuse, and he gave a commitment in Committee that he would come back with a Government new clause. He has honoured that commitment today.

The new clause seeks to clear up the tax rules on consortium relief following the May 1996 Court of Appeal decision in the case of Steele *v.* EVC International NV which, by providing a wide definition of connected persons, effectively restricted group relief. Understandably, the court's decision has given rise to some concern among commercial organisations that enter into joint venture agreements. It is clear that such agreements are increasingly becoming par for the course: one thinks particularly of the role of consortiums in relation to private finance initiative projects, and one would expect the influence of such consortiums to increase in future. That pooling by companies—sometimes of very different backgrounds—of expertise and resources is a sensible way of proceeding and reflects the trend whereby the modern company does not try to provide all services by itself, but instead contracts in, buys out, or works together with other like-minded companies on a specific project.

To date, the tax treatment has been to offer participating companies tax relief on losses from the consortium company in which they hold shares according to the proportion of their shareholding in the consortium company. That sort of arrangement is especially important in the context of long-term and major infrastructure projects, which may involve considerable initial investment and, therefore, early losses. The Court of Appeal decision seemed to say that, where there was a means of participating companies' governing the policy of the joint venture company, they would lose their right to tax relief because they could be defined as connected persons. Existing tax rules prohibit relief where certain types of arrangements are entered into: for example, where someone and others—connected persons—are acting together to obtain at least 75 per cent. of the votes in the joint venture or consortium company.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West said in Committee that some people in the City were advising companies not to enter into joint venture agreements, given the Court of Appeal ruling and the subsequent advice issued by the Inland Revenue in December 1996. I do not know to what extent that is happening, but, obviously, erecting significant new obstacles to legitimate commercial activity is a matter of very serious concern. I believe that the Minister has recognised the concerns, and proposes by means of the new clause to remove the uncertainty by eliminating the acting together rules from the particular arrangements test in which they are to be used.

I should be grateful if the Minister would clarify some important points about the operation of new clause 9. What is the object of the clause, and what arrangements will be regarded as outside the new criteria for gaining tax relief? In what regard does he believe the existing rules have proved so deficient that they have deterred potential joint venture arrangements? Obviously, it would be a matter of concern if important projects had been deterred in any way because of the operation of the rule, especially in the light of the Court of Appeal decision and the subsequent Revenue guidance in December 1996.

How long have the Government been aware of the deficiencies in the current rules? Have they responded to specific representations that have been made during the few months since the Court of Appeal judgment and the issue of the Inland Revenue guidance?

Perhaps the Minister will answer two significant points on the new clause when he replies to this short debate. First, can he give us an idea of the cost of the measure in a full year—has the Revenue gauged the implications for the Exchequer? Secondly, will he give some assurances that the changes to group relief structures will not result in new abuses? If we close loopholes to encourage productive investment, it is important that taxpayers receive an assurance that their interests are properly looked after.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman has posed me six questions, but I hope that he will forgive me if I respond first to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg), who asked a specific question. The change will have effect from the date of Royal Assent; but the Inland Revenue will not seek to argue that a shareholder agreement might prevent consortium relief on the ground of acting together for any open case.

The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) asked about the object of the new clause. I hope that my introductory remarks, and my comments in Committee, have shown what it is about. The new clause resulted from uncertainty created by the Steele *v.* EVC International NV judgment; we have sought to end that uncertainty.

The hon. Member for Darlington asked about the existing rules. I have made it clear that we wished, not to undermine the existing avoidance rules, but merely to clarify the operation of consortium relief in exactly the terms that he has used.

The hon. Member for Darlington asked how long we had been aware of deficiencies in the current rules. Following the decision in the Steele *v.* EVC International NV case, we received representations about whether that

form of acting together conflicted with consortium relief, and that effectively gave rise to the uncertainty that the hon. Gentleman expressed.

The Inland Revenue issued its tax bulletin in December 1996 to try to reassure those who had doubts following the Steele *v.* EVC International NV court decision, but that alone was not enough to provide reassurance, although in our view the position was clear. Matters were brought to a head when my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South–West proposed his own legislative solution, which we subsequently refined into the new clause.

I cannot answer questions about cost. We have merely clarified the use of an existing relief. We are not creating any new opportunities; instead, we are merely allowing that which would normally have carried on within the existing curtilage of the law. We are not creating new opportunities. We are merely clarifying the operation of the existing relief.

I was asked, finally, whether these changes occasioned the opportunity for new abuses. With respect, that was why we targeted the new clause precisely so as to ensure that we hung on to the proper anti-avoidance measures that are part and parcel of the arrangements that we are discussing, but without disrupting the proper use of the consortium reliefs to which the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend have rightly attested.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 10

FUTURES AND OPTIONS: TRANSACTIONS WITH GUARANTEED RETURNS

'.—(1) After section 127 of the Taxes Act 1988 there shall be inserted the following section—

"Futures and options: transactions with guaranteed returns

127A. Schedule 5AA (which makes provision for the taxation of the profits and gains arising from transactions in futures and options that are designed to produce guaranteed returns) shall have effect."

(2) After Schedule 5 to that Act there shall be inserted, as Schedule 5AA to that Act, the Schedule set out in Schedule *(Futures and options: taxation of guaranteed returns)* to this Act.

(3) In section 128 of that Act (profits arising from commodity and financial futures etc. to be taxed only under the provisions relating to chargeable gains)—

(a) after the word "which", where it first occurs, there shall be inserted "is not chargeable to tax in accordance with Schedule 5AA and"; and

(b) for "that Schedule" there shall be substituted "Schedule D".

(4) In section 399 of that Act (withdrawal of loss relief for losses from dealing in futures etc.), after subsection (1) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(1A) Subsection (1) above does not apply to a loss arising from a transaction to which Schedule 5AA applies."

(5) In section 469(9) of that Act (sections 686 and 687 disapplied in relation to unauthorised unit trusts), at the end there shall inserted "except as respects income to which section 686 is treated as applying by virtue of paragraph 7 of Schedule 5AA."

(6) Subject to subsection (7) below, this section and Schedule *(Futures and options: taxation of guaranteed returns)* to this Act shall have effect, and be deemed to have had effect, for chargeable periods ending on or after 5th March 1997 in relation to profits and gains realised, and losses sustained, on or after that date.

(7) In relation to profits and gains realised, and losses sustained, on or after 5th March 1997, paragraph 1(6) and (7) of the Schedule 5AA to the Taxes Act 1988 (rule against double counting) inserted by this section shall be deemed to have had effect for chargeable periods beginning before that date (as well as for those beginning on or after that date).'.—*[Mrs. Angela Knight.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government new schedule 1—*Futures and options: Taxation of guaranteed returns.*

Mrs. Knight: The purpose of the new clause and the associated schedule is to counter an avoidance undertaken by the use of transactions in derivatives that produce a guaranteed return on investments.

The avoidance devices can take many forms, but essentially they turn income into capital gains. The background note to the explanatory note gives an example of an avoidance device that the new clause covers. It is called a "box spread", and it uses four options that are related to the FTSE 100 index. We first learned of the use of this avoidance device last summer. It was being used by an authorised unit trust. The Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds responded by suggesting that a change should be made to the accounting rules in the relevant statement of recommended practice—or SORP, for short—to prevent this abuse. We accepted the association's assurances.

Evidence has come to light, however, that the avoidance device was being used by others. For the moment, we shall keep faith with the unit trust industry's assurances that its SORP will be effective in countering any use of the device by authorised unit trusts. For others, the new clause will apply only where there is a scheme or an arrangement involving two or more transactions that is designed to produce a guaranteed return from the disposal of one or more futures or options, and only if that return is in substance similar to interest. It will apply from 5 March. I commend the new clause and associated schedule to the House.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): We welcome the new clause as it will close a loophole. We accept many of the points that the Economic Secretary has made. There remain, however, some questions, some of them technical and others that are broader. Perhaps I should start with the broad questions.

First, how much will be saved by the implementation of the new clause? Is there some concern that the Government may be faced with the development of further avoidance techniques? What steps are the Government taking to prevent the similar exploitation of the different tax treatments of various financial instruments? We wish to be reassured that the Government have an overall strategy and that we are not merely waiting for some clever tax specialist to find a new angle to exploit. We hope that the Government have a strategy, by the use of which they will get ahead of the tax avoidance industry and ensure that revenue is protected.

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

Given the importance of the City and of the financial instruments that concern us, what steps are the Government taking to ensure that bona fine business does not suffer as a result of the misbehaviour of some? Those are some of the broader questions that we wish to raise.

As the Economic Secretary says, the new clause is aimed at counteracting an avoidance device that effectively turns interest coming to capital gains into something that may be more favourably taxed. As the House will know, futures and options are financial instruments that are used by companies and individuals to manage risk, and increasingly financial risks. For example, a metal-bashing company in the midlands may purchase an option contract on the London metal exchange to protect itself against unfavourable price changes in key raw materials. UK tax law treats futures and options as capital assets when they are in the hands of taxpayers who are not financial traders—not banks and the like. Therefore, if the midlands company exercised or sold the contract and made a gain, it would be taxed as receiving a capital gain. Similarly, a loss on the contract would be taxed as a capital loss.

4.30 pm

The abuse occurs when a taxpayer—usually a cash-rich taxpaying company—purchases a specially constructed financial derivative in favour of a usually higher-yielding conventional deposit. Such arrangements may not be abusive if the financial derivative exposes the purchasing company to the usual risks inherent in such instruments. However, the Government are rightly seeking to prevent cases where the derivatives are structured to expose the purchaser to essentially the same risks of movements in interest rates as the purchaser would be exposed to simply by purchasing a conventional deposit.

The new clause is broadly welcomed. Its objectives are worthy, but let us examine some of the more technical aspects. The new legislation seems to overcome the mischief by applying a charge under case IV of schedule D to profits realised on or after 5 March 1997 from the futures or options concerned. Some have suggested that taxing under case IV of schedule D is strange. Should they not be deemed to be non-trading debits and credits arising from a loan relationship under the Finance Act 1996? Those are amounts that are axiomatically equivalent to interest by definition arising from contracts which, but for failures in definition, would have been non-trading items under the Finance Act 1994 financial instruments regime. The legislation applies just as much to hedged transactions that were entered into for purely commercial reasons, with no intention to secure a tax advantage, as to avoidance transactions.

If schedule 5AA generates a D IV gain, a trader can eliminate it, presumably, by a corresponding non-trading deficit. However, if schedule 5AA generates a D IV loss, which can hardly have been an effective tax avoidance transaction under the existing rules, a trader cannot use this and will probably have to do an artificial schedule 5AA transaction in order to use the D IV loss. One of our advisers suggested to me that—to use his words—that might be daft. Perhaps the Minister can reassure us that that is not the case, and that, although we have only just moved derivatives out of D IV and into D III and non-trading deficits, this way of dealing with matters will work.

The next issue is not so technical and concerns unit trusts. As the Minister pointed out, it became apparent in the summer of 1996 that unit trusts were exploiting this form of arbitrage to market a product for investors. The close capital account was the main example. I have a news report which is effectively an advertisement for the close capital account launched by Close Fund Management. Although the purpose was apparently to announce plans to outlaw moves in relation to unit trusts, it seems that the present clause does not apply to unit trusts. However, as the Economic Secretary pointed out, the intention was to try to deal with the matter by way of a practice direction issued by the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation—IMRO.

We need further reassurances that the Minister is satisfied not just by the Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds agreeing to abide by the direction. Perhaps she could provide more substantial reassurance that although a decision was initially made to examine unit trusts, they have now been satisfactorily dealt with. Will the Minister assure us that, if problems arise with unit trusts, the Treasury will act very quickly—general elections notwithstanding? The Treasury must monitor the situation closely, and the revenue must be protected for the sake of AUTIF and everyone else.

I seek the Minister's reassurances regarding a more technical area. Will she confirm that the schedule is being dealt with? That is very important. I have several questions about paragraphs 4(4) and 4(5) of schedule 5AA. If the Minister cannot respond to my somewhat technical points now—I appreciate that it may take some time to answer them—perhaps she could reply in writing.

The grants of options are not disposables under schedule 5AA—notwithstanding that they are under the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992—so long as there is a later disposal of something else. Where an option is granted and not exercised, the grant of an option is taken to be a disposal only as and when a disposal takes place with respect to a related transaction—not necessarily one arising under the option contract. Will the Minister clarify precisely what those parts of the schedule mean?

I do not see the point of paragraph 4(3)(c), given the definition of an option in paragraph 4(6); nor how that alters the definition in section 144(8)(c), as it already excludes traded options. Schedule 5AA is arguably retrospective as it applies to contracts in existence on 5 March 1997. What does "significant extent" in paragraph 3(1)(a) mean? The Minister may need to respond in writing.

Mrs. Angela Knight: It is estimated that the new clause would save £50 million. However, as people talk to each other, there could be more costs to the Exchequer. That is why we have moved quickly to introduce this measure. Obviously, others might look to other types of derivatives apart from those covered by the new clause. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall keep a close eye on how matters develop. If it is necessary to change the legislation, we shall do so. Otherwise, we shall ensure that other sorts of transactions are challenged within the existing legislation.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the legislation would catch all taxpayers, including those engaged in bona fide transactions. I assure him that, with the

exception of financial traders whose profits from such transactions will already be taxed as part of their normal case 1 trading profits, the legislation catches everyone. There are a few more exceptions: charitable trusts, pension funds and authorised unit trusts. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman can see that those who are engaged in legitimate transactions will be able to continue with those transactions.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a metal-bashing company and asked several questions in that regard. All the points relating to that company and others come under the general hedging heading. No commercial hedging will be caught: the legislation applies only where the guaranteed return arises from the futures or options used. I remind the hon. Gentleman that I said in my opening remarks that the clause applies only to a scheme or arrangement, involving two or more transactions, that is designed to produce a guaranteed return from the disposal of one or more futures or options if the return is similar to interest. I can put his mind at rest on that.

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions relating to case IV, but the taxable income will be calculated under case VI of schedule D.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Minister is quite right; it is case VI rather than case IV.

Mrs. Knight: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that taxable income will be calculated in accordance with the principles of case VI. That will usually mean the profit or loss—the difference between the acquisition cost and the disposal proceeds of the future or option. I think that I have answered most of his questions in that area.

We will keep faith with the unit trust industry's assurances that the statement of recommended practice for the authorised unit trusts will be effective in countering any use of the device by authorised unit trusts. However, we shall not hesitate to bring them within the scope of the new clause in future if there is evidence that individual authorised unit trust fund managers are trying to get around the spirit of the accounting rules. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we will keep this matter under very close watch.

The hon. Gentleman had a list of technical points. A firm of solicitors raised the same points. Indeed, we received a letter from one today. I sincerely trust that it will engage in useful dialogue with the relevant officials, as those points need to be covered. That would probably be a better way to reach a conclusion on them, but if the hon. Gentleman insists, I will, of course, write to him.

Mr. O'Brien: I do not know which firm of solicitors, as I have had no contact with it. The points were raised by our advisers, and not any firm of solicitors, so perhaps the Minister will, out of courtesy, write to me.

Mrs. Knight: I will, of course, write to the hon. Gentleman. I suggest that his advisers go back to the solicitors, who no doubt informed his advisers in the first instance.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 3

REGISTRATION OF PROFIT–RELATED PAY SCHEMES

'A profit–related pay scheme shall not be capable of being registered under Chapter III of Part V of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (profit–related pay) unless:

(1) The scheme was registered before the Finance Act 1997 received Royal Assent; or

(2) The pay before deduction of tax of employees to whom the scheme relates does not change as a result or consequence of the scheme.'.—*[Ms Primarolo.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

It is important to outline to the House the intentions of profit-related pay, the problems that are emerging and how our amendment seeks to protect the taxpayer in the registration of such schemes.

We tabled the new clause to seek to deny tax relief to new profit-related pay schemes that simply convert taxable pay into non-taxable profit-related pay. Some 3.6 million employees in 12,740 schemes benefit from relief from income tax on profit-related pay. The Government propose to phase out the relief by 31 December 2000 by reducing the taxable income relieved each calendar year. Labour supports the principle behind the Government's proposals, but proposes, in our amendment, to improve the legislation by preventing employers from using the phased withdrawal of the scheme to register new schemes that subsidise pay at the taxpayers' expense.

It is essential to make it clear that, as a result of our new clause, any employee who currently benefits from a tax-favoured profit-related pay scheme will continue to do so, as the Government intend. Any employees who are members of newly registered bona fide schemes can enjoy the benefits until the Government withdraw them. We seek to deny employers the opportunity to use profit-related pay schemes to subsidise pre-tax pay.

It is necessary to remind the House why profit-related pay was introduced, so that I can properly illustrate how the abuses are taking place. The scheme was introduced in 1987 and enabled any employer out to make profits to pay employees up to 20 per cent. of salary, or £4,000, whichever is the lower, free of income tax subject to certain conditions. At least 80 per cent. of employees must be able to participate, and all participants must do so on similar terms. The main beneficiaries of profit-related pay are likely to be employees on lower incomes.

4.45 pm

In the 1983 Budget the then Chancellor of the Exchequer asserted that £100 million would be saved in 1994-95 by closing a loophole in the profit-related pay rules that allowed companies to pay employees up to £4,000 per annum free of income tax and commercial risk, contrary to the intention of the legislation. The loophole was closed, and employers are now unable to offer profit-related pay without some degree of risk that payments made under the profit-related pay regime may vary with "profits" as defined in the scheme. I shall return to that point. However, the Chancellor did not prevent employers from constructing schemes that expose employees to only a negligible risk of loss of earnings.

[Ms Dawn Primarolo]

Effectively, 80 per cent. of employees must vote in favour of the scheme—again, I shall return to that point—so it is unlikely that the majority of employees will vote for a scheme with a material risk to them. The overwhelming majority of schemes can be expected to convert approximately 20 per cent. of guaranteed pay into almost risk-free but also tax-free profit-related pay. That reasoning is supported by survey evidence from the income data studies report of June 1996 on profit-related pay, which suggested that the major part of the £1,500 million cost to the taxpayer of profit-related pay is funding schemes that provide tax-free pay rises rather than performance-related pay.

The Government published a research report on profit-related pay in May 1995, commissioned by the Inland Revenue, the Department for Education and Employment and Her Majesty's Treasury. The report's main conclusions were that tax relief has stimulated significant additional take-up of profit-related pay—which is not surprising—and that the main benefits of the relief, from an employer's point of view, are tax efficiency and employee involvement. The report did not provide conclusive evidence that the cost to taxpayers of profit-related pay was justified by improved economic performance.

In Committee, we tabled an amendment, which was unsuccessful, requiring the Treasury to publish a report each year on what companies with profit-related pay schemes propose and how their schemes would work. Our amendment seeks to highlight and, I hope, close the loophole whereby companies can now use the four years before the scheme is phased out to introduce schemes that provide tax relief for the company.

I want to draw the House's attention to a scheme and to a publication that was given to employees entitled "Tax Free Pay—Your chance to get more take home pay." It was provided by a firm called SITA, which is a large, French-based, multinational, contract service company. It has won a number of local authority service contracts through the compulsory competitive tendering process. As a result of a trade sale, the company took over responsibility for engineering services, ground maintenance, street lighting and refuse collection in a number of authorities, including Bristol city council. It employs 600 staff in Bristol, and more nationally. The company presents itself as a quality employer.

Last year, the company told its employees that it was unable to give them an annual pay award. Suddenly SITA announced that, instead of a pay award, it could offer staff the benefits of a so-called tax-free pay scheme, which is a national scheme. The booklet to promote the scheme was circulated in January 1997. The company says:

"We have designed the Scheme to maximise the tax relief you can receive"—

"you" being the employee in the company. It says that the scheme is designed to share the benefits between the employee and the company. There is no mention in this publicity material of the principles and objectives of profit-related pay: no mention of encouraging closer working relationships between employees and the company; no mention of improving relationships between the company and its employees; and no mention of giving employees a stake in their company.

Risk does not feature in this publication either. The element of the entitlement that relates to the company's performance is simply described as "a bonus" to be paid later. So much for employees' involvement in the rough and tumble of the marketplace. The scheme is clearly a mechanism for exploiting the tax loophole. Worse still, the company originally tried to use the scheme as a substitute for an annual pay rise. Instead of profit-related pay being used to generate staff involvement in and commitment to a company and its affairs, the scheme is being used to give staff a pay rise funded by the state.

The company is quite open about this scheme. Apparently, a representative who spoke to the staff outlined the scheme and said, "Why should we fund the pay award when the Government will pay for it." Talk about making an offer that cannot be refused! The scheme requires that 80 per cent. of the staff must vote for it: that is an interesting concept. The company is so keen to achieve 80 per cent. support that, under the section entitled "What do I do next?", it says:

"If you want to accept this opportunity to increase your take-home pay through TFP, do nothing—you will automatically be included."

That is a new and interesting concept in balloting. The booklet goes on to say:

"If you do not wish to participate, please telephone and request an opt out form from the Group Personnel Manager's office".

It may, of course, be a P45. Employees should certainly consider whether non-participation would damage their chances of promotion in the company. I am sure that plenty of SITA's employees will think that if they question the scheme they will not have a future. What has happened to the concept of a secret ballot, which is supposed to be a provision of the scheme?

The SITA scheme is merely one example of a number of schemes that are being established all over the country. The Government have scored a double whammy: first, the incompetence of creating a massive tax loophole, and then the incompetence of not closing it properly so that it continues to be exploited. The true extent of late applications to the Treasury for such schemes has been revealed in written answers to my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane). In the two months from 1 December 1996, 3,800 applications were made.

Putting it politely, I believe that there is clearly a problem. It is obvious from scrutinising the material sent to employees that the intention of the scheme is to take advantage of the tax loophole—the scheme has been set up for one year only, because the company presumably thinks that it can renegotiate it next year. I cannot believe that it is beyond the wit of the excellent brains in Her Majesty's Treasury to find a way of ensuring that bona fide schemes are protected and agreed and that such abuses are prevented.

Mr. Jack: I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady. She envisages that the new clause would maintain the existing registration mechanisms for schemes but would rule out a certain type of scheme. If the existing registration mechanism is to be maintained, how would the schemes to which she has referred be ruled out? The new clause is deficient in that detail. Could she supply it?

Ms Primarolo: With respect, the Financial Secretary could make that point when he responds to the debate. Frankly, if we were in government, I am sure that we

would find a way. The principle in the new clause is clear, so surely to goodness the Government can find a mechanism to achieve it.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I support the new clause, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) moved in a moderate and ministerial way. I shall be interested to hear how on earth the Minister manages to justify what is, by any honest examination, ministerial incompetence. The profit-related pay blunder, which my hon. Friend has examined in some detail, was identified as such in previous statements by the Chancellor. This is not a new discovery or the result of earnest research by the Labour party. It has been a matter of concern to Chancellors and to the Treasury, as shown by speeches reported in *Hansard*.

Having discovered the loophole, the Government have made no effort to close it. The new clause is the first concrete proposal to save the taxpayer what is potentially a serious loss of revenue, and to signal to companies that are rushing to take advantage of that tax loophole that the game is up.

The paradox is that, although the Budget is meant to be formulated in conditions of confidentiality and secrecy—the so-called purdah into which the Chancellor and his Ministers and officials must disappear until the Budget statement—the intention to remove profit-related pay from our fiscal regime was heavily flagged up a full two months before that statement. In mid-September, the business pages of every newspaper carried detailed reports suggesting that the elimination of PRP from the system was a racing certainty. As a result, there was a rush of firms seeking to register for PRP schemes between September and November, when the Budget statement was made.

5 pm

Following that, we all waited—or, at least, Opposition Members waited—for the Chancellor to announce that, with effect from his Budget statement or perhaps a week or two thereafter, as is the norm when such loopholes are closed, no more schemes would be accepted for registration, or, at best, the loophole would be closed once the Finance Bill became law. In fact, the opposite happened. Massive publicity was directed at firms, suggesting that here was a wonderful tax avoidance dodge, and that, although it was going to be phased out, any company that chose to register a scheme could do so in the meantime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South mentioned a company in Bristol. I know of companies in the engineering and metal-bashing sphere—as one whose constituency contains Britain's, indeed Europe's, largest engineering steel plant, I have nothing but respect for the craft and industry of metal bashing, steel making and engineering generally—that have been rushing to set up PRP schemes. They have offered their employees an absolute guarantee of no loss of income, thus invalidating the very principle—a sensible principle—that underlies all profit-related pay: the idea that those who make that extra effort and put in that extra commitment will cause the company's profits to increase, and will be paid more as a result.

I do not know what package is described in the fancy words of accountants in letters to the Treasury, but, on the ground, employees being offered such schemes are being told that there is no way in which they will suffer any reduction in pay. Instead, they are told, they will pay less tax. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South pointed out, the clear implication is that they can moderate their pay demands, because they will gain the advantage of the tax break that the Chancellor will be able to offer for a number of years.

The very concept of profit-related pay has been nullified by the schemes that are being set up. They amount simply to a subsidy by the taxpayer to firms whose accountants and finance directors were able to read the business pages in September, and to follow the Budget speech. The Government waved an immense flag in front of their noses, saying, "Here is a way in which you can cut your company's overall tax burden."

The answers given to my parliamentary questions, which my hon. Friend mentioned, show that, between September, when the first massive publicity about the phasing out of PRP was leaked to the press—the breaking of the purdah—and the end of January 1997, the Treasury received 7,500 applications to register schemes, more than in the full 12 months of 1994. I do not have the figures for last month. The tax relief given since the Chancellor first said, through leaks to the press, that he was intending to take PRP out of our fiscal system amounts to £1.1 billion, more than the £1 billion in revenue forgone throughout 1995.

In the five months from the first Treasury-inspired publicity about phasing out PRP, through the Budget, to the end of January, schemes have been registered which the Treasury estimates will cost the Inland Revenue £1.1 billion. That money, which the Chancellor has lost through his incompetence, could be used to build 15 medium hospitals or 70 new schools with 1,000 pupils, to employ 60,000 new teachers or to put 30,000 extra police officers on the beat.

Opposition Members are concerned not just about the overall ideology of the fiscal regime as practised by the Government in the past five years, but about the incompetent handling of important technical issues. It is complete and utter nonsense to announce that a scheme is to be phased out, when that announcement is followed by a tidal wave of people rushing to join the scheme in order to profit from it, with a consequent massive loss of revenue to the Treasury in ensuing years. That is the point of the new clause to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South spoke so ably.

This is the real saga of the black hole. We know about the various other black holes—losses of revenue owing to serial ministerial incompetence in recent years—but this is the cherry on the icing of the black hole cake, if I may mix my metaphors. Conservative Members laugh at that, but I can tell them that constituents of mine in Rotherham who have been invited to join the Gadarene rush to help their firms to reduce their overall tax burden would much prefer a new hospital or a few more bobbies on the beat.

I do not know whether the Financial Secretary has seen the recent interesting report from Lloyds bank, which examines in broad terms the whole way in which Ministers managed to render the economy so unstable between 1980 and 1986. The bank's economists have drawn up headings for output, inflation, interest rates and exchange rates across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The United Kingdom, as governed by Treasury Ministers, lies at the bottom of

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

nearly all the stability indices. That issue of stability—which means people knowing what their regime will be for tax planning, pay planning and personal savings planning—is essential, but it has been denied to those people by the recent incompetence of Ministers.

The Financial Secretary is an honest and an honourable man, with whom we enjoy engaging in debate. I hope that he will take this final chance to apologise, on behalf of the Chancellor, for this last example of Government incompetence. I believe that the Chancellor is in Beijing, giving weird interviews about statements that he made to a conference of grocers; I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) is with him to discuss the problems of the grocery trade. I hope that he will apologise for this last £1.1 billion that the Chancellor has managed to lose the Treasury since September last year, and apologise to the British people for the lack of the hospitals and schools that they could have had, the teachers who could have been in those schools and the bobbies who could have been on the beat. All that has been denied them because of the mishandling of the scheme—the profit-related pay fiasco.

I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House, irrespective of party allegiance, to vote for the new clause, to give the new Government a fresh start to close this loophole and to ensure that such tax fiddles never again disgrace Conservative Members.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): As Labour Members have said, it is absolutely clear that, since the Budget announcement and the suspicion leading up to the Budget, there has been a stampede into profit-related pay to take advantage of it in its closing years. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) for extracting from the Minister the information that he has referred to, which puts the scale of the problem into context.

What has emerged is that, in the past few years, the growth in the use of the PRP scheme has been almost exponential. The cost to the Treasury of the schemes registered in 1994 is expected to be just over £0.5 billion, in 1995, £1 billion and in 1996 nearly £1.7 billion. As my hon. Friend has said, in the five months from September to January alone, the cost is more than £1 billion. He also said that there were about 7,000 new applications in that period. According to Inland Revenue statistics, there were only 12,740 schemes at the end of 1996, so there has been a huge increase just in the past few months.

The new clause that was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) ensures, first, that any employee currently in a PRP scheme that has been successfully registered and is tax favoured will continue to benefit from that scheme and, secondly, that employees in bona fide new schemes will be able to enjoy the benefits, until the Government phase those schemes out. However, we surely need to prevent, as the new clause proposes, employers from using the scheme simply to cut their pay bill by cutting income tax payments, with little or no benefit to employees.

PRP loopholes have already been closed. The Chancellor moved to close the most glaring loophole in 1993, when he ensured that it was no longer possible to have PRP schemes that were entirely risk free—that is, where the profit-related element of the pay bore no relation at all to the profits that were being earned by the firm. Thankfully, that loophole was closed, but the evidence now is that most of the cost of the scheme—possibly the great part of the cost—in forgone tax is related to schemes that are almost risk free. It is no longer possible to have an entirely risk-free scheme, but it is still possible to have schemes that are almost risk free, where the link between the company profits and the level of pay received by the employees is extremely slender, so that the scheme is, in reality, a method just of avoiding tax on regular salary payments.

Mr. MacShane: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in all the profit-related pay schemes set up in the past few months, employers are saying to both trade unions and employees that their salary is not at risk? Therefore, whatever the Treasury may suggest, in the real world, about which Ministers know nothing, people are being told that there is absolutely no risk of any reduction in monthly pay.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because that underlines the point that we have a flagrant abuse of the rules with this scheme.

I understand that it is widely the case—my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South mentioned an example of this in Bristol—that, where employees in a firm anticipate that they will have a 2 per cent. pay rise, the employer says that he will give them a 3 per cent. pay rise if 80 per cent. of the employees accept his proposal, but then he does not increase his pay bill at all; he simply introduces an element of PRP into the existing pay arrangements. By so doing, he is able to increase the employees' take-home pay by 3 per cent.

I understand that it is possible to construct a scheme where more than 90 per cent. of the supposedly profit-related element of the pay is guaranteed—the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham has just made. For example, in schemes that make 12 monthly payments to employees, only the 13th payment is profit related.

Mr. Jack: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said. Given that the new clause maintains the existing registration scheme for profit-related schemes, how in detail would the new clause that he is advocating deal with the point that he has outlined?

Mr. Timms: I am not entirely clear what the Minister's difficulty is because our new clause makes it clear that it would exclude from registration a number of schemes for which application was being made, unless

"The pay before deduction of tax of employees to whom the scheme relates does not change as a result or consequence of the scheme."

Mr. Jack *rose—*

Mr. Timms: Perhaps the Minister wants to say something more about what the difficulty is.

5.15 pm

Mr. Jack: The question I asked is: given the existing criteria for registering schemes, will the hon. Gentleman tell me in detail how the new clause achieves the

objective, which he has just described with some clarity, within the terms of the existing registration scheme? Will he please give me the detail of the legislative route through?

Mr. Timms: Clearly, there is a difficulty that the Minister grasps which I do not. The new clause seems to me to be clear: schemes of the sort that I am describing could not be registered. If that is not so, the Minister will no doubt explain that and perhaps he can propose a form of words that would do the trick, but I hope that he is perhaps showing by his interventions that there is a serious problem and that a loophole needs to be closed. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South would be delighted if the Minister proposed a form of words that dealt with the difficulty that is clearly in his mind, although it is not apparent as yet to us.

A number of schemes of this nature are being brought forward where perhaps 12 monthly payments are fixed and only the 13th payment is profit related, so the overwhelming bulk of what is supposed to be a profit related element of the employees' pay is not in any way profit related.

The Treasury press release from November states:

"PRP is that part of pay which varies with changes in the profits of the business in which the employee works."

However, in these schemes, the majority of which are being registered now, the degree of change with profits is extremely small and the schemes are primarily a device for avoiding tax. They certainly do not introduce the sort of incentive that all of us understand and support.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): There is an important difference between a variation that is extremely small and no variation at all. The new clause refers to a situation in which there is no variation at all, so I do not understand what it would add to the existing arrangement because, to qualify for a PRP scheme, people had to have some element of pay that varied in accordance with movements in profits.

Mr. Timms: The problem is that, as I have mentioned, in some schemes, the 13th payment is predictable; there are 12 fixed monthly payments and only the 13th payment varies very marginally. Those schemes comply with the existing Treasury requirements for registration. We are seeking to change the rules so that they would not. If there is a difficulty in the form of words that appears on the amendment paper, the Minister will no doubt draw that to our attention and perhaps he or the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) will suggest a form of words that will deal with the difficulty. I would hope that there is agreement across the Floor of the House that there is a loophole that needs to be blocked.

The issue raises a basic question of morality. It is certain that there is no significant performance-related element in the great bulk of schemes that are being registered in the current rush. They are a one-way bet for employers. It is very hard for employers to resist such a temptation. A device is available—advertised by all the publicity surrounding the Budget—by which employers can reduce their tax bill without adversely affecting their employees. Employers are in turn putting out leaflets of the sort that we have heard read out in the debate to encourage employees to take part in what is in fact a scam.

As the poll tax created a personal tax avoidance culture, from which we are only recovering many years later, such schemes are encouraging employers and employees to become part of an income tax avoidance culture. All Opposition Members and I are anxious—I would have thought that Conservative Members would be anxious too—to ensure that that loophole is blocked. If there is an alternative way in which to do that, we would be delighted to hear about it. It is important to ensure that the loophole is blocked and that many more thousands of schemes do not come into effect with all the adverse consequences that I have described.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The important new clause deals with an interesting aspect of social and fiscal policy. I share a constituency boundary with the Chancellor and I share some of his views on profit-related pay, but the action that he proposed in the Budget, which the Bill would enact, is not sufficient. The new clause strengthens and improves that action.

It is important that hon. Members remember that in his Budget statement the Chancellor said that he believed that

"employees' rewards should depend on the success of the business for which they work."

He added that he had

"argued publicly for many years, that in a modern enterprise economy people's pay should be closely linked to the performance of the business for which they work."—[*Official Report*, 26 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. 165.]

That must be right. Employees must have a say and a stakeholding in their company; they must be able to share the benefits and profits. Conversely, they must share the risks. The present system, although right in principle, is badly conceived and has been a one-way bet for many years.

It is important to remind ourselves that the scheme dates back to a Green Paper in 1986, in which Nigel Lawson said:

"There is considerable inertia to overcome, so it might make sense to offer some temporary measure of tax relief."

It is important to emphasise the phrase "temporary measure". The experiment has been running for almost 11 years. It is suggested that it has cost the Exchequer £4 billion. Inland Revenue statistics suggest that it will cost £1.5 billion in 1996-97, although a recent written answer from which some of my hon. Friends have quoted suggests that it could cost £1.7 billion.

The figure of £1.7 billion is significant because it is almost the amount that would be raised by increasing the rate of income tax by 1p. Although 3.6 million people benefit from 12,740 profit-related pay schemes, it is important to recognise—the Chancellor recognised it in his Budget statement and I know that the Financial Secretary recognises it too—that 22 million other taxpayers could benefit by using that £1.7 billion to take 1p off income tax. We know that we face hard choices at the moment—priorities have to be judged and decisions made. I suspect that the wrong decision has been made, and I am pleased that the Government propose to stop the experiment—the tax loophole—by 2000.

We have had plenty of time to discuss the issue. It was discussed at length in a Committee of the whole House on 22 January. I am pleased that the Financial Secretary appears to be taking a genuine interest in the amendment. He has asked probing questions. It is a pity that he did

[Mr. Paddy Tipping]

not show such interest in the debate in January, when his winding-up speech occupied less than a third of a column in *Hansard*, which could be described as minimal. He said that he saw nothing to commend the amendment. I am delighted that, over the past few months, he has taken a genuine interest in the issue. I hope that he has looked closely at our amendment. It may not be perfect, but as he has had months to look at it, perhaps he could do better.

Mr. Jack: As the hon. Gentleman says, I have been looking carefully at the amendment. Using the registration criteria for profit-related pay and the terms of the Opposition's amendment—it is, in fact, a new clause; I should not want to downgrade it to an amendment—will he say how, in reality, the scheme would work?

Mr. Tipping: That is the comment of a genuinely inquiring Minister. He has had since January to consider the issue. He has had the benefit of knowing the terms of the new clause—I am grateful for his correction—for a little time. If he is not satisfied with it, he at least knows its spirit: that the risk, the downside of profit-related pay, should be shared as well as the upside. I am sorry that he finds the new clause difficult; it is very straightforward. In essence, it proposes that current members of the scheme would not lose out until 2000 and that only genuine, bona fide schemes will in future qualify.

I want to draw the Financial Secretary's attention to good schemes and bad schemes—especially to one that is about to be introduced at Nottingham university. In the past, Nottingham university has been viewed as being in the public sector. It has now decided that it is in the private sector. It has corporate status and is to introduce a profit-related scheme. I would call the scheme not a profit-related scheme but a salary-conversion scheme.

The accountancy firm, Ernst and Young, which has looked at the issue, suggests that 75 per cent. of all profit-related schemes are salary-conversion schemes. Staff at Nottingham university—I am delighted that the Chancellor, who received an honorary degree from Nottingham university some time ago, is in his place—were told that the scheme was a no-risk scheme; that if 80 per cent. of them voted for it, it would be pound notes all the way; and that there was no element of risk.

I still find it difficult to understand conceptually how a university can make a profit. Moreover, many of the staff at the university are anxious about the notion of profit-related pay at a university. They recognise it for what it is—a tax avoidance scheme—and know that the most significant part of their income comes from the public purse. They are avoiding tax and are not paying it to the Exchequer. Simultaneously, however, university and student funding comes from the Exchequer. It is bizarre.

I should like to contrast that scheme with another in the Nottingham area that has been operated for many years by a well-known manufacturer of net curtains, Phillip A. Minsen. The significant difference between the two schemes is that employees of Phillip A. Minsen share all the company's risks and are real stakeholders. They share the profit, if there is one, but they also share the downside. New clause 3 is important because it tries to distinguish between proper and well-meaning profit-related schemes and those that can be described only as scams.

5.30 pm

New clause 3 would end the element of tax avoidance. My hon. Friends have already mentioned the increase in the number of schemes that people are attempting to establish by 2000. I support the new clause because it would improve the Bill. I hope that we shall have an opportunity to make more progress on the subject in the debate.

Mr. Tim Smith: Having listened to the debate, I conclude that new clause 3 would be ineffective and that it is misdirected. The Government have become a victim of their own success. Tax relief on profit-related pay was introduced in 1987 and was generally welcomed. A chart in the Red Book shows how the cost of relief has risen substantially over the past few years, especially since 1991, when it was doubled. This year, it is estimated that it will cost £1,500 million. Therefore, one could reasonably say that the relief has achieved its objective, and that it would be sensible to phase it out.

I have no knowledge of the figures produced by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) and I certainly do not dispute them. Companies may have been attempting to take advantage of the relief although it is to be phased out, and that issue should be addressed, but if the Opposition are as concerned as they claim, they should have drafted a more effective new clause. Surely it would have been more sensible to say that no new schemes will be registered as from today. Why not? If the relief has achieved its objective, why not say, "We'll finish the existing schemes, but no new schemes will be admitted"?

The difficulty with the Opposition's new clause is that it is unintelligible and would achieve nothing. It states:

> "The pay before deduction of tax of employees to whom the scheme relates does not change as a result or consequence of the scheme."

As I understand it, however, to qualify initially as a profit-related pay scheme, a part of one's pay must be variable in relation to the profits of the organisation for which one works. As the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) and other Opposition Members said, only a small proportion of someone's pay may vary, but I do not believe that a scheme would be approved if no part their pay varied although the employing enterprise's profits fluctuated. Therefore, new clause 3 would achieve little or nothing.

New clause 3 does not go far enough and is rather feeble.

Mr. MacShane: Is not subsection (1) the key part of the new clause? If the new clause is agreed, we will, de facto, be announcing a winding-up of profit-related pay schemes. Lawyers and accountants have made fun of interpretations of subsection (2), but that is a matter for experts and the Revenue and, ultimately, for the courts. We face that problem with all complicated amendments to tax law. However, the thrust of the new clause is quite clear: it is politely to say that no one wants such schemes any more and that it is time to say goodbye to existing

schemes. There is no problem with existing schemes—they can continue and no one will face any problems with them—but new ones will not be allowed. Surely the hon. Gentleman should be urging the Minister, in the interests of sensible tax raising, to accept this important new clause.

Mr. Smith: It is not the Minister's new clause. It has been tabled by the Opposition, and we are entitled to ask a few questions about its implications. The hon. Gentleman seems to be shifting his ground and saying that we should place more emphasis on subsection (1), but that is what I have been saying. Why not stick to the first condition and drop the second? Subsection (2) does not make sense. It is no good merely saying that we want to outlaw schemes that are not bona fide and keep those that are. We must draft legislation that achieves the objective, but I do not think that that can be done in one sentence. I certainly do not think that new clause 3 achieves that objective, and that is why I think that it should be thrown out.

Mr. Jack: I have listened assiduously to the debate. The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) accused Conservative Members of incompetence, but this is an incompetent new clause. No Opposition Member could answer my question about how the second condition would work. The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) shakes her head. I shall give way to her if she can tell me how it would work within the terms of the existing registration scheme. Clearly she cannot do so. She asks the House to approve a new clause that, essentially, will not work.

I caution the hon. Member for Bristol, South that the Opposition have not thought through the full implications of their proposal. She said that in principle Labour supports the Government on phasing out profit-related pay. I assume, therefore, that she supports the argument advanced in the Budget debate by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, whom I am delighted to see in the Chamber, when he said that he wants an orderly withdrawal of profit-related pay so that companies can adjust their affairs as tax relief is withdrawn. New clause 3, however, would cause a disorderly withdrawal of relief. The Opposition cannot have it both ways.

Ms Primarolo *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Jack: The hon. Lady shakes her head. It is her new clause—let her tell me that I am wrong. Under the new clause, no more profit-related pay schemes could be registered for tax relief after the Bill received Royal Assent. That would eliminate 50 per cent. of profit-related schemes, some of which may be entirely virtuous, according to the Opposition's definition.

How will the Opposition explain their proposal to the 36,000 employees of the John Lewis Partnership—an organisation that was prayed in aid by the Opposition as operating a good scheme? Some Opposition Members did not want such schemes to be affected. How will they explain why such employees will be unable to continue their profit-related pay scheme and take advantage of phased withdrawal of tax relief? Other companies are in a similar position.

Mr. MacShane *rose—*

Mr. Jack: I do not want you to blunder into this and have to face the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in the form of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. All Members in the Chamber are hon. Members, not "you" or "I".

Mr. Jack: I apologise.

Whitbread, with 67,000 employees, Safeway with 60,000, Barclays with 62,000 and many other companies that I could name have annual registration for schemes that the Opposition would call virtuous but that the new clause would eliminate. The House should not be invited to support the new clause.

As for the second condition in the new clause, the registration requirements simply identify the business unit effect, the number of employees, the size of the profit-related pool, how long the scheme would last, the total of profit-related pay that would be required and the upper limit of the profit pool. The new clause would not comply with those requirements; it would not work. It would mean that no more profit-related pay schemes could be registered for tax relief. No serious operator would propose such a measure while claiming to agree with the Government's approach on phasing out profit-related pay. If the new clause is pushed to a vote, I invite the House to throw it out.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 264, Noes 296.

Division No. 91] **[5.41 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean

Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth.Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping B)*
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Ellerton, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*

Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John (Ravensb'ne)
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and Mrs. Jacqui Lait.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 4

DISTRAINT ETC. OF PROPERTY ONLY UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF A COURT

'The property of any person in England and Wales shall not be distrained, or attached or otherwise forcibly taken by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue or the Commissioners of Customs & Excise or any person acting under their instruction or authority in settlement of a liability arising under the taxes for which they are responsible except under the supervision of a court.'.—*[Mr. Mike O'Brien.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 8 to 10.

Mr. O'Brien: The new clause speaks for itself. The important words are:

"under the supervision of a court."

We all want the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise to have sufficient power to recover sums due, but we also want to ensure that it is done properly.

Through the new clause, the Labour party would require a court to supervise any action taken by the Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise to seize people's property in settlement of a tax debt. Labour's proposals will give taxpayers in England and Wales a similar protection of judicial supervision of distraint of property by the tax authorities to that enjoyed by taxpayers in Scotland.

[Mr. O'Brien]

The Government originally proposed to give the tax authorities wide powers to distrain taxpayers' property which could be exercised without any independent supervision and by any person authorised by the Board of Inland Revenue or the commissioners for Customs and Excise. The Government appeared willing to accept that very junior officers in either tax authority could take people's property to settle a tax debt.

Distraint and the other options open to Customs and Excise are extremely serious powers, involving infringements of the liberty of an individual citizen, such as entering a house or taking money from an account. Although it is right for those powers to exist to recover moneys properly due, such serious powers should be treated seriously by all those who seek to make laws for our citizens. We are not satisfied that the Bill properly reflects that seriousness.

6 pm

In Committee, we said that we supported the Government's attempts to rationalise the law on distraint for the settlement of a tax debt, but argued that taxpayers in England and Wales should enjoy the same right to judicial supervision as those in Scotland. The Government conceded then that there should be some judicial supervision, and the new clause is designed to give statutory effect to that concession. In England and Wales there is effectively no court supervision such as is provided by the sheriff in Scotland. We hope that Customs and Excise will never act lightly, but we need to be sure that there are sufficient safeguards in place to protect the liberty of the citizen.

Customs and Excise deals with an extremely large number of cases, many of which directly affect the ways in which businesses can be run and individuals can earn their living. The 1992-93 figures from the House of Commons Library show that 11 per cent. of bankruptcy petitions and 36 per cent. of company wind-ups were by Customs and Excise. It would take a courageous Minister to say that never in the course of 43,000 cases has a mistake been made. The mere fact that we are dealing with human beings who process the information means that errors might innocently have occurred. That is why it is always right to have a safeguard in place to ensure that rights are not infringed, and the courts are the mechanism by which we have traditionally sought to do that.

The Exchequer Secretary will no doubt say that in Scotland, when the sheriff signs the order for poinding or arrestment of earnings or funds, he does so merely to ensure that the formalities are complied with. Why should that supervision be necessary in Scotland but not in England and Wales? Why did the clause relating to the new attachment power in England and Wales, which was based on the Scottish example, lack the safeguards that apply to arrestment in Scotland?

I accept that the sheriff's involvement is ex parte, in that the person against whom the order is made does not appear before the sheriff and put a case, but the sheriff is there to supervise and to ensure that there is no abuse in terms of the paperwork. It is possible to raise questions about the appropriateness of the paperwork and the way in which the case has been conducted—not to make a detailed inquiry, but to ensure that there is adequate protection. In Scotland, the British citizen is protected and orders are supervised. If that protection is necessary in Scotland, as the Government clearly accept, it is equally necessary in England and Wales.

I accept that 99.9 per cent. of the orders may result in no inquiry by a supervising court, but on each and every occasion Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue would be put on their guard to ensure that they had done everything right before going before the court. In a tiny percentage of cases the court might question whether the paperwork is right and the procedures have been correctly complied with. The point of a supervisor is to make officials think long and hard before exercising their considerable powers.

To do the Exchequer Secretary credit—I would always do so where possible—he said in Committee:

"The issue remains—should there be any judicial intervention in the English and Welsh system? I have agreed that there should be and that it should be introduced by regulation."

He also said:

"I accept that this is a legitimate cause for concern, which we shall look to address when we introduce the regulations. I emphasise that, if those regulations are not passed by Parliament, the clause does not become effective. We shall address the issue in consultation with the organisations that have contacted us in the past few days."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 13 February 1997; c. 58, 53.]

I am grateful to the Exchequer Secretary: in the fairly lengthy and complex debate in Committee about the differences between the Scottish and the English and Welsh court procedures, he accepted that important principles were at stake and said that the Government would try to deal with them through regulations.

The problem is that court supervision should be dealt with by statute, because regulations tend to be too easily changed. Historically, statute has been used to protect our citizens and ensure that their rights are not infringed. Statutes are always rigorously scrutinised in the House, whereas regulations, as any hon. Member who has served on one of the relevant Standing Committees will know, tend to go through on the nod or with limited scrutiny, although I accept that on occasion the process is more thorough.

Why is it right to protect the Scots in a statute but not those resident in England and Wales? Why do the Scots have a statute that allows supervision of an order by the sheriff, but citizens of England and Wales do not?

It is also curious that the Government's new order gives Customs and Excise an extra string to its bow to go beyond the traditional civil procedure of a garnishee order. The new power may be justified; I do not object to it. However, as someone who has had to deal with such orders in court proceedings, I know that they are closely scrutinised by those who issue them and that there is considerable procedure and discussion before they are issued, because they can be onerous.

Customs and Excise is being given an attachment power, which it no doubt requires. Will the Exchequer Secretary ensure that where powers are given to Customs and Excise and to the Inland Revenue there is supervision? Supervision should be properly set out in statute. It is not satisfactory to deal with it by mere regulation. I ask the Government to think again and accept new clause 4, which is based on the law in Scotland. It is a sensible, reasonable protection for citizens that most

hon. Members would accept. In principle, at least, the Exchequer Secretary seems to accept it. He seeks to introduce much the same provision by regulation, but he does not have to wait for a regulation: if it is necessary, as he accepted in Committee that it is, let us do it now.

Mr. Tim Smith: New clause 4 is far too widely drawn in two respects. In Committee, concern was expressed about clause 54, which deals only with attachment of debts by Customs and Excise. New clause 4 deals not only with attachment of debts, but with matters that are covered by clauses 51 and 52—that is, enforcement by distress and enforcement by diligence. Moreover, it deals not only with Customs and Excise but with the Inland Revenue. The Inland Revenue is not given new powers by clause 54, which refers only to the commissioners, which I understand to mean the commissioners of Customs and Excise.

I greatly welcome the way in which my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary has dealt with the matter. It was difficult to get the right balance. We must give Customs and Excise the powers that it needs to enforce the law but, equally, we must ensure that the taxpayer is properly protected. My hon. Friend listened carefully to the arguments advanced and I believe that he has not been able to satisfy himself since that all the concerns that were expressed have been properly dealt with. For that reason, he has tabled amendment No. 10 which deletes clause 54. For the time being, I believe that that is the right solution.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) for his comments, which adequately sum up the situation. We have decided to drop the attachment provisions. He also summed up what is wrong with new clause 4.

New clause 4 relates to clause 54 as well as to clause 51. That may be where Opposition confusion stems from. Clause 54 made provision for attachment of debts. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield said—I am sorry, I mean my hon. Friend. I am getting ahead of myself. Government amendment No. 10 withdraws clause 54. As I mentioned in Committee, we had a long public consultation exercise last summer, during which no objections were raised to the proposed attachment provisions. We also had a VAT Budget open day at the end of January. Again, the interested parties raised no objections. Objections were raised only fairly late in the day in February. I listened carefully to those objections and decided that they had some validity.

In Committee, I undertook to consult further, to introduce safeguards if it was possible and to ensure that there was a review procedure for attachment. Since then, Customs and Excise has met the British Bankers Association and other interested parties. Although several of their concerns have been answered, there were other issues that could not be satisfactorily resolved in the remaining short time scale. That is why I have decided to defer introduction of the attachment provisions to allow customs to continue its discussions and consult further. That is where we are with clause 54. If the House accepts our amendment, clause 54 will not happen.

6.15 pm

The problem with new clause 4 is that it applies not only to clause 54 but, rather oddly, to the relatively innocuous clause 51. It extends an extra layer of judicial review to distraint or distress procedures. Clause 51 merely extends to customs dues the existing distress provisions which currently apply to all indirect taxes except customs dues: it does not change the 150-year-old laws in any other way. I accept that the Opposition are acting in the right spirit of trying to get things right, but I hope that I can convince them that in this instance they are not right, for the following reasons.

First, new clause 4 involves a significant administrative burden. If passed, it would be damaging for the recovery of outstanding unpaid taxes and lead to increased revenue loss. I will give an example. Current month-end arrears of VAT and direct taxes—let us not forget that this applies to Inland Revenue direct taxes as well as to Customs and Excise indirect taxes—amount to some £5.8 billion. New clause 4 requires both Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue to seek prior judicial supervision: a court order would have to be obtained to begin action to recover unpaid debt. It thus seeks to overturn more than 150 years of a tried, tested and effective method of recovering taxes. In my time as Exchequer Secretary, I have not, to the best of my knowledge, received any complaints about the existing system. For 150 years, Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue have used those debt recovery powers without significant problems. They have those powers because they are involuntary creditors: unlike private individuals and commercial interests, they cannot vet and choose their customers and stop supplies or credit at will.

Any delay in debt recovery will have a marked effect on the flow of funds into the Exchequer. For example, a delay of only seven days in the recovery of tax and VAT arrears would cost £100 million. Court judgment and execution would delay recovery by at least 28 days, resulting in a loss of some £450 million to the Exchequer. I invite the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), given that he has accepted our tax and spending plans, to say how that hole would be made up.

There is a fundamental misconception that there is no judicial supervision of the procedure. If taxpayers wish to dispute demands for unpaid or undeclared tax liabilities, they have a right to appeal. With regard to Customs and Excise, it can take the dispute to an independent VAT and duties tribunal, and if necessary, it can appeal to a higher court. In such a dispute, all recovery action is suspended in respect of any amount. It is policy that debts are sent for recovery under the distress or distraint procedures only if they are already established and overdue.

To put into context how onerous new clause 4 would be, Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue have 375,000 distress cases per year. They are all authorised at a responsible level and all subject to having been to a VAT tribunal or the relevant judicial body if they are disputed. If, after those disputes have been settled, or the taxpayer has had the opportunity to settle the dispute at a VAT tribunal or other judicial body, collection also required prior and continuing court supervision, the volume of cases would flood the courts. It would pretty well double the number of cases before the courts and place a prohibitive administrative burden on Revenue Departments and the Lord Chancellor's Department.

[Mr. Phillip Oppenheim]

In a sense, the new clause would put the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise at a disadvantage compared with ordinary private or commercial interests trying to collect debts. Customs and Excise may already have gone to a customs tribunal, a VAT tribunal or another judicial body, and would then have to go to court for a second time whereas a private individual or a commercial interest would have to go to a court only once. If they won the case, the court would then supervise the debt collection. The measure would thus be onerous and expensive, and it would increase the cost for each tax defaulter by about £40 per warrant.

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire said that there is supervision in Scotland, although he acknowledged that things are different in Scotland. Indeed they are. We tried to establish in Committee the fact that the sheriff court does not allow for any appeal or appearance by a defaulter. In Committee, the shadow Chief Secretary made a brief appearance and suggested that in Scotland a defaulter might be able to introduce a caveat. As I said after he left the Committee, before the debate had ended, that is not the case when a defaulter comes up against a Government Department such as Customs and Excise or the Inland Revenue. Thus it is not true to say that there is judicial supervision allowing for an appeal in Scotland. What the hon. Gentleman proposes today goes way beyond what happens in the sheriff court, which in any case is very different.

There is another problem with the new clause. I understand that it applies only to England and Wales and not to Northern Ireland. There may be a reason for that, but if the clause is to be consistent it should also apply to Northern Ireland.

The new clause would be very expensive. It would also change distress procedures that have been carried out for 150 years without any great problems. It has nothing to do with attachment, which relates only to clause 54 and which we have already agreed to defer. The new clause would give tax defaulters far greater protection in the rest of the United Kingdom than in Scotland, and would thus increase the imbalance between England, Wales, possibly Northern Ireland, and Scotland. I cannot understand why the Opposition would want that.

For those and other reasons, I strongly urge the House, in the interests of all taxpayers, to resist the new clause.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Amid some not very good points the Minister also made some good ones, but before dealing with them I want to answer the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). I happen to have with me the text of the *Official Report* of our Committee proceedings when the Exchequer Secretary was replying to the hon. Gentleman, who had been discussing the differences between clauses 51 and 52. The Minister seemed then to accept that there was a legitimate case for concern, and went on to deal with the business of regulations. The problem in Committee was that we were discussing clauses 54, 51 and 52 all at once—they got jumbled up in one debate.

Our concern, as outlined by the shadow Chief Secretary, was to establish the fact that, whereas rules in Scotland protect citizens there, they do not apply in the same way in England and Wales—or in Northern Ireland. We were not dealing with the new powers in clause 54 specifically: we were worried in general about the difference between Scotland on the one hand and England and Wales on the other.

Mr. Oppenheim: I can probably help the hon. Gentleman. The situation is certainly rather confusing, and clauses 51, 52, 53 and 54 are related to one another. The Scottish question arose not primarily because of concern about the standard distress provisions in clauses 51 and 52, but because of how those provisions related to clause 54 in terms of attachment and arrestment—Customs and Inland Revenue being able to go into people's accounts. That power already exists in Scotland, and it was alleged that taxpayers there enjoyed better protection because of the intervention of the sheriff court. That extra power of arrestment in Scotland does not exist in England—hence the confusion. There are certainly links, but because we have dropped clause 54 and its powers of attachment and arrestment for the United Kingdom, the situation does not now arise.

Apart from anything else, the new clause will cause problems because it will introduce a further judicial tier for ordinary distress or distraint cases. That extra provision would be massively expensive and time consuming—although for some reason it would not apply in Northern Ireland—and it would create a major imbalance between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom because it would give tax defaulters much more protection in the latter than in the former.

Mr. O'Brien: The fact remains that in Scotland there is supervision by a sheriff. Just because a power has lasted for 150 years, that does not mean that it is adequate. So why have Governments left matters so as to allow no supervision of distraint by courts in England and Wales but to allow sheriff courts in Scotland to exercise some supervision?

The Minister says that we are introducing a number of terrible measures and creating an extra layer of judicial supervision. It is, however, a very limited layer. No one suggests that the powers of judicial supervision should go much further than those exercised in Scotland where, as the Exchequer Secretary told us in Committee, there is merely a limited power to check that all procedures have been properly complied with and that documents have been properly prepared. That is what we suggest should happen here: we want the same sort of supervision to apply in the same sort of way in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. I do not accept that this will involve any more delay than is experienced in Scotland, where there appears to be little or no delay. If there were delays, I assume that the Government would have ended them by now.

The Government accept the Scottish situation, so I cannot for the life of me see why there should be less protection for citizens in England and Wales. I have listened to the Minister's points, some of which—certainly those in relation to Northern Ireland—were valid. I can also see that the word "supervision" denotes a certain looseness in the drafting which might be tightened up at a later stage. Therefore, if the Minister has nothing to add at this point, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 13

RELIEF FROM INCOME TAX ON EXPENDITURE ON ENERGY SAVING MATERIALS

'.—(1) The following section shall be inserted in the Taxes Act 1988 after section 265—

"Relief from tax on expenditure on energy saving materials

265A.—(1) Subject to the following provisions of this section, an individual who incurs expenditure of £25 or more in any year of assessment on energy saving materials shall be entitled to a deduction from his total income for that year of assessment equal in amount to one-half of that expenditure.

(2) In this section 'energy saving materials' means any goods manufactured solely for any one or more of the following purposes—

(a) cavity wall insulation;

(b) loft insulation;

(c) under-floor insulation;

(d) insulating hot water tanks;

(e) insulating pipes and other plumbing fittings;

(f) draft proofing;

(g) controlling domestic heating systems;

(h) external and internal wall cladding;

(i) providing low emissivity glazing.

(3) The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument add to the purposes specified in subsection (2) above; and a statutory instrument under this subsection shall be subject to annulment by a resolution of the House of Commons.

(4) A person shall not be entitled to relief under this section in any year of assessment if—

(a) (disregarding this section) his total income for that year, after all deduction, exceeds the lower rate limit for that year; or

(b) he does not carry out the work for which the energy saving materials in question were purchased within 12 months of the date on which they were purchased.

All such assessment and adjustments of assessments shall be made as may be necessary to give effect to this subsection."

(2) This section shall apply in relation to expenditure incurred on or after 1st January 1998 providing that if before that date the Treasury has by Order made provision for giving relief of not less than nine and one half per cent. on the VAT that would otherwise be chargeable on energy saving materials as defined by section 265A of the Taxes Act 1988 then this section shall only apply if provided for by Order made at any time by the Treasury.'.—*[Mr. Simpson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to discuss new clause 15—*Report on VAT on energy saving materials (No. 2)*—

'Within twelve months of this Act receiving Royal Assent the Treasury shall report to Parliament on the consequences to the Exchequer of reducing VAT on energy saving materials.'.

Mr. Simpson: Earlier today, I had the good fortune to be able to introduce a ten-minute Bill entitled Warm Homes and Energy Conservation (Fifteen Year Programme). It tried to set in context the scale of the fuel poverty that this country has to face. It is against the background of that Bill that I want to speak to the new clause this evening.

I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will allow me to give some background to this issue. Hon. Members will recall that, last year, I moved a similar amendment to the then Finance Bill in an attempt to secure exactly the same outcome—the reduction of VAT on energy-saving materials to 8 per cent. I had to do that in a convoluted way through a rebate system, because it was one of the few mechanisms allowed under the terms of the amendment of the law resolution.

I understood and anticipated that this year the Treasury would look again at the amendment of the law resolution, in order to try to close that loophole, and it did so. That meant that, this year, I had to find other ways to bring back to the House an issue that represents not only the will of the country but probably the will of the majority of Members of Parliament, were we able to get a clear and simple vote on the principle of reducing VAT to 8 per cent. on home insulation products. This year, I have done so by way of the provisions that allow amendments in the context of VAT relief.

6.30 pm

First, I want to take us back to the underlying tax principle. I am grateful to the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), who said in his 1993 Budget statement:

"For the first time, the rate of VAT on domestic fuel and power will be the same as that charged on goods like loft insulation material, which improve energy efficiency. This will bring an end to the current anomaly, which makes nonsense of any attempt to use the tax system to improve the environment."—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 183.]

At that time, the House in its wisdom decided to vote for the reduction of VAT on domestic fuel from 17.5 per cent. to the current 8 per cent. The motive behind my amendments has consistently been to pursue the logic set out by the former Chancellor, which is that it is absurd to have taxation policies that, in an environmental context, result in our taxing energy conservation more heavily than energy consumption. That is environmental nonsense.

I have had to go to considerable lengths, both this year and last year, to get amendments in order in the Finance Bill debate, so as to have the right to advance that principle. I want to put on record my gratitude to the Clerks for their considerable patience with my pursuit of a series of amendments that I had thought were in order but that all fell at one fence or another. The Clerks were unfailingly patient with my attempts and my determination to bring this matter before the House.

New clause 13 is an amendment to the Taxes Act 1988. The mechanism by which VAT would effectively be reduced would be through altering certain arrangements within the income tax system. It would allow relief to be claimed, by those who are only basic rate taxpayers, on the basis of 50 per cent. of the tax paid on energy conservation and home insulation products amounting to a sum of more than £25 in any tax year. The sums involved are the same as the relief that such claimants would receive were they to be given a direct reduction in the rate of VAT charged on energy-saving materials.

There is a proviso for those who would question whether going through the Inland Revenue collection, relief and rebate system is the most sensible way of pursuing the principle. That proviso is set out in

[Mr. Simpson]

subsection (2) of the new clause. It gives the Treasury the option of saying, if that was too cumbersome a collection mechanism and it preferred a direct reduction in VAT, that it could achieve the same result simply by coming back to the House and informing it of that preference.

The underlying principle is the one set out by the former Chancellor in respect of fairness in taxation. That principle has been picked up by the Labour party and by other Opposition parties in the policies we pursue. I do not think that my new clause is at odds with new clause 15, which was tabled by Labour Front Benchers, but it does move matters on.

My new clause allows for a period in which the calculations about how to implement the changes enshrined in the new clause could be worked out by the Treasury. The only difference between the new clauses is that that period of reflection and evaluation would be in pursuit not of a principle, but of the mechanism to implement a principle.

That is in no way inconsistent with many other points of principle that have been made by Labour Front Benchers when setting down our definition of fairness in taxation. In a speech on 20 January this year entitled "Responsibility in public finance", the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), made that principle clear when he said:

"work is something to be rewarded through the tax system, whereas environmental pollution is something that should be discouraged."

In the same terms, the Labour party made its position clear in the Finance Bill debate last year, when my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) said:

"Instead of giving us bureaucratic and technical excuses, the Government should be agreeing to take the proposals forward in the 12-month period provided by the amendments, and should come back next year with clear proposals on how the will of the House can be enacted."

She added:

"The Minister must explain whether he is against the principle that VAT on energy-saving materials should be the same as VAT on fuel, or whether he is telling us that Brussels prevents us from making them the same. If Brussels if preventing us, he should clearly explain why. We believe that he has no reasons to offer and we shall vote against the Government."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 1131.]

I was pleased to see in *The Guardian* today that the shadow Financial Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said:

"Although we support the principle of reducing VAT on this area, we cannot support any additional spending commitment unless it can be financed."

I now turn to the question of financing. When we carried out the original calculations of the impact of reducing VAT on energy-saving materials, clear costs were built into that assessment. At worst, the impact on the Treasury coffers would be a cost of £10 million; at best, it was calculated that it could be revenue-neutral or revenue-positive, depending on the assessments made of potential increase in demand for materials supplied, produced and distributed as part of an energy-saving programme.

We also pointed out that the industry had made its own representations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, saying that it calculated that such a measure would result in a 10 per cent. increase in demand for energy-saving products, and that it could help to create and sustain some 10,000 job years in the installation, maintenance and delivery of home insulation products.

Last week, the energy policy committee of the Confederation of British Industry reinforced and repeated its message to the House, saying that it wished VAT to be equalised so that tax on energy conservation was no heavier than that on energy consumption. Eighty per cent. of the annual reports that have been presented to the House by local authorities under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 have asked the Secretary of State to reduce VAT to help them meet the targets that the 1995 Act set for them. To date, more than 300 local authorities have also passed motions in support of that tax principle.

Cost is an issue, and I can understand people wanting to know about cost before making a tax commitment, but I want to place this matter in context. Even the worst case scenario involves tax pittances—a minute fraction of the margin of error built into the annual accounts. That £10 million, even in terms of slippage in existing Government programmes, would effectively amount to no more than the time that the Chancellor takes out of delivering his Budget speech when he scratches his backside—a tiny sliver of total spending.

I say to my hon. Friends on both sides of the House that, instead of regarding this proposal as an uncosted spending commitment, if we were to pass the new clause tonight, it would constitute not a spending commitment of the Opposition parties but part of the Government's own commitments in this year's Finance Bill and this year's Budget. I suspect that we would then be arguing about who should take the credit for it, because there continues to be huge and growing support outside the House for that tax principle.

We are arguing tonight not about a delivery mechanism but about whether the principles of fairness in taxation are those that enshrine a belief that we must be fair to the environment and the planet as well as people. In that context, we must move in a direction in which we tax-penalise polluting processes and tax-reward acts of energy conservation.

I believe it was in 1852 that Victor Hugo said:

"An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come."

I ask the House to take note of the fact that we may have before us an idea whose time has come, and a public who long for us to recognise that.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): We—at least I—debated this issue with the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) last year, myself from a different position, but I still have considerable regard for the hon. Gentleman. I admire him for his consistency, and the fact that he has always believed that one achieves a social end and an environmental end by making better use of our energy. I say the same about some Conservative Members who have always tried to bring together those two concerns into a programme to improve energy efficiency.

I very much share the aims of the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, and have done so ever since I served in the Department of Energy, now abolished, in which

I noted that we still waste a great deal of energy in this country, although very often the people who shout loudest about that do the least about it.

I attended many meetings in many halls throughout the country to promote energy efficiency, and was roundly castigated for lack of Government interest or cash, and I frequently noticed that there were no long-life bulbs in the light fittings, that the room was overheated and that little practical attention was being given to the need to control energy use. There is a fair amount of hypocrisy on this subject.

6.45 pm

I am afraid that it is a hard fact that there are two main incentives to energy efficiency, the first of which is the weather. A cold winter focuses attention on energy efficiency—but the Government do not control the weather.

The other main factor is the cost of energy. It is a sad fact that many people, in their domestic circumstances, ask themselves how they might save energy only when the price is increasing. We have lived for some years at a time of low world fossil fuel prices. Moreover, the success of our privatisation programme has delivered major benefits to the electricity and gas industries, which have flowed through to consumers. That has been a tremendous social benefit to a great many people, but it is bad for energy efficiency.

The Opposition policy to reduce VAT on fuel from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. would deal another blow to energy efficiency. I am not sure about the status of that promise or pledge or aim or aspiration, but we think that we have it from the Opposition Front Bench that it is Labour's aim, at least, to reduce VAT in that way. It will encourage further waste of energy unless something is done in the opposite direction.

I must make one or two remarks about new clause 13 that will be familiar to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South. Apart from being technically defective in several respects, the new clause overturns a major consideration of the Government: to simplify the tax system, to make it easy to administer and comprehensible to the public, and to further our attempt to reduce burdens on businesses, especially small businesses, if we can.

The proposals in the new clause would entail extremely difficult judgments, to be made by a person or an agency, between various types of energy-efficient materials, as against other equipment or materials that may claim to be energy efficient but might not measure up to such a standard. Someone would have to judge what qualified for such treatment.

Mr. Simpson: Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, if the option under subsection (2) of the new clause were exercised by the Treasury—that is, if a direct reduction of VAT on energy-saving materials were pursued—it would both simplify the tax system and reduce the burden on industry in the way that he has advocated?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I concede that it would be rather simpler than the main proposal set out in the new clause. I say in parentheses that the hon. Gentleman showed considerable ingenuity in getting the whole thing in order on the Finance Bill. However, even with a straight reduction in VAT, someone would have to decide what equipment or materials qualified for such treatment.

Even a straight reduction in VAT would complicate the tax system. We have a single positive rate of VAT in this country, with the exception of the 8 per cent. rate on fuel and power, which is fairly simple to administer because it is easy to define the fuels that qualify, and they are sold by a comparatively narrow range of outlets. However, materials listed in the new clause are sold in every high street hardware store or ironmonger.

Presumably the system would work as follows. An invoice would have to be certified, and made out by the retailer to the effect that the material concerned would or might qualify. There would be no certainty that the material would be installed properly.

If that problem is overlooked, there is still the problem of making repayments to a separate category of people as defined by reference to their status in the Inland Revenue system. We would rapidly be faced by a monstrous paperchase. The proposed system would be highly regulatory and burdensome to business and industry. My criticisms of last year, which I voiced from the Dispatch Box, seem still to be valid, and I recommend their acceptance by the House.

I promised, again from the Dispatch Box, that other ways would be pursued of trying to achieve the ends of which the hon. Member for Nottingham, South has spoken. I know that my words were taken up by those who followed me at the Dispatch Box, and by Ministers in the Department of the Environment.

Something has changed, however, since last year, and I shall end by drawing attention to it. The Labour party has performed a spectacular somersault, and in so doing has revealed breathtaking cynicism. Last year, the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) criticised the directors of Friends of the Earth, who had suggested that the Labour party might abstain on the issue. She said that there was no question of abstention. She added that she would ask all hon. Members to vote for a rather similar clause in the name of justice, jobs, democracy and energy efficiency. The hon. Lady was patently insincere in saying that.

A similar scheme has been advanced this year, but suddenly it is not all about justice, jobs, democracy and energy efficiency. Instead, it is now all about the hon. Lady's election chances. She has had a fit of responsibility, like all the poodles who sit behind her, who are not all in the Chamber this evening. They were leaned on to take their names off the amendment. They have meekly fallen into line. That gives a rather disconcerting glimpse of what a future Labour Government might be like—shallow, opportunistic, contradictory, unprincipled and, at root, cowardly.

That contrasts with the approach of the hon. Member for Nottingham, South. I hope that I am not embarrassing him by praising him in this way. Although I disagree with many of his political principles, at least he has shown consistency on these issues, as has my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), who has pursued the issues that are now before us over many years. I cannot help but draw a distinction between the records of the hon. Gentleman and of my hon. Friend and the somersault that has been completed by the Labour party.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

I reject the new clause with a certain reluctance, because I am aware of the motives that lie behind it. I can at least be glad that the whole episode has educated us further on what the new Labour party is really like.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The objective of reducing the cost to the consumer of energy-saving materials has received wide cross-party support. In various ways, well over half the Members of this place have signalled their support for the measures in the new clause. I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on his extraordinary vigour and determination, and not a little ingenuity. It is not easy to get around the rather arcane procedures, if you will allow me to say that of them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that govern the way in which the House deals with Finance Bills.

There is clear support from hon. Members on both sides of the House, because they know that the outcome would be good for industry and would help to create jobs. Perhaps more important, we have before us a simple and relatively inexpensive measure which, if implemented, would start to tackle the problems of global warming, which have been acknowledged by right hon. and hon. Members. Those problems are recognised by Governments throughout the world. Anyone who does not accept the argument that stems from those problems would not accept anything that I am saying and, equally, would not support the new clause. As I have said, however, the clause is broadly supported.

The new clause would help enormously those with low earnings who are living in damp, cold homes that they cannot afford properly to heat. We know that, every winter, people in this country—mainly, elderly people—die of hypothermia in their homes. In simple terms, that is virtually unknown in any other part of western Europe. For many years, other western European countries have built homes to standards of insulation that are way beyond our own. In many instances, they have colder climates. The people of those countries have no difficulty in affording to heat their homes, because costs are very low.

In that context, it is bizarre that the House should have created a position in which the use of fuel—that is a bad thing in itself, because no one benefits from the use of fuel—is subject to a lower rate of tax than that which applies to fuel conservation, which can help the environment and help people to stay warm. We are in a position to correct that anomaly this evening.

The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), speaking on behalf of the Government when he was Paymaster General, promised to look into ways of achieving a reduction in the cost of energy-saving materials. Here is a chance for the Government to act positively. That applies also to the Labour party, which, until Friday, I thought was in favour of reducing the cost of energy-saving materials. After all, 240 Labour Members had signed an early-day motion calling for the reduction in the cost of such materials. The entire Labour Front-Bench team voted in that way a year ago. Together, working across the House, we came within one vote of defeating the Government on that occasion. We could be almost certain of doing so now, given the Government's changed position, having lost their majority in the House.

Last week, however, I was told that Labour had withdrawn its support. I was told also that Labour Whips were asking Labour Back Benchers to withdraw their support. Yesterday morning, for just a moment, I thought that everything was all right and that I had heard ugly rumours bearing no relation to the truth. In an interview published yesterday by the national energy authorities, the Labour energy spokesman, the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), said:

"as regards energy saving materials, we actually supported the amendment to the last Budget to equalise VAT rates for energy saving materials so I think our intention is plainly staked out there."

That intention has certainly been staked out, but the road to the election is paved with good intentions. It now seems that the hon. Gentleman and the rest of his Front-Bench colleagues will let the Government off the hook. Staring victory in the face, Labour Front-Bench spokesmen opt for a U-turn.

Labour's Treasury team should not be afraid. Its members should have no problem voting for the new clause, because it sets out their policy. Only a couple of months ago, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said:

"Taxation is not neutral in the way it raises revenue. How and what government tax sends clear signals about the economic activities they believe should be encouraged, and indeed discouraged, and the values they want to entrench in society. For example, work is something to be rewarded through the tax system, whereas environmental pollution is something that should be discouraged."

How right the right hon. Gentleman is, or rather was.

I feel sorry for the hon. Member for Nottingham, South. Last week, he was doing something on behalf of Labour Front Benchers, and no doubt expected a pat on the back and congratulations on defeating the Government. This week, he will be hauled before the Whips—at the end of the evening, no doubt—and told what a bad chap he is and how he has let the side down.

7 pm

The hon. Gentleman has not changed his policy position. The Labour Front-Bench argument has done a U-turn on itself in the past couple of days. Yesterday, Labour Front Benchers had not identified the money. Today, the problem is not the money, but the new clause, which is not drawn up in precisely the same terms as last year's, and, as it is not identical, they cannot support it. Last year, they did not support the new clause. They supported the caveat that allowed the Government to find a better solution. That caveat remains in the new clause today.

As for the money, it is extraordinary that Labour cannot find less than £10 million; yet, only a few months ago, the shadow Chancellor confirmed that the Labour party would further reduce VAT on energy to 5 per cent., at a cost of some £500 million. He has still not explained how he would fund that.

The Liberal Democrats still support the concept of environmental taxation—shifting tax away from jobs and on to pollution, and the use of scarce resources. Cutting VAT on energy-saving materials would send clear signals about the commitment of the House to combating global warming and helping people to cut their fuel bills and stay warm. It would also send clear signals about the strength of commitment of each hon. Member present in the

Chamber to principles promoting the environment and social justice. A number of Conservative Back Benchers have shown their support, which I welcome. They are standing by their principles.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, South and those on the Labour Benches who I know will support him. I note that there is cross-party support for this measure on the Opposition Benches. There is the potential for a Government defeat. In a few moments, that can be delivered. The only thing that will save the Government is the prospect that the Opposition dare not oppose any longer—that they will accept the Government Budget and line up to vote for it and defend the Government's position.

I always knew that we would get little support from Conservative Front Benchers. It did not occur to me for a moment that Labour Front Benchers would reverse their position, let down the environment, show that they cannot be trusted on tax issues and show, above all, that they cannot be trusted on an issue of social justice that would help the old and the cold to stay warm in their homes, and help the environment too. It is a disgrace, and I hope that they will still change their minds.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on tabling the new clause and on the ingenuity of its phraseology, which enables us to debate the issue of VAT on energy-saving materials. His persistence deserves admiration, although I fear that it will not receive that from his colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench. Despite his attempts to argue that his new clause was part and parcel of their new clause, there is a huge gulf between new clause 13 and new clause 15.

The case for cutting VAT on energy-saving materials is overwhelming. I will not rehearse the arguments—they have already been referred to in this short debate, and I entirely accept them. I had hoped that we might win the argument with the Treasury today. I thought that there was a chance that the example set by the landfill tax and by the differential rates of duty on petrol showed that the principle of using the tax system for environmental objectives has been completely embraced.

The true significance of the debate is the way in which the new clause has exposed the craven and backsliding attitude of members of the Opposition Front Bench. For months, as the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) pointed out, the Labour party has given the impression that it favours cutting VAT on energy-saving materials to 8 per cent. It has abandoned that position more or less overnight—a real kick in the teeth for the green movement, and a warning that, if the Labour party ever came to power, environmental objectives would be at the bottom of its list of priorities.

We have become used to the image of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) as a sort of John Kennedy in reverse. The word has gone forth from Labour party headquarters that there is no freedom, however dear to Labour in the past, that will be defended if such defence might cost the right hon. Gentleman votes in the future. There is no frontier, however bravely protected by Labour in the past, that will be protected in the future if such protection might cost him a vote or two.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield has justified the overthrow of every principle on which he and his colleagues live their political lives and were elected to the House, by saying that those were the principles of old Labour. This week he has gone a step further: he has started to overthrow the principles of new Labour as well. Last year, members of his shadow Cabinet backed the proposal to cut the rate of VAT on energy-saving materials. They implied to every listener over the past 12 months that those were still their views, but now we know better. At the very first whiff of grapeshot from the shadow Chancellor, Labour's green aspirations have exploded.

That has happened when Labour is 20 per cent. ahead in the opinion polls. Would any of Labour's present policies survive if its lead slipped to 10 per cent.? The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has whispered to teachers that more resources are coming around the corner; let those teachers take heed. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has whispered to public sector trade unions that higher pay settlements are just around the corner; let them take heed as well. One shadow Cabinet Minister after another has toured the country, lining up local councils and whispering that more money is just around the corner; let them all take heed from what has happened today.

Labour's promises are not worth a bucket of warm spit. When the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) speaks, she has only to say that she is abandoning new clause 15. Will she say whether Labour, if it ever gets the chance, will cut VAT on energy-saving materials to 8 per cent. or whether it will not?

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I shall not detain the House for more than a few minutes, but it would have been remiss of me if I had not supported the new clause, having been associated with legislation on energy conservation in the past.

The principle of rewarding energy conservation should be at the heart of the tax system. There is no question about that. There has been debate on whether the wasteful use of energy should be punished by raising VAT, as proposed, to 17 per cent. There is a strong argument against that, which was persuasively deployed last year. Our housing stock is extremely inefficient in energy terms and some people would have been severely disadvantaged by that increase in VAT. No one could quibble with the principle of equalisation.

The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) spoke about the complexities that might arise from implementation of the new clause. VAT on domestic fuel is 8 per cent., and a serious attempt should be made to deal with the anomaly between VAT on domestic fuel and VAT on energy-saving materials.

The measure would, at modest cost, improve comfort and warmth and reduce costs for the fuel-poor—an important target group—and create employment and provide environmental gain. It is astonishing that Labour Front Benchers are not prepared to support such a measure.

Last night, in a debate on social values, I suggested that a worrying accommodation was occurring between the Labour position and the Government position. In the present case, we have the mother of all accommodations.

[Mr. Cynog Dafis]

The argument in favour of the new clause is compelling, and the arguments that might be presented against it are among the lamest ever deployed.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): As a former Secretary of State for Energy, I should like briefly to intervene to support the new clause moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson).

Much is made of old Labour, but I remember the scheme that I introduced as Secretary of State to help the elderly in the winter. We did not depend on the temperature—we provided a 25 per cent. cut in the energy bills of anyone on benefit through the three winter months; that helped.

Any Member of Parliament, regardless of political allegiance, will know the fear of winter that exists among older people. This is not a sophisticated argument. Many people come to my surgeries and complain that their windows are draughty. Draught-proofing is not a sophisticated form of insulation, but those whose homes are losing heat in that manner—when it is avoidable and they can ill afford it—deserve the support of the House.

Another reason why I speak with some feeling is that, as a representative of a former mining constituency, it sticks in my gullet that unemployed miners and others in Chesterfield are dying of hypothermia. It is an outrage that an energy industry was shut down when people cannot keep warm in the winter.

Finally, I shall vote for the new clause because I believe in it—and there may be a case in politics for sticking to what we believe in before, during or after a general election.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I have listened attentively to the hon. Members who have spoken during the debate. I noted with interest that the former Paymaster General, the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) returned, as Conservative Members usually do, to the complexities of accepting a technical amendment. Are Conservative Members rejecting the new clause for technical reasons or because they will not accept the morality of the argument?

Someone remarked that there was an element of ingenuity about the new clause. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), with whom I work in the warm homes group, that the measure is not about ingenuity but about challenging all hon. Members to achieve a benefit for the many people who suffer from the cold and damp and who want a better life. The House has denied them that outcome for many years.

New clause 13 offers a variety of opportunities. Those of us who have studied the problem in detail know that insulation measures that are applicable in my constituency may not be applicable in Nottingham, South. We must examine all the options. We are trying to offer the people, councillors, local authorities and all the organisations involved the means of reducing heating costs. We must consider also the cost of misery, excessive winter deaths, conditions such as asthma and bronchitis and the chest diseases that many of our constituents suffer as a result of the House's failure to address the problem effectively.

It is important that we pass the amendment tonight. In the past 24 hours, there has been much uncertainty about the Government's intentions regarding value added tax on domestic fuel. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has flown back from China to see what is happening as a result of his interviews with *The Grocer* magazine. I am delighted to see him in the Chamber. When we proposed reducing VAT on domestic fuel to 5 per cent., we were told bluntly by the Labour party that it was a cynical ploy. We are now considering a new clause that would be a step toward resolving the problem of fuel poverty.

I suspect that all hon. Members will return to warm flats or warm homes tonight. However, hundreds upon hundreds of our constituents will return to homes that are damp and miserable. This measure is a small, but reasonable, step forward. It is more in sorrow than in anger that I ask Labour Front Benchers why they have sent their colleagues home to their warm and comfortable flats while they are sending our constituents to cold and miserable homes.

At Inverness in the north of Scotland, the Labour party gave a clear commitment that it regarded energy efficiency as a key issue, which it promised to put at the top of its housing priorities. Where on earth are the people who were at the Labour party conference at Eden Court in Inverness? They are not here tonight to vote for a step in the right direction.

Sir James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I support the remarks by hon. Members representing the parties below the Gangway. On this and many other related issues, we have acted co-operatively and, dare I say, with a degree of integrity. Our position on this issue has remained constant through many battles.

7.15 pm

Without any bitterness, I tender a word of advice to Her Majesty's Opposition: perhaps it would be in their interest to withdraw their rather meaningless new clause 15. It is rather like saying, "When in doubt, call for a report." We all know exactly what that means and where it ends. There is also a whiff of another phrase that used to be bandied about on both sides: "That the Bill be read in six months' time." There is still time for the Opposition to withdraw their new clause.

I am beginning to regret my decision to retire at the general election, as I shall envy the young folk around me who will return full of vigour to a truly entertaining House of Commons—if today's events are anything to go by.

Ms Primarolo: I shall speak directly to our new clause 15 and return to what is on the amendment paper rather than what might have been on the amendment paper but could not be because of an amendment to the law. At issue this evening is a serious debate about how we should deal with two issues: first, fuel poverty and how we can assist the fuel-poor; and, secondly, energy conservation. When dealing with the question of energy conservation and debates about that issue and about protecting the environment, it is important to recognise—as I am sure all hon. Members do—that environmental objectives may be achieved first, by fiscal measures; and, secondly, by direct regulation or investment in projects to assist the fuel-poor.

Despite the fact that there has been much comment about fuel poverty, new clause 13 does not deal with that issue. I shall return to that point later, as I have a feeling that hon. Members would like me to refer to that new clause. New clause 15 pursues the position that we supported last year: whether a variation of value added taxes on energy-saving materials will assist the objectives of energy conservation and of pursuing our environmental policies, and whether that is workable.

I remind the House that last year's amendment required the Treasury to define energy-saving materials and to consider a reduction of VAT on fuel. New clause 15 requires costings of the practical implications of varying the rate of VAT on fuel. If we could spend the same amount directly investing in people's homes and ensure that it was targeted at the fuel-poor, that would need to be considered.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: As I understand it, the hon. Lady is saying that new clause 13 is technically imperfect. Given that the second part allows any Government to come up with an alternative scheme, could not the Labour party put pressure on the Government to do that? If Labour is in government in a couple of months' time, it will be able to come up with such a scheme in any case.

Ms Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman has just shot himself in the foot by admitting that new clause 13 is not workable. We are trying to come up with a workable proposal. At present, I am speaking to new clause 15, not new clause 13.

The policy goal must be to encourage households, particularly those on low incomes, to invest or to have that done for them, to reduce their fuel bills, and a move towards sustainable development, which would combat fuel poverty, save fossil fuels, cut emissions and generate jobs. An example of that is the environmental task force that Labour would fund, which would specifically address fuel poverty, and it would be targeted to assist the most vulnerable.

There is, of course, no entirely satisfactory way to promote that goal solely through the variation of VAT on insulation materials. The creation of jobs is highly suspect in regard to a major proportion of the materials used, and the work to fit them is often undertaken by households or their friends. Therefore it is important that close regard is paid to how the variation of VAT could be used.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Lady referred to the housing task force. Given the statement made by the executive of the Labour party at Inverness last weekend, what exactly does Labour mean when it talks about setting aside funds? Can she give a figure?

Ms Primarolo: It means what it says: that the windfall levy will pay—*[Laughter.]* I am not surprised that Conservative Members laugh or that some hon. Members now speak in favour of an amendment for which they were not prepared to vote last year. Had they done so, some progress would have been made, so I shall take no lessons from hypocrites on the Conservative Benches who now claim that they are in favour of energy conservation.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Primarolo: If I could make some progress, I would be very grateful. I will not leave the hon. Gentleman out, as I am sure that he has a point to make against the Labour party.

Another difficulty is how to determine what qualifies as energy-saving material. We tried to set the Government that task last year, and we asked them to come back with a report this year. It is not unreasonable that that clarification is still necessary, because some building materials have insulation qualities, and if VAT is to be extended to those areas as well, we should know what the full extent is to be. I cannot understand why it is considered so unreasonable to ask for the exact potential.

We also need to consider exactly how we would define energy-saving materials, for instance, referring to the quality of the materials themselves. A good environmental objective would be that not only must the materials be energy efficient but the production of those very materials should be carried out in an energy-efficient way. It may not be possible to deal with all of those items simply through the amendment.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Lady said that there are Conservative Members who are prepared to vote tonight for something for which they were not prepared to vote last year. That is true, but it is also true that Labour Front Benchers are not prepared to vote tonight for something for which they were prepared to vote last year. What political lessons does she draw from that change of position?

Ms Primarolo: I shall return to what is in new clause 13, because—

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): She will write to you. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Especially the second row on the Conservative Benches.

Every hon. Member who has taken part in the debate on the new clause has been given a reasonable hearing, and the hon. Lady has a right to the same.

Ms Primarolo: If only I could just write to everybody.

New clause 15 seeks to assess properly the costs of going down that route, so that we can then compare it with alternative strategies to ensure that we maximise our objectives.

On new clause 13, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) has been incredibly ingenious—I congratulate him on that—but he has lost sight of what he was seeking to achieve. Every hon. Member who spoke in the debate referred to the poor and the consequences of fuel poverty on the poor. The new clause provides for income tax relief, which would be provided against income tax the year after, and subsection (4)(a) provides for that to be paid at 23 per cent. Therefore, anybody who is not paying income tax cannot

[Ms Primarolo]

access the relief. Then, having put forward a proposition that does not reach the objectives that Members set in the important speeches in tonight's debate, the get-out clause, "If the Treasury does not like this, just reduce VAT on energy-saving materials," is no way to progress business in the House and to ensure—*[Interruption.]* Forgive me, but we are trying to create a system that is workable as opposed to scoring points against Labour's Front Bench.

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): I support my hon. Friend in the sense that we should make good law, and I have strong suspicions that, as drafted, new clause 13 is not good law. She said a moment ago that this applies to the 23 per cent. rate of tax. My understanding is that the lower rate would be 20 per cent. rather than 23 per cent. Will she confirm that not only will many people not qualify, but that one of the fundamental problems is that people who have never had to complete income tax returns will now come under a self-assessment regime, and all the cost savings from the energy-saving materials will be blown in accountants' fees to help them to fill in the forms?

Ms Primarolo: My hon. Friend has made the point. Our new clause addresses the very issues that hon. Members have raised. It would enable an examination of the potential advantages of using a variation of VAT to deliver energy conservation measures. That has to be seen in parallel with the commitment to an environmental task force and the specific assistance given particularly to pensioners, who suffer because they cannot afford fuel.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Primarolo: I have given way a number of times, so I shall not give way again.

Tonight's debate should be about the best way to deliver energy conservation and to tackle fuel poverty. Had the Government accepted last year's amendment, we would be discussing how to make progress towards that goal. I hope that the House will accept that, in the provisions in new clause 15, that objective is still in sight. In our discussions on energy conservation, we should decide how to tackle the problems of people who are experiencing fuel poverty through no fault of their own.

7.30 pm

Mr. Jack: I thought for a moment that I was dreaming. I was in a fantasy world in which hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench were talking about saving on the cost of energy. A little cloud appeared in my dream: it was the windfall tax. I realised that that would increase the cost of energy. I ask my hon. Friends to bear that in mind when they consider the Opposition's arguments.

The debate is principally about new clause 13. I do not believe that I can better the arguments against new clause 13 made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), except to add that it is not only £10 million or £20 million that is at stake—that may be the initial figure, if the new clause were to have the force of law—but it could rise to £100 million. The new clause is exploitable, because there are loopholes all the way through it.

The Government have an excellent record of achievement on and commitment to energy saving, so we do not mind our policies being scrutinised. I, therefore, accept new clause 15. Let the report be written, and let our record shine forth.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 58, Noes 241.

Division No. 92] **[7.32 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Austin-Walker, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Hendron, Dr Joe
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McGrady, Eddie
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mallon, Seamus
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurnham, Peter
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Cynog Dafis and
Dr. Lynne Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James

Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Matthew Carrington and Mr. Roger Knapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 15

REPORT ON VAT ON ENERGY SAVING MATERIALS (NO. 2)

'Within twelve months of this Act receiving Royal Assent the Treasury shall report to Parliament on the consequences to the Exchequer of reducing VAT on energy saving materials.'.—*[Mr. Darling.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 16

VEHICLE EXCISE DUTY AND ISLES BASED VEHICLES

'( ) The small islands to which paragraph 18 of Schedule 1 of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 applies, shall include those islands designated under an Order made under the provisions of the said paragraph together with the main island of Orkney, the main island of Shetland, Lewis and Harris.'.—*[Mr. Wallace.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7.45 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss new clause 17—*Exemption of small islands based vehicles*—

'( ) Paragraph 18 of Schedule 1 of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, shall be amended as follows:

"In sub-paragraph (7) the definition of 'mainland road' shall be deleted, and the following definition shall be substituted therefore:

' "mainland road" means any public road in the United Kingdom, other than one which is on a small island or which connects two such islands or is on the main island of Orkney, the main island of Shetland, Lewis or Harris.'.".'.

Mr. Wallace: The new clauses give me an opportunity to raise a matter that is important to haulage contractors in my constituency, specifically those based in some of the smaller isles.

The origins of new clause 16 lie in earlier Finance Acts. During the passage of those Acts, there was considerable debate about the application of an exemption from the higher rates of vehicle excise duty on lorries based in the smaller isles. Before the Finance

[Mr. Wallace]

Act 1995, lorries based on islands where there was no opportunity for plating and testing were given an exemption, and paid a much lower rate of vehicle excise duty. The Bill as originally proposed would have taken that away, and would have meant some haulage contractors on those isles paying over £1,000 more than they would have paid if the exemption had continued.

After a spirited debate in Committee on the Floor of the House, the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who was then a Treasury Minister, met hon. Members whose constituencies contained islands. He gave us a fair hearing, and accepted that we had something of a case. An amendment was subsequently tabled, and there is now a reduced rate of vehicle excise duty for vehicles that are on an island designated under the Vehicle Excise Duty (Designation of Small Islands) Order 1995, which lists a range of islands. It involves goods vehicles at up to 17,000 kg revenue weight normally kept at a base or centre on a small island having use of mainland roads, and goods vehicles at over 17,000 kg revenue weight normally kept at a base or centre on a small island where use of such vehicles on the mainland is subject to a 5 km distance restriction from a mainland port for the purposes of loading and unloading.

New clause 17 is intended to redefine mainland roads—roads where vehicles would be able to travel a greater distance. In my constituency, the operation of the exemption has given rise to some anomalies and inconsistencies. First, in Shetland, hauliers operating on the small islands of Yell, Unst or Fetlar, find that the port where they must arrive at the Shetland mainland, Toft, is 25 to 30 miles from the main town of Lerwick, and that there is nothing much at the port other than a ro-ro terminal. There are no loading or unloading facilities. Likewise, vehicles coming over from Whalsay and arriving at Laxo are some 20 to 25 miles from Lerwick.

In the northern isles of Orkney, the ro-ro ferry comes into Kirkwall, and, for the most part, islands-based lorries weighing more than 17,000 kg can do their business within 5 km of where they land. Those in the southern isles—specifically from Hoy, where I have received representations—come into the rural terminal of Houton. Again, there are no loading or unloading facilities there. Most then go to either Stromness or Kirkwall, the two largest towns on the main island of Orkney, which means that they must travel more than 5 km.

The purpose of the original exemption, which we support, does not apply to a number of lorries on some of the islands, because of the location of the port or terminal where they reach the main island. The purpose of the new clauses is to extend the exemption to lorries based on those small islands.

I raised this matter with the former Paymaster General, the right hon. Member for Wells. At that time, his concerns were that, if we accepted a much broader definition and allowed vehicles to travel much further on mainland roads, that could lead to abuse on the roads on mainland Scotland. I recognise that that was one of the reasons why the restrictions were made in the first place. I propose, therefore, that the new clause should apply only in the main island of Orkney, in the main island of Shetland and in Lewis and Harris. Because those are discrete islands, there is no chance of that sort of abuse arising.

The former Paymaster General also felt that there might be competitive disadvantages for hauliers based on the main islands of Orkney and Shetland—hence new clause 16, which would extend the lower rate of vehicle excise duty to all hauliers based on the main islands, as well as to those on small islands. Again, there are arguments for that, apart from the points that I have already raised. First, in my constituency, there is no designated trunk road in either Orkney or Shetland. The origin of vehicle excise duty was to reflect wear and tear on the road network. Some consideration might be given to the fact that a haulier operating on the Orkney or Shetland mainland, which has no trunk roads, has to pay the same as a haulier based in Birmingham who has immediate access to hundreds of miles of motorway.

Secondly, there is a practical point in terms of the companies based in the islands. There is little scope or opportunity, if a haulier's vehicle breaks down, to hire another vehicle. As a result, I am informed that many hauliers feel obliged to maintain a spare vehicle so that, if anything goes wrong, they have the capacity to carry on their business. Of course, that adds generally to their costs, because those vehicles have to be maintained, quite apart from being bought. In particular, if the vehicle excise duty is at the higher rate, that is another imposition and burden on those hauliers.

To address the practical situation, I understand that, if a lorry goes from mainland Orkney to the Scottish mainland, there are no tachograph requirements in the isles, but, if the lorry crosses the Pentland firth, a tachograph must be calibrated in Thurso. Therefore, the potential for abuse does not exist because, if lorries are exempted from vehicle excise duty and a special disc has been designed to cover those lorries, clearly, there will be a simple means of enforcing the exemption when the tachograph has to be calibrated.

In short, the purpose underlying the new clauses is to try to give some support to hauliers who are based in the islands. It is not easy to make a business flourish there and we are considering ways in which they can receive the exemptions, specifically with regard to those hauliers whose lorries arrive at a ro-ro terminal more than 5 km from the main towns.

I ask basically that hauliers in those islands be put on the same basis as was intended originally by the Government when they agreed the original amendment to the Finance Act 1995. More generally, it would make sense to extend the exemption throughout the main islands because that would help those hauliers, who have a range of additional costs, which are not faced by those who run haulage operations on mainland Britain.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): It will come as no surprise that I support the principles behind new clauses 16 and 17. I congratulate the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on raising the matter in that way. He gave the history of the origin of the exemptions. Although the Government in 1995 agreed to restore some of the concessions, that restoration benefited only half the lorries previously eligible for the exemption. As he pointed out, it has also left adrift some of the smaller islands, which the Government themselves intended should be part of the exemption.

Although this is an important matter for hauliers who are affected, it is worth making the point—I am sure that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland would concede

this—that the new clauses address only one aspect of the disadvantages that remote island communities face because of transport costs and difficulties. We need to consider the whole picture affecting the island economies to understand the significance of the issue.

It is clear that the single biggest handicap or disadvantage faced by island communities such as the Western Isles and Orkney and Shetland is their distance and remoteness not only from the mainland of Scotland, but, taking a wider economic view, from the markets of the whole of the United Kingdom and, indeed, of Europe. The costs imposed on businesses by transport costs and the costs that come indirectly from the difficulty of making transport connections have a significant impact on island businesses. That is the single biggest handicap facing the economy of the Scottish islands and the single biggest factor in producing consistently high unemployment rates, particularly in the Western Isles; Orkney and Shetland obviously have a special position because of the impact of the oil industry.

Those transport costs affect not just island businesses, but consumers. The price of everything is increased because of transport costs: the price of petrol, building materials and food—anything that consumers buy in the shops. Therefore, if we take the sum of those two effects on the economy—high unemployment and high prices—transport costs produce hardship and poverty in the island communities.

The Government can help to overcome those handicaps in many ways. Spending on general public services is among them, but one of the best ways that a Government can help is by targeting help and reducing overall transport costs and their effects on businesses and consumers in the islands. To do that effectively, we need, first, an accurate measure of just what those costs are and how they affect the islands' local economy.

The Scottish Office recently produced a report through some consultants on the effect of transport costs on the highland economy, but it was supposed to include the island economies as well and only one company was included in the report. Therefore, we need to have a specific study of the impact of transport costs on the Scottish islands. I recommend such a study both to the Government in place and to the Government in waiting. It would help to formulate a policy to tackle this problem.

Once we have an accurate measure of how the local economy is affected by those transport costs, the Government can work out how best to deploy their resources in the most targeted and cost-effective way to help the islands overcome the transport handicap. Vehicle excise duty is only one way in which transport costs affect the Scottish islands. The cost of ferry transport is obviously another important factor. Others include high air fares and the air passenger tax. All of those, in their different ways, affect the island economies. Therefore, we need to have from Government an overall view of the impact of transport costs and a strategic approach to working out the most cost-effective ways in which Government can assist to overcome that handicap.

I would like not simply a piecemeal approach, tackling specific aspects of the costs, but an overall strategic view. Although I support the principle behind the new clause, what we really need in the islands is an overall view. That is what we are looking forward to, after the election.

8 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) is to be congratulated on raising the matter. It is quite clear that the concern affects many people living in the Scottish islands, and he is right to put down a marker for the future.

The hon. Gentleman wishes to extend the exemption that applies to some of the smaller islands but—as he rightly said—not to others, which causes all sorts of anomalies and resentment. Half the lorries might be covered, but half are not. The question is whether we extend the exemption to include all lorries and appropriate vehicles on the islands or whether it might be more appropriate to have a proper look at the whole system of support—direct and indirect—for island transport.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), who put forward a cogent and coherent case for a proper strategic look at the way in which the Government support island transport. The vehicle excise duty problem, to which the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland referred, is only one part of an overall problem. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the transport costs faced on the islands—not only by hauliers and commercial travel but by those who cross the sea in private cars. The cost of going to the Scottish islands is much greater than that of crossing the English channel, for example. All of us who have ever attempted to take a car and family across the Minch, let alone a large lorry carrying freight, will know that transport costs impose a formidable burden. In addition, such costs have a substantial bearing on the competitiveness of island firms.

A strategic approach is clearly called for. I know that the Government have agreed to a further study—the first study that they carried out having been rather more limited than was desirable. My hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles will know that the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland has said that he will embark on a comprehensive review of Scottish Office spending. I can certainly undertake on his behalf that, as part of that study, we shall examine how the Government support transport to the Scottish islands—by both air and sea—and see how we can best assist the majority of individuals and businesses based there.

Such a strategic study is long overdue and marks the difference between us and the present Government, who have tended to regard such things, inasmuch as they ever think about them, in a very piecemeal way. We believe that an overall comprehensive approach is absolutely essential with regard not only to the new clause but to the amendment on air passenger duty, which we shall consider later. People living on the islands of Scotland clearly face specific problems. They rightly look to the Scottish Office in particular and Parliament in general to address them. If the Government will not do that, we certainly will.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have sympathy with the points made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). He has fought a battle over a long period on this issue, with a certain amount of success. I am sorry that, certainly for the Government's part, I cannot offer him any further success this evening. However, I emphasise that there is quite a lot of sympathy for some of the points that he made. I shall briefly give the reasons why we do not think that the new clauses are acceptable.

[Mr. Oppenheim]

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland argues that, on Orkney and Shetland, there are no trunk roads. Heavy goods vehicles can of course cause more wear and tear on smaller roads that are not necessarily designed to take them than on trunk roads, so quite a large cost is still involved. The reason why the islands were originally excluded is that the islands that were included were included for historical reasons. There is a danger of where to stop if a concession is made to one or two more islands. There are the small islands around Northern Ireland and the Isle of Wight—the list could go on. If one island got a concession, the next would lobby for a concession that—arguably—might be justified. The issue would become quite open-ended for any Government.

I did not find the point that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland made about some hauliers having to keep a second truck in case the first broke down because they could not rent a truck on the islands totally convincing in this day and age. Even fairly modern commercial vehicles are not that unreliable. The general points that he made about the difficulty of living on the islands and the importance of increasing employment opportunities and reducing cost penalties wherever feasible are, however, well taken, but I am not sure that the creation of further anomalies in the indirect tax system is necessarily the way in which to address them. The debate could be taken far wider into regional aid policy, European regional aid policy, and so on. I think that that is the way in which to address the issues rather than creating anomalies in the vehicle excise duty system.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the Minister for the understanding way in which he has negated what I have sought to do. Will he address the point with regard to vehicles that come from islands that are designated as small islands but, due to almost an accident of geography, those over 17,000 kg have to go more than 5 km before they reach a landing point where they can do any business? Such an anomaly seems to defeat the purpose of the exemption.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point, and we shall look at that particular anomaly. We have already looked initially at the matter. The fundamental problem is that the system would still be left open to abuse, to which hauliers, especially on the mainland, would object. There is an anomaly, but if there were a concession that vehicles could go more than 5 km, it could be abused in other directions—not particularly on the islands mentioned. That is a fair point; there is a particular problem and we shall certainly look at it. The hon. Gentleman is coming into the Treasury tomorrow for a meeting on another issue, so perhaps we can discuss the matter in more depth then, if that is convenient for him.

The comments of the Chief Secretary were absolutely marvellous—very new Labour. New Labour does not make spending pledges, it makes report pledges. We heard the usual story: lots of hints, but no firm pledges.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): The hon. Gentleman said that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) is the Chief Secretary.

Mr. Oppenheim: Sorry, shadow Chief Secretary. We heard the old story—all talk and no action. If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) seriously thinks that, if Labour were to get into office, all the little hints and nudges about increasing spending here and there would be fulfilled, he and his constituents are dreamers.

We costed all the pledges very conservatively in the winter—and they came to £30 billion. What happened? The shadow Chief Secretary said, "That is nonsense. We have potentially an iron Chancellor. He is not going to go rusty or exceed Tory tax and spending targets." I find it absolutely incredible that, after 18 years in opposition, the unique selling proposition of new Labour, after all the focus groups and spin doctors—

Mr. Darling *rose—*

Mr. Oppenheim: If the hon. Gentleman will sit down a minute—is that the Tories have made such a mess of things that it is going to stick to all their policies.

Mr. Darling: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, since I assume that that is what he is going to do. It is a pity that, when discussing a matter that is important to many thousands of people living in the Scottish islands, he should depart from—indeed, not attempt to answer or come up with a constructive solution to—the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). He surely must accept that, given that the Government support to a greater or lesser extent some aspects of transport in the Scottish islands and given that there are anomalies, any Government should be prepared to consider them and see whether there is a better way in which to support such transport. Nobody is in the business of writing blank cheques or making promises that cannot be delivered. He admits that there is a problem. Rather than making silly and inaccurate points, might he not do better in his remaining days in the Treasury dealing with some of the problems?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman clearly did not listen. I did my best to answer the points made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. I also said that we would discuss them further tomorrow. Some of his points were invalid but some were valid. There are anomalies. I said that the new clause was not the best way in which to deal with them. I offered to discuss the genuine anomalies with the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland.

It is legitimate for me to criticise the total dishonesty of Labour's policy, which is constantly to drop hints that people need only elect Labour and help will consequently be given here and there. However, whenever Labour Members are pinned down on their policy, they say, "No; we'll stick to the Government's tax and spending commitments." It is legitimate for me to make those criticisms, having dealt reasonably fully with the legitimate points made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland and offered him a meeting on the subject. On that basis, I hope that he will withdraw the motion.

Mr. Wallace: We achieved the original concession from the Government in the Finance Act 1995 by a remarkable cross-party consensus involving the support not only of the Conservative party, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats but of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), who made a very lively speech.

I have no intention of making this a partisan matter. For the Treasury, the amounts involved are relatively small, and I should certainly welcome any review, from any quarter, of the islands' transport. I think that, tomorrow, the Minister and I can usefully discuss the matter further. I am glad that he realises that there are some genuine anomalies. As I do not intend to push the matter to a Division, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 7

ULTRA LOW SULPHUR DIESEL

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): I beg to move amendment No. 27, in page 6, line 30, leave out '(6)' and insert '(7)'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 28, in page 6, line 39, at end insert—

'(7) "low cancer-risk part-renewable blended diesel" means fuel of the description in Schedule 2B to this Act'.

No. 29, in page 7, line 4, at end insert—

'( ) £0.3416 a litre in the case of low cancer-risk part-renewable blended diesel;'.

No. 30, in page 7, line 11, at end insert

'low cancer-risk part-renewable blended diesel or'.

No. 31, in page 7, line 15, after first 'of', insert

'low cancer-risk part-renewable blended diesel or'.

No. 32, in page 7, line 23, after 'not', insert

'low cancer-risk part-renewable blended diesel or'.

No. 33, in page 7, line 30, at end insert—

'( ) after the definition of "light oil" there shall be inserted the following definition—

"low cancer-risk part-renewable blended diesel" has the meaning given by section 1(7) above;'.

No. 35, in page 8, line 4, after '(a)', insert

'low cancer-risk part-renewable blended diesel or'.

No. 36, in page 8, line 18, after 'not', insert

'low cancer-risk part-renewable blended diesel or.'

No. 37, in page 8, line 22, at end insert—

'() After Schedule 2A to that Act (mixing of heavy oils) there shall be inserted the following Schedule—

"SCHEDULE 2 B
LOW CANCER-RISK PART-RENEWABLE BLENDED DIESEL

1. Low cancer-risk part-renewable blended diesel is fuel which consists of—

(a) a blend of heavy oil containing not less than 22 per cent. by volume of kerosene which when blended conforms to the specification in paragraph 2; and

(b) not less than 3.8 per cent. and not more than 15.0 per cent. by volume of methylester which is derived from rapeseed oil which contains not more than 0.02 per cent. by weight of free glycerine and which conforms to such other specifications as the Commissioners may direct.

2. The specification referred to in paragraph 1 is a blend of heavy oil—

(a) of which not less than 60 per cent. by volume and not more than 72 per cent. by volume distils at a temperature of 250 degrees celsius;

(b) of which not less than 90 per cent. by volume distils at a temperature of 290 degrees celsius;

(c) which has a density at 15 degrees celsius of not less than 813 kilograms per cubic metre and not more than 819 kilograms per cubic metre;

(d) which has a minimum cetane number of 49;

(e) which contains not more than 0.0015 per cent. by weight of sulphur;

(f) which contains not more than 11.25 per cent. by volume of aromatic hydrocarbons and not more than 0.05 per cent. by volume of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (containing three or more carbon rings); and

(g) which conforms to such other specifications as the Commissioners may direct."'.

Sir Michael Spicer: I should say that I am president of the Association of Electricity Producers. I am not quite sure what that might have to do with amendments on fuel, but I have been advised to make that declaration, just to be absolutely safe. I am raising the issues on behalf of a constituent, who has asked me to do so.

The amendments would give a small additional tax incentive for the use of diesel which is blended to reduce a specific group of pollutants—polycyclic polyaromatic hydrocarbons, known as PAH—which are suspected of inducing cancer. Later this year, the Department of the Environment is expected to classify PAH as a priority pollutant.

In this instance, the pollutant is attacked by blending diesel fuel with methylester, which is produced from rapeseed. Therefore, as well as attacking emissions suspected of being cancerous by reducing PAH compounds by a factor of 60, the blended fuel has an interesting renewable element. My amendments treat that low-cancer-risk compound in precisely the same manner as the Bill treats ultra-low-sulphur diesel in clause 7—all my amendments relate to clause 7—and simply tag on an additional exemption to the standard rate of tax.

In a letter dated 10 December 1996 to my constituent, Mr. Charles Fraser, of Dove International Ltd., the Treasury rightly expressed concern on two matters. First, it states:

"The objective"

of clause 4

"is to secure improvements in air quality, particularly but not exclusively in urban areas".

I completely agree with the objective of improving air quality, and my amendment, like clause 7, simply furthers it.

Secondly, the letter states:

"it was not our intention to favour any particular brand or formulation of fuel over another."

That is a perfectly reasonable constraint on the Bill. That intention is also why my amendment No. 37—a proposed schedule 2B—has been devised very precisely to define fuel generically, in terms of its low-cancer-risk effect. There is a generic element—certainly not a brand element—to the proposal, and it is based not on any particular compound but on the generic effect of reducing diesel's potentially dangerous emissions.

[Sir Michael Spicer]

Therefore, there is no real difference between my proposals and the Government's proposals in clause 7 on low-sulphur fuel. My amendments build on the Government's proposals, thereby enhancing them. I therefore very much hope that, on reflection, the Minister will be able to accept them.

Mr. Oppenheim: I am entirely at one with my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) in focusing on the need to reduce air pollution. An important part of the Budget's strategy has been to try to provide fiscal advantage to those using low-polluting fuels, such as low-sulphur diesel and liquid petroleum gas. We feel that one of the greatest detriments to people's quality of life, particularly in urban environments, is smoke emanating from vehicles. Much of that smoke is unnecessary, particularly because it comes from badly maintained diesel engines.

The changes to the tax system to reduce tax on low-sulphur diesel by 1p, and the very significant tax reductions on liquid petroleum gas, provide real opportunities for commercial vehicle owners and fleets to reduce emissions over the next few years. Those changes were made with a great amount of support from all parties, and because they were pushed in successive Budgets by hon. Members from both sides of the House. I was pleased to make some progress on that matter.

8.15 pm

We do not feel that the amendments are the appropriate way forward, because of the cost. By concentrating available funding on low-sulphur diesel fuel—which is relatively cheap to produce compared to the fuel mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire—we will be able to maximise the benefit.

The problem with the fuel produced by Dove, which is a mixture of refined rapeseed oil and low-sulphur diesel, is that it is much more expensive than conventional low-sulphur diesel, and does not provide a perceptible gain in emissions. The fuel's extra production cost is about 3p to 4p, and it would require a subsidy of about 2.7p to bring it into line with regular low-sulphur diesel.

There is no clear evidence that Dove fuel is any less carcinogenic than other low-sulphur diesel fuels. That was another point in our consideration of the matter.

Sir Michael Spicer: I understand the point about cost, but might it not be worth considering the matter—not now, but later—in relation to the money spent on renewable energy that does not necessarily produce a beneficial effect on the environment? In those terms, one might reconsider a form of renewable energy that potentially does have a very beneficial effect on the environment. In future, could not the matter be considered within the context of renewable energy and beneficial effect on the environment?

Mr. Oppenheim: I accept my hon. Friend's point that we must consider all fuels of that type. The problem with the fuel he has mentioned is that it is significantly more expensive than other low-sulphur fuels, without offering significant benefits. Therefore, from the point of view of the taxpayer and the environment, it would be wrong to concentrate funding on one fuel when others would be more cost-effective, and would achieve the same, and possibly better, results.

If the cost gap can be narrowed, there may be an opportunity to re-examine the matter. We will always keep an open mind on it. However, my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire should realise that the fuel is produced partly because of the common agricultural policy. Particularly in France and in Italy, the policy is to reduce rapeseed surpluses by refining some of it into fuel.

In the long term, once technology improves and costs are reduced, it may be a feasible solution. We have not yet reached that stage, although I can certainly give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that we will keep an open mind on the issue. If in future the fuel is a cost-effective way in which to reduce emissions, we will certainly reconsider it.

Sir Michael Spicer: When my hon. Friend throws the CAP at me, I feel a little on the defensive.

I do not think that my constituent will be particularly pleased with my hon. Friend's response, although he has opened the door for the matter to be thought about in future. It has been useful for my constituent to have the opportunity for the matter to be aired on the Floor of the House. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 9

RATES OF AIR PASSENGER DUTY

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 8, line 38, leave out from beginning to end of line 3 on page 9.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 22, in page 9, line 3, at end add—

(4) Subsections (1)–(3) of this section do not apply for flights to and from airports in areas in receipt of Objective 1 funding from the European Union.'.

Mr. Trimble: The amendment would leave out clause 9, which doubles air passenger duty. When air passenger duty was introduced, we thought that it was misconceived. We do not need provisions that increase the cost of air travel. In the British Isles in particular and western Europe in general, we need the cost of air travel to come down.

I have in my pocket the airline ticket that I used to get me over here this afternoon. It cost £247 for a return fare. In my briefcase, I have a return ticket to take me to North America tomorrow morning, where, no doubt the Government will be glad to know, I shall be away for a week. That ticket to Washington and back cost £209. That is a ridiculous state of affairs. We need lower fares, not just for the comfort of those going on holiday—I am not doing that tomorrow, of course—but for business.

We in Northern Ireland are particularly conscious of that need. Unlike those hon. Members who fly to Glasgow or Edinburgh, we have no alternative—we fly or we do not travel. Taking a boat and then a car or a train is not a realistic alternative for business users. It is all right for

holidaymakers. When I go on my holidays, I go by car and boat, but for business purposes that is not feasible. Air travel is essential for business. I have not bothered to do any studies on the matter, but the fact can be seen by looking around at people who travel on aeroplanes. Most of the traffic is business travel. The duty is penalising business. That is an important consideration.

One must also consider the impact on private citizens. The Government may have thought that the duty—introduced at £5 and now increased to £10—was a comparatively small amount in relation to ticket prices. In relation to the ticket that I have here, it is a small percentage sum, but there is a range of prices. For those who are planning family travel on cheaper fares, the duty is quite hefty in percentage terms. I expect that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) will elaborate on that, considering the impact of the duty on short-hop journeys to the Scottish islands. A £10 duty on a £50 fare is a significant extra cost, and an unfair burden.

We considered tabling amendments to exclude Northern Ireland, because we are uniquely dependent on air traffic. We could have considered amendments to exclude areas such as the islands of Scotland, which are also uniquely dependent on air traffic. However, we preferred to table an amendment on the general provision. The tax is bad. We do not want to single out one part of the kingdom against others. We prefer to leave out the clause. We would like to repeal the duty, but at least let us not make it worse.

Mr. Salmond: I support amendment No. 7, and shall speak to amendment No. 22, which would provide a low-cost alternative to the proposal of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). It would concentrate relief on objective 1 areas of the United Kingdom—the highlands and islands, Northern Ireland and Merseyside. If the Government have any sympathy for the arguments, they might at least consider this low-cost alternative.

In Committee, the Exchequer Secretary was sympathetic to the arguments for the highlands and islands not undergoing the doubling of air passenger duty. However, he doubted whether the duty was having a substantial effect on the area. Rather than giving him my arguments, I should like to read a letter that appeared in the *Financial Times* in December from a number of people who have a deep knowledge of the highlands and islands and a deep interest in the economy of the area.

The letter said:

"Air services to and from the islands of Scotland are an essential part of the transport structure of the region. The natural boundaries of mountain and sea make air travel a social and business necessity and, in many instances, a lifeline service with no acceptable alternatives in road and rail.

It is our view that the imposition of the Duty in November 1994 was inequitable and has had far reaching detrimental repercussions to island life and the local economy. In adding to the cost of travel, the duty is contrary to the special case presented by the government for European structural funds to achieve lower transport costs through Objective 1 status. The lower than projected passenger numbers on these lifeline services is already jeopardising some routes and frequencies and the reduction expected as a result of the doubling of duty will increase subsidies already paid by the Scottish Office with the net tax take to the Exchequer being reduced.

While the amount of duty to be raised from November 1997 by the Exchequer nationally from the duty will be about £700 million in a full year, the amount collected in the Highlands and Islands will be less than £2 million. However, the consequences of the duty in the Highlands and Islands are greater because the proportion of tax is four or five times that on fares in other parts of the UK.

Although in national terms, therefore, the Highlands and Islands tax take is insignificant, to the region it represents a very substantial penalty which will be detrimental to the future growth of the area's economy."

That letter was signed by Alan Wilson, the chief executive of the Scottish Council (Development and Industry), and supported by Air UK, Highlands and Islands Airports, Highlands of Scotland tourist board, Loganair, the Orkney Islands council, the Shetland Islands council, the Highland council and the Western Isles council. All those organisations have a deep interest in the development and welfare of the highlands and islands of Scotland. Their arguments should be taken more seriously than the Minister was prepared to do in Committee.

I want to stress three arguments. The hon. Member for Upper Bann put his points well. Northern Ireland is particularly dependent on air travel, and so are the highlands and islands of Scotland. There are lifeline services for which there is no acceptable alternative. It was remiss of the Government not to consider beforehand the impact on those areas of doubling the duty, which is damaging to the local economies.

Levying the duty at two flat rates brings about the extraordinary anomaly of charging £20 on a business class fare to Japan, which costs many hundreds of pounds, perhaps even thousands of pounds, and £10 on a fare from Inverness to Stornoway, which costs a mere fraction of that. The charge is therefore proportionally much greater.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann pointed out that the fare from Northern Ireland to London was more than that to cross the Atlantic. People in the islands of Scotland will rightly point out that many fares are already too high in relation to the distances travelled. There are some extraordinarily high fares at the moment. Is it not all the more anomalous to impose a flat-rate duty on vulnerable communities?

Secondly, amendment No. 22 refers to objective 1 areas. Do the Government not consider it somewhat anomalous on the one hand to identify those areas as objective 1, with special help for transport infrastructure and other facilities, while at the same time imposing national taxation, without any differential, on the self-same areas?

In Committee, the Exchequer Secretary said that he thought that some of the fares in the Western Isles were already supported. I do not know whether he was sure about that. Yes, some fares in the highlands and islands are supported. Is it not therefore anomalous not to take that into account when considering the taxation system?

My third argument is about the high fare structure. For many years, the routes from Edinburgh and Glasgow to London have been among the most profitable for the operating companies. This year, British Airways shuttle flights from Edinburgh and Glasgow to London were among the most profitable of any of its operations anywhere in the world. In recent years—indeed, recent months—we have had the development of low-cost flights. Easyjet, Ryanair and other airlines have come on to some of the routes and started to put downward pressure on charges. It is working against that grain of

[Mr. Salmond]

encouraging competition to impose a flat-rate charge. The impact will be felt hardest by the airlines that are promoting economy tickets.

8.30 pm

For all those reasons, I hope that the Exchequer Secretary will reconsider. If he is not prepared to junk the whole taxation hike—I do not know whether it is Tory tax increase No. 22, 23 or 24 since the last election—perhaps he might like to consider the low-cost alternative of looking at objective 1 areas, which in fiscal terms would cost perhaps one tenth of the measure suggested by the hon. Member for Upper Bann.

I hope that my suggestion will attract some sympathy from both sides of the House. After the debate on energy-saving materials, I have no great expectation that the Labour Front-Bench team will be attracted to it, beyond promising a survey or a report. That is a great pity, because I suspect that hon. Members from every other Opposition party will be in the Lobby to support one, or perhaps both, of the amendments.

The Government have levied an increase in taxation without fully taking into account the consequences for certain areas that are particularly dependent on air travel and they were wrong to do so. It is the job of the Opposition—a real Opposition—to oppose that increase and to join in opposing it, rather than sitting, preparing for government and mentally placing themselves on the other side of the Chamber.

Last year, or perhaps a few years ago, in a debate in this Chamber, the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) said that the Labour party had become the national party of Scotland. He meant not that it had become the national party, but that it had Members and prospective parliamentarians from the length and breadth of the country. I give the Labour Front-Bench team a warning. Unless Labour is prepared to show some identity with and support for the fragile communities in the highlands and islands of Scotland by supporting this sort of amendment, or at least giving a firm commitment in financial terms to an alternative proposal, it will be cleared out of those areas come the general election.

Mr. Wallace: Air passenger duty certainly generated considerable controversy in the islands when it was first introduced in November 1994 and in the debates leading up to the enactment of that Finance Bill.

I cannot support the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), inasmuch as I could not support suddenly losing that amount of revenue by removing the tax. In saying that, I am sympathetic towards the arguments that motivated him to move the amendment. My right hon. and hon. Friends will support the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), although even that has some shortcomings. I do not intend any hint of criticism for the Chair, but my amendment was more specific and dealt with the islands alone. There is a particular problem in the islands.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the mistake was to impose the tax? Is he also prepared to recognise that it is a tax on children, whose fares are low? At a time when we are trying to attract more tourism to the United Kingdom and the pound is strong, it is also a tax on tourism, so the tourist industry is being threatened as well.

Mr. Wallace: I agree about it being a tax on children and I was going to refer to that. As a generality, however, I find it one of the more difficult taxes to oppose—it is more a case of the details of its imposition. Among European Union countries, we probably have the lowest rate of air passenger duty, so I do not think that it produces a competitive disadvantage. I am concerned about its imposition on vulnerable communities and routes.

In October last year, British Airways withdrew its services on routes in the highlands and islands, claiming that it could no longer make a profit—indeed, it claimed that it had never made a profit—and that they were loss-making routes. The services are now being run by British Regional Airlines, which I am sure will try to make them profitable and successful.

In being asked to apply air passenger duty to routes serving the islands, we are being asked to tax a loss-making operation. Highlands and Islands Airports is subsidised by the Government. It reckons that, as a direct result of the duty that came into effect in November 1994, it has identified a less than projected increase in air travel in the region.

On the one hand, we are taxing loss-making routes—that could lead to greater subsidies being required for Highlands and Islands Airports—and on the other, we are paying a subsidy. The hon. Member for Upper Bann referred to the cost of about £247 for a return fare from Belfast to London. I do not have a ticket on me, but it costs approximately £480 or £490 for a return fare from my constituency to London. That is a phenomenal cost, and the Government now want to place an additional tax on top of that.

Businesses in the islands operate on pretty slim profit margins because of where they are. One cannot alter facts of geography, but one can try to minimise the disadvantages. One way to do so is to ensure that no additional burden—

Mr. Salmond: If my memory serves me right, in 1979 the Tory manifesto referred to the cost of travel to and from the Scottish islands, promising a range of measures sharply to reduce that cost, including road equivalent tariffs.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman remembers correctly. I had the misfortune to hear the then Secretary of State for Scotland, now the noble Lord Younger of Prestwick, announcing the retreat from road equivalent tariff. That is just an example of the greater burdens that exist.

Parents who live in Orkney and Shetland will pay £30 in additional taxation to take a child to hospital in Aberdeen. I have received parliamentary answers showing that the additional cost to the Orkney and Shetland health boards runs into tens of thousands of pounds as a result of the additional taxation that will be levied.

In Committee, the Exchequer Secretary said that he was not unsympathetic to the views being put forward. Indeed, in a letter to me on 19 February, he repeats that he is

"sympathetic to the issues raised about the lifeline nature of some services in the Islands",

but thinks that the exemption from air passenger duty is not necessarily the way to deal with that. He goes on:

"in recognition of the valuable service provided by air transport to the Scottish Islands communities, the Government decided that subsidy was the best way forward."

I have rarely heard that said by a Conservative Minister, but it is a fact of life.

"Additional funding was made available to enable the Western Isles council for example to offset the effects of APD. I think this is a more effective way of granting relief as subsidies can be better targeted to routes where it has been objectively shown that help is needed to keep them in existence."

The subsidy is very limited: there is certainly no subsidised route between my constituency and the Scottish mainland. Again, I have to meet the Minister tomorrow with the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) to go into the matter in more detail, but it would be interesting to hear what he has in mind with regard to greater targeting of support to vulnerable routes.

A paper prepared by the Scottish Office for the most recent meeting of the Highlands and Islands Convention in Stornoway said:

"The Government recognise, however, the concerns about APD are real and that commercially fragile routes in the Highlands and Islands are under threat. The Government are giving the matter the fullest consideration."

I welcome that consideration, but I hope that it will be productive.

Mrs. Ewing: That viewpoint has been underpinned by the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) and by the tourist authorities and many business organisations, as well as the councils in the highlands and islands. The Government should take that on board: not only members of political parties make that point, but people across the entire sphere of interests in the highlands and islands.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Lady is right, as was the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, to give examples of the range of support for opposition to the tax.

We have some reservations about amendment No. 22, although it is true that there is a contradiction between having objective 1 status to try to eliminate the disadvantages of peripherality, and imposing a tax that exacerbates them. Removing the tax from Liverpool but leaving it in Manchester would not, however, be readily understood in the north-west of England. The amendment is therefore in some respects unsatisfactory, but it is nevertheless the best vehicle we have with which to register the point, and my party is prepared to support it.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I do not entirely identify with all the issues of the islands, so I leave it to others to make representations about them. It amazes me that there are not more hon. Members from the central belt of Scotland in the Chamber tonight, because the tax has a significant effect on flights from central Scotland.

One of the Government's recent successes has been the introduction of a range of low-cost choices for flights from Scotland to England: there is a £29 single fare from Prestwick to London, or about £59 return. If the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) wants to find a cheaper way of getting to London from Belfast, I suggest Gill Air at £56 return to Prestwick, followed by Ryanair at £59 to London. If he does that, however, tax will be charged twice because of the change of airline; that does not seem fair.

Mr. Wallace: That is an important point, about which I often get complaints from constituents. My understanding is that, if the issuing travel agent can link the two tickets and show that they apply to a single journey, and if the second flight takes off within six hours of the previous one arriving, air passenger duty should be levied only once. The Minister may want to confirm that, but it is something that should be drawn to the attention of travel agents.

Mr. Gallie: That is an interesting point, but it is my understanding that, if people change airlines, they lose that option.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) is correct: it makes no difference whether it is one airline or two; if it is one journey, even though the flight is broken because of connections, the tax is levied only once, and not at a double rate.

Mr. Gallie: I am relieved to hear that, because travel agents in my constituency certainly felt that on a journey from, say, Prestwick to London, connecting with an onward flight to the United States, two charges would be levied. If that is not so, I have little to argue with my hon. Friend about.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The hon. Gentleman should bear it in mind that the Minister was talking about a through fare. People who fly into London or Manchester and spend a few days there before flying on to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness or the north-east of England would be subject to double taxation.

8.45 pm

Mr. Gallie: I have asked my hon. Friend for further clarification on that point, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comment.

It seems to me that a percentage rate would be more appropriate than a flat rate. I have no difficulty with the idea of airport taxes, as they seem to apply in every other country, and, as the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said, our rate is one of the lowest. That apart, there is an unfairness with respect to low-cost flights. I ask my hon. Friend either to address that point today or to give an undertaking to do so in the future.

Mr. Macdonald: I well remember some of these details from a Finance Bill some years back, when the tax was first introduced and we tried to explore some of its complexities. I support what the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) said about the value of considering a percentage, VAT-style approach to the duty, especially if it continues to increase.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) for his undertaking to take an overall view of the impact of transport costs on the

[Mr. Macdonald]

economy of the islands. This debate ties in neatly with a previous debate on vehicle excise duty, and we need an overall view of all such costs and their impact on the economy of the islands if we are to have a strategic approach to targeting assistance in the most effective way.

Three years ago, when the tax was first introduced, I moved an amendment in Committee in terms that were extremely close to those of amendment No. 25, tabled by the Liberal Democrats. That amendment has not been selected for debate, for what must be good and proper reasons, but I regret that, because I believe that it represents the right approach to the issue. If we are to tackle the disadvantages facing the Scottish islands—it is notable that all those who have spoken so far have emphasised the position of those islands as compared with other parts of the United Kingdom—we must target support and assistance in a proper, cost-effective way; so I would have been happy to support amendment No. 25, had it been selected.

I support everything that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said. He gave much background about how this will affect the Scottish islands, and explained that airline routes are essential to them.

It is worth emphasising that the public sector is a big user of the airline routes. The measure affects business people and ordinary consumers, but it also affects the public sector, and especially local authorities and health boards. Perhaps nothing more clearly illustrates the lifeline nature of the routes than the fact that they are used so extensively by local health boards, not only to carry officials around but to transport patients from island to mainland. No other health board in the country flies patients to hospital for treatment, but in the islands, it must be done; that emphasises that the airline routes are essential.

Although I understand at least part of the motivation behind the selection of amendments and the remarks made about them, I fear that they go too wide to tackle the problem specific to the Scottish islands. Amendment No. 22 is not only too wide, but probably unworkable. It is not sensible to link exemptions to objective 1 status, because its lifespan is limited. In two or three years, that status will be reviewed, and it is likely that the highlands and islands will not retain it.

An exemption made to help the region could end up missing its target. Merseyside could continue to enjoy objective 1 status and an exemption but the highlands and islands could be excluded. That would be absurd. It is not the outcome that we are trying to achieve. More sensible is the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central for a proper strategic approach to the range of problems that are tied up in the issue. We can then target help where it is most needed.

Mr. Darling: As my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) said, this debate follows on from that on vehicle excise duty. I want to deal with the two amendments separately. Amendment No. 7 was moved by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). The difficulty is that it deletes all the revenue brought in by air passenger duty, which would amount, when fully implemented, to £415 million. I appreciate that for him and his party, and for the nationalists, that is not their problem but somebody else's. The hon. Member will recognise that, under the present Government or a future one, if the House deleted £415 million of revenue, all other things being equal, the money would have to be recovered from elsewhere. Some of that money would be spent in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member has no doubt reflected on that; perhaps he will say where he proposes to make good the loss of revenue were clause 9 to be wholly removed.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said, in his usual sneering way, that the problem with Labour is that we might be preparing for government. It has occurred to us that it is possible that, in a few weeks, we will be elected to govern the country. That means that there are constraints on us that are not visited on him.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: In due course. I understand that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan leads a party that vehemently opposes Labour and that he must take every opportunity to criticise what we do or propose.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: In a minute. Were clause 9 deleted, some £415 million would be lost to the Revenue. All other things being equal, that money would have to be recovered.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan first, because I referred to him in critical terms. The courtesies of the House, as the Minister might just grasp, mean that I should therefore give way to him.

Were amendment No. 7 carried, a traveller going to New York on Concorde would get the same benefit as someone travelling from Stornoway to Glasgow or from Belfast to London. It would therefore be a mistake to support amendment No. 7, but I accept that the hon. Gentleman and others need not concern themselves with such problems, because their position is different from ours.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman should be careful. The last time he was at the Dispatch Box describing a Scottish National party move as a cynical ploy, it was our proposal to reduce VAT on fuel from 8 to 5 per cent. Within 10 months, he was trying to explain why that was not a cynical ploy by the Labour party. Does he expect to be at the Dispatch Box suggesting something like what we propose in the near future, or can he rule out any help for the highlands and islands, Northern Ireland or anywhere else?

Mr. Darling: I shall disappoint the hon. Gentleman in two respects. I am glad that he raised the other point, because I am happy to deal with it. The hon. Gentleman will recall that, when the Labour party tabled an amendment to stop VAT on gas and electricity going up to the full 17.5 per cent. rate, the arithmetic of the House meant that it was necessary to win support not only from Opposition parties but from rebel Tories. The nationalists,

as ever, wanted to get in on someone else's activities; they tabled an amendment to go one better than us that would have reduced VAT to 5 per cent. I thought, and I think that I was right, that it was opportunist to table such an amendment then. The argument before the House was whether VAT on gas and electricity should be at 17.5 or 8 per cent. I understand why the hon. Gentleman does this. The whole stance of the nationalist party is to—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Reference in passing to other matters is all right, but this is taking too long. I would prefer the hon. Gentleman to return to the main subject.

Mr. Darling: I am happy to do that, because I was about to come to the opportunism of the nationalists in respect of the present amendment. I have a suggestion more helpful than amendment No. 22, tabled by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, with which I have not yet dealt.

Some parties claim that it would be a great step forward if the Government were defeated on amendment No. 7, but £415 million is a lot of money. Although other Opposition parties do not have to concern themselves with this problem, we have to concern ourselves with the possible loss of revenue and with a problem that any future Government will have to face: dealing with the economic situation that we actually inherit, not one that we might like to inherit.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan wants to exempt people who travel to and from airports covered by objective 1 status. The problem is that objective 1 funding is to be reviewed, starting this year and coming into effect from 2000; so we do not know at this stage which areas may be covered. I agree with the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) that it would be hard for people living in Manchester to find that Liverpool airport was covered but Manchester airport was not. I understand exactly why the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan included objective 1—it covers the highlands and islands and, by a happy coincidence, it also covers the area represented by the Ulster Unionists.

The Labour party, possibly together with some Conservative Members, recognises the problems associated with highlands and islands flights. As my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles said, these are lifeline services, especially for health. They are a much quicker way of reaching other parts of Scotland, the United Kingdom and Europe. Ferry travel can often take hours and sometimes days to cover the same distance.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said that we are talking about only £2 million. Supposing we had that £2 million; we would then have to decide whether to use it by forgoing airport passenger duties in the highlands and islands or whether to use a similar sum to subsidise, for instance, freight going to and from the islands. All the transport costs involved in transport between the highlands and islands and the rest of Scotland need to be looked at.

I therefore believe, as do the Government to some extent, that we need to examine how best the Government can support air and sea transport to and from the islands. The whole issue needs to be looked at strategically to determine how best we can assist the islands with the resources available to us. That is far more constructive than looking at any one item in isolation.

9 pm

Mr. Wallace: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and of course I welcome any review. What worries me is that the £1 million or £2 million at stake is money that would go straight to the Treasury, whereas a freight subsidy of up to £3 million would come out of the Scottish Office bloc grant. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that that bloc grant would be inflated to allow directly for transport support for the highlands and islands, or does he mean that, if the money is to be provided, something else for Scotland will have to be cut?

Mr. Darling: I am not saying that at all. Whether the money goes to the Treasury or comes from the Scottish Office bloc grant, it will still be a sum within the total available to central Government to spend—

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Is that a commitment?

Mr. Darling: The commitment to a review is of course a commitment. I do not mind being criticised by anyone for my party's reluctance to make promises unless we know that we can deliver on them. *[Interruption.]* The Minister seems to be greatly exercised by that remark. He should perhaps reflect on the fact that one reason his party is in such deep trouble is that it made promises at the last general election that it did not keep. We will not get into that position—

Mr. Oppenheim: The only promises the hon. Gentleman is prepared to make are to stick to Tory policies—after 18 years in opposition.

Mr. Darling: Madam Deputy Speaker, you would doubtless rule me out of order if I listed the many areas where there is a clear difference between us and the Government. One of them is that we will not make promises unless we know we can deliver on them—indeed, that is a big difference between Labour and the Conservatives.

Another difference, related to these amendments, is that we have always recognised that the highlands and islands of Scotland have particular transport problems, but those problems are not satisfactorily dealt with by the sort of promises that some of the small parties make, knowing that they will never be in a position to keep them. Nothing is more calculated to increase disillusionment among the public than political parties making promises that they know they will never have to deliver.

There is clearly a problem in this area at which we need to look, but I am not giving any commitments and I will not do so unless I know that we can stick to them. The points raised by several hon. Members, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, have been argued positively by representatives of the island communities who know what the problems are and who have come up with constructive ways of dealing with them.

I make no apology for the fact that Labour will not support amendment No. 7. Perhaps we will hear how the money is to be made good; the hon. Members who have tabled the amendment have to reflect on the fact that the revenue would have be made good from elsewhere and

[Mr. Darling]

that some of it would find its way to their own constituents. If they cannot answer that question, they should not have tabled an amendment of this nature.

Mr. Oppenheim: All hon. Members on both sides of the House who listened to the speeches of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and other Opposition Members will have sympathy with the particular problems of the islands and Northern Ireland. I want to deal briefly with some of the generalities in respect of airport passenger tax—they have been adequately rehearsed, so I shall not speak on them at length—before going on to explain why the amendments will not work in practice.

First, I want to clear up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie). The position is that if there is one journey, even if there is a relatively small break in it, there is only one tax, but if there is a significant break and, effectively, two journeys are being made—even if the break is a stopover for some reason—that will be taxed twice. I am sure that, if my hon. Friend considers the problem, he will see that any other system would be unsustainable, because at what point would the cut-off be—one day? Two days? A week? If a significant gap in a journey resulted in only one tax being levied, the system would be open to abuse.

On the generalities, everyone accepts that aviation is an area in which taxation is relatively low. International treaty provisions mean that there can be no tax on aviation fuel, unlike fuel used in many other forms of transport, so airlines have a significant fiscal advantage in that respect. Regarding the Scottish islands in particular, the small aeroplane exemption means that 50 per cent. of departures from the Scottish islands are exempt. I know that the proportion of passengers is smaller than 50 per cent., but the exemption helps a little.

The other general point is that 40 per cent. of the tax is paid by foreigners visiting the UK, in the same way as British tourists and travellers abroad have to pay taxes in other countries. There is no sign that it damages our tourism industry, which is still growing strongly, although I accept that any indirect tax increase will have a marginal impact.

Mr. Wallace: To take the Minister backwards for a moment, did I hear him say that aircraft fuel cannot be taxed? Does he accept that AvGas, which is used by a number of aeroplanes operating in the islands, is taxed? Is there any scope for looking at that aspect?

Mr. Oppenheim: Yes, there is scope for looking at that matter; but if it is not covered by international treaty, there is scope for taxing it. The hon. Gentleman might want to raise that issue when he comes to the Treasury tomorrow, but generally air fuel—regardless of whether it is for domestic or for international flights—is not taxed as a result of an international treaty.

On relative rates, as one or two Opposition Members accept, our rate is—even after this increase—still relatively low. I shall quickly read out the figures based on a £120 domestic flight—we are primarily talking about domestic flights. The tax in Germany would be £27.61, and the list then goes down through Mexico, Greece, Austria, Finland, Spain, Norway, Italy, Belgium, Canada, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, the USA, Portugal, the Netherlands—apologies to *Hansard*—which all levy the tax at a higher rate than the UK. The UK is in the bottom third of countries in respect of taxing domestic flights, even after the rise.

No one likes taxes, but as the shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), pointed out, this tax raises a significant sum—£385 million in 1998-99. We all know that the money goes primarily to core services such as education, law and order and health. Those are all services on which hon. Members on both sides of the House want extra money to be spent, so it is worth remembering that that is where the money goes.

Mr. Salmond: A few seconds ago, the Minister was laughing at the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) for giving no commitment. In Committee, the Minister said that he was sympathetic about the specific problems of the highlands and islands, but could give no commitment. Six weeks have passed. Six weeks is a long time in politics; who knows what can happen in six weeks? Has the Minister anything constructive and tangible to offer regarding the highlands and islands or Northern Ireland?

Mr. Oppenheim: If the hon. Gentleman will let me finish, I shall describe the best possible ways to help the regions.

I greeted the shadow Chief Secretary's comments with mirth because, although I may be extrapolating too far from the drift of his comments, he seemed to be saying that, because the Labour party thought that it would be in government—I thought that Labour Front-Bench spokesmen had been forbidden to say triumphalist things like that—all of a sudden it had decided that it must be responsible. By implication, for the past 18 years it has not been responsible. It focuses the mind somewhat to know that one will be in government; one suddenly has to be responsible.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central is right: a large sum is involved, and any party that votes against the raising of that sum, by what I believe to be a reasonably fair form of taxation, will have to say where else that money can be found. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point when he says that that money primarily goes into the core services whose funding all hon. Members, regardless of party, want increased.

I was not sure whether the proposal in amendment No. 22 was that flights should be exempt or charged at a lower rate if they were to or from any objective 1 airport. To be legal under European law, that proposal would have to apply to all objective 1 airports throughout the European Union. The cost would be £50 million—quite a substantial sum—but the effect might not be exactly what hon. Members intend. For example, on that basis, the exemption would apply to all flights from any United Kingdom airport to anywhere in Greece or any other objective 1 country, so flights from Heathrow to Greece would be exempt. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry; that is the effect of amendment No. 22. *[Interruption.]* I am afraid that it is.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister is adopting a traditional Treasury Bench tactic. If the hon. Gentleman is saying

that he accepts the sense behind the amendment but does not like the detail, let him specify the highlands and islands and Northern Ireland in his own amendment, as has been specified in the case of inter-island flights already. Does the fact that we have exemption for inter-island flights—island-hopping flights on low-capacity planes—mean that a similar exemption must be made throughout the European Union? I say to the Minister, "Do not hide. If you agree with the substance of the amendment, find a way to put it into practice; if you disagree with it, say so."

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman misinterprets what I am saying. I in no way agree with the sense of the amendment. Not only do I not agree with the sense, but in practice the amendment is unworkable.

I shall take another example of why this measure would be unworkable. It would exempt all flights to and from Liverpool airport but not Manchester airport, thereby creating distortions and competitive problems.

I have explained the problems regarding amendment No. 22 and I have outlined the objections to basing any exemption on objective 1. To produce an amendment that applied generally to the UK regions but not more widely—which I believe the Liberal Democrats tried to do—would be illegal under articles 59 and 62.

I accept that there is a specific problem relating to the islands and to Ulster, but I do not consider that this is the way to tackle it. I believe that all hon. Members on both sides of the House accept that there are specific problems relating to the UK regions, but the way to tackle those is not to create piecemeal anomalies and exemptions, which logically could be extended to many other areas.

The way to tackle those problems is, if necessary, in some instances to give subsidies. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) expressed surprise at the idea that I, a Treasury Minister, would support that. In principle, we have always said that, where there are social needs for subsidies for transport—be it trains, buses or some air routes—that is a legitimate reason for subsidies. We do not believe in subsidising lame-duck industries, but there are cases where there should be social subsidies in sectors such as transport. We have never denied that; it is a long-standing Tory policy.

Those problems are genuine—I do not duck away from them—but the way to tackle them is not to create anomalies or piecemeal exemptions, but to use regional aid and another more general policies. I urge hon. Members not to press the amendments to a Division.

Mr. Trimble: This has been an interesting debate, and what I have heard reinforces my view that amendment No. 7 is right. I am surprised by the Government's approach on this matter. They acknowledge that there is a problem, especially regarding the regions.

The Minister says that the solution to the problem of the regions is subsidy; but subsidy will not solve the problem, because the problem is the cost caused to travellers, and the subsidy will not go to travellers. The subsidy may be relevant only in the context of uneconomic flights, where there is an argument for subsidy. We have heard, however, that the British Airways flights to Glasgow and Edinburgh are among that airline's most profitable. The most profitable route for British Midland is from London to Belfast. It is not the most profitable route for British Airways, but there are reasons for that. The subsidy will not arise on the profitable routes, but there will be a cost for the regions. Subsidy is not the answer to the problem. The Minister acknowledges that there is a problem, but, as I have said, the answer does not lie in subsidy.

9.15 pm

The Minister should think again because of the cost that he is imposing on the regions, on businesses travelling to the regions and on individuals who travel to them. I am reinforced in my belief that amendment No. 7 is the right one because of the problems that would arise with the implementation of amendment No. 22.

The Liverpool and Manchester position is superficially attractive, but in reality is not. With a localised exemption, there will always be problems in drawing a boundary. The fact that a boundary runs over land or over sea is irrelevant. The problem with the Scottish National party's amendment, No. 22, is its reference to "Objective 1". Objective 1 is under review. As the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) said, it is not likely that objective 1 status will apply to any part of the United Kingdom within a short time. If we are to be positive, we must accept the proposal that has been put before the House in amendment No. 7.

It is right that we should take that course against the background of the costs being imposed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said, a regressive tax is bearing especially heavily on those who opt for budget fares, and that can be said particularly of children.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) produced some remarkable arguments. He said that the revenue gained would benefit our constituencies. The revenue might benefit the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but it will certainly not benefit Northern Ireland constituencies, because in the current Government spending round—the hon. Gentleman may not appreciate this—expenditure in Northern Ireland as a whole is being reduced in real terms. The additional revenue will not come to any constituency in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central sees a problem in raising £415 million. I am amazed. A year or two ago, we defeated the Government when they proposed increasing value added tax on domestic fuel. I did not hear Labour spokesmen expressing worries about lost revenue. The Government seemed to have no problem in filling a much greater gap than would ensue if the amendment were passed. It is remarkable, as the Minister has said, that Labour is now adopting Conservative policies in broad terms. It may quibble about details, but broadly it is adopting those policies.

Labour has been offered an opportunity this evening to defeat the Government, and what does it do? The answer is that it retreats. One wonders why Labour Members bother to continue sitting on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Darling: Am I not right in thinking that the hon. Gentleman's party has been sustaining the Government in office for some weeks?

Mr. Trimble: There is an interesting contrast to be drawn. As on other occasions, the hon. Gentleman might

[Mr. Trimble]

have paused to think before he spoke. Let us cast our minds back to the announcement of the Budget resolutions. How did Labour vote on this issue? Did it vote for or against? It did not vote in support.

At that stage, the Government had a majority. The Government did not have to worry about that. They do not have a majority now and an opportunity has arisen. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central will understand, if he reflects, that there has been no Division in this place when the votes of my colleagues would have saved the Government. However, Labour was given the opportunity tonight to defeat the Government. We do not see Labour Members. Let us see what happens when the Division is called. As the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) asked, where are the hon. Members representing the central belt of Scotland? They have an interest in the matter. Labour Members seem to have lost their way in their approach to the issue generally and to the amendment in particular.

I am sorry to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we will not withdraw the amendment, but intend to press it.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 17, Noes 225.

Division No. 93] **[9.19 pm**

AYES

Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Butcher, John
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangf'd)*
Trimble, David
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. William Ross and
Rev. Martin Smyth.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riffkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William

Walden, George
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sebastian Coe and
Mr. Anthony Coombs.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 22, in page 9, line 3, at end add—

(4) Subsections (1)–(3) of this section do not apply for flights to and from airports in areas in receipt of Objective 1 funding from the European Union.'.—*[Mr. Salmond.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 35, Noes 223.

Division No. 94] **[9.31 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Llwyd, Elfyn
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Margaret Ewing and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard

Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Anthony Coombs and
Mr. Sebastian Coe.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 12

LIABILITY TO PAY GAMING DUTY

Amendments made: No. 8, in page 12, line 19, at end insert 'and'.

No. 9, in page 12, line 23, leave out from 'person' to end of line 25.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Clause 25

CERTAIN FEES TO BE TREATED AS PREMIUMS UNDER HIGHER RATE CONTRACTS

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 20, line 16, leave out from 'or' to end of line 17.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 20, line 24, leave out from beginning to end of line 26.

No. 3, in schedule 4, page 120, line 1, leave out from beginning to end of line 50.

No. 4, in page 120, line 3, at end insert

'the contract is a designated contract and'.

No. 5, in page 120, line 7, at end insert—

'(1A) For the purposes of this Act a taxable insurance contract is a designated contract if it is designated by the Commissioners as being of a class under which the premium received has been fixed at a higher level than is necessary to purchase the insurance to which it relates in order to reduce the price and charge to tax of another connected contract for goods or services.

(1B) The Commissioners may make a designation under the above sub–paragraph at any time but such designation shall not take effect until the beginning of the financial year following the financial year in which the designation is made.'.

No. 6, in page 120, line 16, at end insert

'but for the purposes of this sub–paragraph a person shall not be regarded as connected with a tour operator or travel agent if he is a registered insurance broker within the meaning of the Insurance Brokers (Registration) Act 1977.'.

No. 26, in page 120, line 16, at end insert—

'( ) The premium under a taxable insurance contract relating to travel risks shall not fall within this paragraph if the contract provides cover for a risk which relates to services supplied by a tour operator or travel agent and these services are not subject to Value Added Tax other than at the zero rate.'.

Mr. Shaw: It is possible that one of the interests placed against my name in the Register of Members' Interests is involved here. I do not believe that it is, but I thought that I should mention it.

I raise the issue because I have been asked to take an interest in the subject by the travel industry and also by Saga Holidays—a company which, although not based in my constituency, employs a number of my constituents who work in neighbouring Folkestone at the headquarters of Saga Holdings. The change in insurance premium tax was discussed in Committee, but in the context of a number of other changes. My amendments deal solely with the possibility of exempting the travel industry from the change.

I entirely understand why the Treasury has raised the issue in the Bill—there is concern about tax avoidance through value shifting—but we are now becoming so refined in our attempts to introduce measures to counter tax avoidance that we are in danger of going too far. In many instances, we are hitting legitimate businesses that are implementing measures not designed for tax avoidance and we may end up raising taxes in certain sections of society and creating distortions. The travel industry has argued that the fears of Customs and Excise and Her Majesty's Treasury are exaggerated and may even be wrong. Travel agents are bound by the rules of the trade, which in their view make it impossible to have effective value shifting. That is because the way in which tax is paid is based on a fixed margin, which does not change if discounting takes effect.

9.45 pm

Tour operators believe that there cannot be value shifting, certainly not to any great extent, because the only circumstance in which it might happen would be in the small number of cases where the tour operator has its own travel agent and is involved in providing insurance. In those instances, where that does take place it is very unlikely that the tour operator could gain significant benefit, because competition in the marketplace is so tight and the public are well used to buying the holiday at the most competitive price. Therefore, if companies were value shifting, it might discourage the public from going to those companies.

People are beginning to ask whether this tax avoidance measure, as it is being sold to the House, is more of a revenue-raising measure. The problem is that we are likely to end up with differential taxation. Insurance sold through insurance brokers will be taxed at a different rate from travel insurance sold by the travel industry. Bridget Rosewell, an economist who runs a company called Business Strategies Ltd., has done a one-page economic analysis of this. It should be commended to the House, if only because it is on one page, which is rather unusual for economists. In the analysis, she competently points out that the differential effect will shift the selling of travel insurance towards direct insurance providers—that is, insurance brokers.

That seems illogical because it simply takes business away from those who are involved in the travel industry. I am concerned that this measure produces just a further distortion in the marketplace. It may cause many problems for travel companies and may mean that they will find some artificial way of restructuring their businesses to enable them to go on providing insurance. It seems

illogical for business to have to go through such contortions to operate in a manner approved by the Treasury. I urge the Minister to think seriously about whether the travel industry is being unfairly treated and ask whether we will end up having to revisit the matter anyway because this is not sustainable on a fair basis.

As the Minister knows, I represent a constituency with a considerable interest in the travel and tourism industry, so I hope that this issue will be seriously addressed.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I rise briefly to support the basic thrust of the arguments of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and to refer to amendment No. 26, which is in my name.

As the Exchequer Secretary will be aware, we had quite a fair debate about this in Committee and I do not intend to repeat those arguments. The only thing I would say is that I am increasingly of the view, as expressed by the hon. Member for Dover, that this is looking more and more like a revenue-raising measure rather than a loophole-closing measure. It is discriminatory not only against the travel trade, or against certain sectors of it because of the way they happen to operate, but against the consumer, whose interests could be damaged. That case was made particularly by Saga, which obviously still feels strongly that the measure discriminates against the special way in which it approaches its specialist market. That is to the disadvantage of the consumer as much as it is to the disadvantage of the company in question.

I also suspect that, given the way in which the tax has been structured, if value shifting or tax avoidance has been a feature of the tax, which the Minister did not entirely prove, there is a danger that he is creating a framework that will encourage more of the same. Clearly, people will find one way or another to avoid falling into the 17.5 per cent. tax bracket. I wonder, for example, whether people will start to include free insurance in the price of the holiday, and in so doing argue that there should not be any tax levied at all. If free insurance is provided, 17.5 per cent. of nothing is nothing. That could lead to a fair amount of exchange between Customs and Excise and individual businesses.

Amendment No. 26 highlights a basic discrimination which, it has been suggested to me, is likely to lead to judicial review. It is absurd to suggest that there should be 17.5 per cent. VAT on the insurance premium for a product that does not attract VAT at all and therefore where the possibility of value shifting does not occur.

I know that the Minister has given a written explanation of why he is resistant to the argument. However, it is fair to say that the Federation of Tour Operators feels very strongly that there cannot be value shifting—which is an argument that the Minister used for the justification of the difference—where a product is not liable to VAT or is zero-rated. It is technically impossible, yet people will have to pay a 17.5 per cent. tax. The fact that the Minister will find that the ruling is discriminatory and will be challenged in the courts is not a threat, but it is the judgment of one person in the trade.

I do not believe that the Minister and his Department have dealt with all the anomalies satisfactorily and I am sadly confident that we shall have to re-visit the matter. Although—I think—neither the hon. Member for Dover nor I are at this point going to press the matter any further, we want to put on record that we believe that the anomalies will have to be addressed.

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I support my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw). I do so particularly because I am concerned about the effect of the measure on smaller travel agents rather than larger companies.

It is undoubtedly clear that very many smaller agents depend on commission from selling travel insurance to sustain themselves in competition against larger companies. My hon. Friend is chairman of the Back-Bench smaller businesses committee, and I have the honour of being its vice-chairman. The case for the small business should be put forward.

The principle that is being established is exceedingly odd and could cause endless trouble in the future. We are deciding that different rates of VAT will apply to the same product, merely according to where one buys the product. I have spent many years in the insurance industry and I deeply object to the establishment of such a principle. If the present Government or any future Government proceed on such a principle, I forecast all kinds of trouble. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Dover, I believe that this debate is not the last word on the subject. I believe that there will be such abuse or evasion of the measure that in the end the Treasury will have to look at it again. I shall give one clear example of such possible abuse.

If a customer goes to a small travel agent, who sells him a holiday, and the travel agent says, "You will of course need insurance, but if I sell it to you it will include 17.5 per cent. VAT," the customer will blink and think again. All that the travel agent has to say is, "Down the road is my friend the friendly insurance broker, who will be very happy to sell you travel insurance at a lesser rate of VAT." There would be nothing to stop the insurance broker giving his friend down the road some commission for passing on all his customers. If VAT at 17.5 per cent can be that easily evaded, one must question the very logic of introducing it in the first place.

I do not follow the logic of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). Holidays may be advertised as having free insurance, but free insurance costs something, even without commission. A company that is offering free insurance will have to pay for it one way or another, and I suspect that it will do so by increasing the cost of its holidays. In that case, 17.5 per cent. VAT would be applied across the board.

This would be a retrograde measure for small businesses. I hope that it will not cause small travel agents to close. I should hope that the Government would deplore that result. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to re-examine the matter at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Oppenheim: I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) and the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). They made some reasonable points, and I appreciate the way in which they did so. In Committee, we probably had a fuller debate on this issue than on any other and I accepted that

[Mr. Oppenheim]

clause 25 would not be an easy measure to pass. I explained that there was a problem, and that we are absolutely convinced that value shifting is occurring in the travel sector among tour operators and travel agents. The measure is not the ideal way to deal with the problem, but it is the least bad option. It is not perfect, and I have always made that absolutely clear.

I accept the argument that, whereas value shifting is clearly occurring in some sectors—particularly in the car hire sector, where it has almost amounted to an abuse—the situation has been less clear in the travel sector, although we are convinced that it is occurring. I also accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover and the hon. Member for Gordon that we shall have to keep the matter under review. There is no question about that. It is a new type of VAT loophole, and it is being closed in a new way.

I accepted in Committee that there are complications and that the current solution is not ideal. The matter should be kept under review, and I will certainly give a commitment that the Government will do so. On that basis, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Dover will seek leave to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. David Shaw: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 37

SUPPLIES TO NON-TAXABLE PERSONS ETC.

Amendments proposed: No. 11, in page 31, line 13, leave out

'Subject to sub-paragraph (3AB) below,'.—*[Mr. Oppenheim.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment Nos.12 and 13.

Mr. Timms: I shall be very brief. The Minister will recall that we discussed in Committee, under clause 37, the matter of the Custom House and Canning Town community renewal project and the effect that the changes would have on it. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) and I both mentioned that matter. Amendments Nos. 11, 12 and 13 put into effect the announcements made by the Minister in Committee. However, the accountants who are advising the project have mentioned some difficulties, on which I should like to question the Minister.

In a case in which a charity is the developer of a refurbished building and intends to occupy a small office in it comprising about 2 per cent. of its floor space, will subsection (13) in amendment No. 12 mean that that charity will not be able to reclaim any VAT on the project because it will occupy, as the developer, a small part of the building? The charity has always accepted that it will not be able to reclaim VAT on the 2 per cent. of floor space that it uses. That matter was not mentioned in Committee, but since the amendment was published it has caused some alarm to those involved with the project.

I raised two other issues in Committee, and the amendments do not make it clear how they have been dealt with, as the Minister said that they would. Will the Minister confirm that, in cases in which small businesses occupying commercial units are below the VAT threshold, the VAT paid will still be reclaimable? He said in Committee that he intended to exempt small workshops from the provisions of clause 37, but I am not sure where in the amendment that exemption has been made. Perhaps he will clarify that matter.

Secondly, as I mentioned in Committee, the district health authority has contributed £50,000 to the project because it would include a health centre. Will the Minister give an assurance, consistent with what he said in Committee in 11 February, that a general practitioner will not be regarded as being connected with a person responsible for financing the development, so that VAT will continue to be reclaimable on that part of the project?

10 pm

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope that I can give some clarification to the hon. Gentleman. Charities benefit from zero rating on new buildings for non-business use. Up to 10 per cent. business activity is allowed. That relief remains unaffected.

The amendments do not help a doctor, a financial sector operation, a business or any similar operation that is exempt. An exempt business gains benefit from being exempt and therefore does not have to charge VAT to its customers. The fact that doctors and hospitals cannot reclaim is reflected in their funding, which is gross of that unclaimable VAT.

The amendments are not designed to help those, such as exempt businesses or doctors, who should not be able to reclaim. Those who are exempt should not have the right to tax, and therefore the right to reclaim, otherwise they would be getting it both ways—reclaiming without having charged, or while being funded gross.

I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman, but if he wants to deal with those points in detail with me, I shall be happy to oblige with the greatest of pleasure.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 12, in page 31, line 16, leave out from beginning to end of line 6 on page 32 and insert—

'(a) the grant giving rise to the supply was made by a person ('the grantor') who was a developer of the land; and

(b) at the time of the grant, it was the intention or expectation of—

(i) the grantor, or

(ii) a person responsible for financing the grantor's development of the land for exempt use,

that the land would become exempt land (whether immediately or eventually and whether or not by virtue of the grant) or, as the case may be, would continue, for a period at least, to be such land."

(3) After paragraph 3 of that Schedule (construction of paragraph 2) there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

"3A.—(1) This paragraph shall have effect for the construction of paragraph 2(3AA) above.

(2) For the purposes of paragraph 2(3AA) above a grant made by any person in relation to any land is a grant made by a developer of that land if—

(a) the land, or a building or part of a building on that land, is an asset falling in relation to that person to be treated as a capital item for the purposes of any regulations under section 26(3) and (4) providing for adjustments relating to the deduction of input tax; and

(b) the grant was made at a time falling within the period over which such regulations allow adjustments relating to the deduction of input tax to be made as respects that item.

(3) In paragraph 2(3AA) above and this paragraph the references to a person's being responsible for financing the grantor's development of the land for exempt use are references to his being a person who, with the intention or in the expectation that the land will become, or continue (for a period at least) to be, exempt land—

(a) has provided finance for the grantor's development of the land; or

(b) has entered into any agreement, arrangement or understanding (whether or not legally enforceable) to provide finance for the grantor's development of the land.

(4) In sub-paragraph (3)(a) and (b) above the references to providing finance for the grantor's development of the land are references to doing any one or more of the following, that is to say—

(a) directly or indirectly providing funds for meeting the whole or any part of the cost of the grantor's development of the land;

(b) directly or indirectly procuring the provision of such funds by another;

(c) directly or indirectly providing funds for discharging, in whole or in part, any liability that has been or may be incurred by any person for or in connection with the raising of funds to meet the cost of the grantor's development of the land;

(d) directly or indirectly procuring that any such liability is or will be discharged, in whole or in part, by another.

(5) The references in sub-paragraph (4) above to the provision of funds for a purpose referred to in that sub-paragraph include references to—

(a) the making of a loan of funds that are or are to be used for that purpose;

(b) the provision of any guarantee or other security in relation to such a loan;

(c) the provision of any of the consideration for the issue of any shares or other securities issued wholly or partly for raising those funds; or

(d) any other transfer of assets or value as a consequence of which any of those funds are made available for that purpose.

(6) In sub-paragraph (4) above the references to the grantor's development of the land are references to the acquisition by the grantor of the asset which—

(a) consists in the land or a building or part of a building on the land, and

(b) in relation to the grantor falls to be treated for the purposes mentioned in sub-paragraph (2)(a) above as a capital item;

and for the purposes of this sub-paragraph the acquisition of an asset shall be taken to include its construction or reconstruction and the carrying out in relation to that asset of any other works by reference to which it falls to be treated for the purposes mentioned in sub-paragraph (2)(a) above as a capital item.

(7) For the purposes of paragraph 2(3AA) above and this paragraph land is exempt land if, at a time falling within the period mentioned in sub-paragraph (2)(b) above—

(a) the grantor,

(b) a person responsible for financing the grantor's development of the land for exempt use, or

(c) a person connected with the grantor or with a person responsible for financing the grantor's development of the land for exempt use,

is in occupation of the land without being in occupation of it wholly or mainly for eligible purposes.

(8) For the purposes of this paragraph, but subject to sub-paragraphs (10) and (12) below, a person's occupation at any time of any land is not capable of being occupation for eligible purposes unless he is a taxable person at that time.

(9) Subject to sub-paragraphs (10) to (12) below, a taxable person in occupation of any land shall be taken for the purposes of this paragraph to be in occupation of that land for eligible purposes to the extent only that his occupation of that land is for the purpose of making supplies which—

(a) are or are to be made in the course or furtherance of a business carried on by him; and

(b) are supplies of such a description that any input tax of his which was wholly attributable to those supplies would be input tax for which he would be entitled to a credit.

(10) For the purposes of this paragraph—

(a) occupation of land by a body to which section 33 applies is occupation of the land for eligible purposes to the extent that the body occupies the land for purposes other than those of a business carried on by that body; and

(b) any occupation of land by a Government department (within the meaning of section 41) is occupation of the land for eligible purposes.

(11) For the purposes of this paragraph, where land of which any person is in occupation—

(a) is being held by that person in order to be put to use by him for particular purposes, and

(b) is not land of which he is in occupation for any other purpose,

that person shall be deemed, for so long as the conditions in paragraphs (a) and (b) above are satisfied, to be in occupation of that land for the purposes for which he proposes to use it.

(12) Sub-paragraphs (8) to (11) above shall have effect where land is in the occupation of a person who—

(a) is not a taxable person, but

(b) is a person whose supplies are treated for the purposes of this Act as supplies made by another person who is a taxable person,

as if the person in occupation of the land and that other person were a single taxable person.

(13) For the purposes of this paragraph a person shall be taken to be in occupation of any land whether he occupies it alone or together with one or more other persons and whether he occupies all of that land or only part of it.

(14) Any question for the purposes of this paragraph whether one person is connected with another shall be determined in accordance with section 839 of the Taxes Act.'".

No. 13, in page 32, line 13, leave out '31st May 1997' and insert '30th November 1999'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Clause 54

ATTACHMENT OF DEBTS

Amendment made: **No. 10, in page 51, line 18, leave out from beginning to end of line 45 on page 53.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]***

New Schedule 1

'SCHEDULE

FUTURES AND OPTIONS: TAXATION OF GUARANTEED RETURNS

Schedule to be inserted as Schedule 5AA to the Taxes Act 1988

"SCHEDULE 5AA

GUARANTEED RETURNS ON TRANSACTIONS IN FUTURES AND OPTIONS

Charge to tax etc.

1.—(1) Subject to sub–paragraph (2) below, profits and gains arising from a transaction to which this Schedule applies (including those which, apart from this sub–paragraph, would be taken to be of a capital nature) shall be treated, when realised—

(a) as income of the person by whom they are realised; and

(b) as chargeable to tax under Case VI of Schedule D for the chargeable period in which they are realised.

(2) Sub–paragraph (1) above does not apply to—

(a) so much of any profits or gains arising to a person from a transaction as are charged to tax in his case under Case I or V of Schedule D;

(b) any profits or gains arising to a company which is a qualifying company from a transaction which, as regards that company, is or is deemed to be a qualifying contract; or

(c) any profits or gains arising to an authorised unit trust (within the meaning of section 468).

(3) In sub–paragraph (2) above—

'qualifying company' means a qualifying company for the purposes of Chapter II of Part IV of the Finance Act 1994 (interest rate, currency and debt contracts); and

'qualifying contract' means a qualifying contract for those purposes.

(4) For the purposes of this Schedule the profits and gains arising from a transaction to which this Schedule applies are to be taken to be realised at the time when the disposal comprised in the transaction takes place.

(5) For the purposes of sections 392 and 396 any loss in a transaction to which this Schedule applies is to be taken to be sustained at the time when, in accordance with sub–paragraph (4) above, any profits or gains arising from that transaction would have been realised.

(6) Subject to sub–paragraph (7) below, the following, namely—

(a) profits and gains to which sub–paragraph (1) above applies, and

(b) losses in transactions the profits and gains from which (if there were any) would be profits and gains to which that sub–paragraph applies,

shall not be brought into account for the purposes of income tax, corporation tax or capital gains tax except by virtue of this Schedule and, in the case of losses, section 392 or 396.

(7) Nothing in sub–paragraph (6) above shall prevent any amount from being brought into account in accordance with section 83 of the Finance Act 1989 (receipts to be brought into account in any Case I computation made in respect of life insurance).

Transactions to which Schedule applies

2.—(1) This Schedule applies to a transaction if—

(a) it is a disposal of futures or options;

(b) it is one of two or more related transactions designed to produce a guaranteed return; and

(c) the guaranteed return comprises the return from that disposal or from a number of disposals of futures or options, of which that disposal is one, taken together.

(2) For the purposes of this Schedule two or more related transactions are transactions designed to produce a guaranteed return if, taking the transactions together, it would be reasonable to assume, from either or both of—

(a) the likely effect of the transactions, and

(b) the circumstances in which the transactions are entered into, or in which any of them is entered into,

that their main purpose, or one of their main purposes, is or was the production of a guaranteed return from one or more disposals of futures or options.

Production of guaranteed return

3.—(1) For the purposes of this Schedule a guaranteed return is produced from one or more disposals of futures or options wherever (taking all the disposals together where there is more than one) risks from fluctuations in the underlying subject matter are so eliminated or reduced as to produce a return from the disposal or disposals—

(a) the amount of which is not, to any significant extent, attributable (otherwise than incidentally) to any such fluctuations; and

(b) which equates, in substance, to the return on an investment of money at interest.

(2) For the purposes of sub–paragraph (1) above the cases where risks from fluctuations in the underlying subject matter are eliminated or reduced shall be deemed to include any case where the main reason, or one of the main reasons, for the choice of that subject matter is—

(a) that there appears to be no risk that it will fluctuate; or

(b) that the risk that it will fluctuate appears to be insignificant.

(3) In this paragraph the references, in relation to a disposal of futures or options, to the underlying subject matter are references to or to the value of the commodities, currencies, shares, stock or securities, interest rates, indices or other matters to which, or to the value of which, those futures or options are referable.

Disposals of futures or options

4.—(1) For the purposes of this Schedule a disposal is a disposal of futures or options if it consists in—

(a) the disposal of one or more futures;

(b) the disposal of one or more options; or

(c) the disposal of one or more futures together with one or more options.

(2) Subject to sub–paragraph (4) below, any question for the purposes of this Schedule as to whether there is a disposal falling within sub–paragraph (1)(a) to (c) above, or as to when such a disposal is made, shall be determined, on the assumptions specified in sub–paragraph (3) below, in accordance with—

(a) section 143(5) and (6), 144 and 144A of the 1992 Act (closing out and settlement of futures contracts and rules in relation to options); and

(b) the other provisions having effect for determining for the purposes of that Act whether or when an asset is disposed of;

and references in this Schedule to entering into a transaction are references, in relation to a transaction consisting in a disposal, to the making of the disposal.

(3) Those assumptions are—

(a) that all futures are assets for the purposes of the 1992 Act;

(b) that the words "in the course of dealing in commodity or financial futures" are omitted in each place where they occur in section 143(5) and (6) of that Act; and

(c) that any reference in that Act to a financial option within the meaning given by section 144(8) of that Act is a reference to any option that is not a traded option.

(4) Subject to sub–paragraph (5) below, where—

(a) one of a number of related transactions designed to produce a guaranteed return is the grant of an option,

(b) at least one of the other transactions is a transaction entered into after the grant of the option, and

(c) the transaction or transactions entered into after the grant of the option is or include a disposal which is not itself the grant of an option,

the disposal consisting in the grant of the option shall be deemed for the purposes of this Schedule to be a disposal made on the first occasion after the grant of the option when one of the other transactions which is a disposal but is not itself the grant of an option is entered into.

(5) Nothing in sub–paragraph (4) above affects so much of sub–paragraph (2) above as (by applying section 144(2) or 144A(2) of the 1992 Act (cases where options are exercised))—

(a) requires the grant of an option and the transaction entered into by the grantor in fulfilment of his obligations under that option to be treated for the purposes of this Schedule as a single transaction; or

(b) determines the time at which such a single transaction is to be treated for the purposes of this Schedule as entered into.

(6) In this paragraph—

'future' means outstanding rights and obligations under a commodity or financial futures contract;

'option' means a traded option or an option which is not a traded option but is an option relating to—

(a) currency, shares, stock, securities or an interest rate; or

(b) rights under a commodity or financial futures contract;

'traded option' has the meaning given for the purposes of subsection (4) of section 144 of the 1992 Act by subsection (8) of that section.

The return from one or more disposals

5.—(1) In this Schedule references to the return from one or more disposals are references to the return on investment represented either—

(a) by the total net profits and gains arising from the disposal or disposals; or

(b) by all but an insignificant part of those net profits and gains.

(2) For the purposes of the references in sub–paragraph (1) above to the total net profits and gains from any two or more disposals, it shall be assumed that profits and gains realised, and losses sustained, by persons who are associated with each other are all realised or sustained by the same person.

(3) For the purposes of sub–paragraph (2) above persons are associated with each other in relation to any two or more disposals made in pursuance of the same scheme or arrangements if—

(a) each of those persons shares or is to share, to an extent determined for the purposes of or in accordance with the scheme or arrangements, in the net return represented by the aggregate of all the profits, gains and losses realised or sustained on those disposals;

(b) those persons are associated companies at the time when the last of those disposals is made; or

(c) those persons have been associated companies at an earlier time falling after the first occasion on which a transaction was entered into in pursuance of the scheme or arrangements.

(4) In this paragraph—

'associated company' shall be construed in accordance with section 416; and

'scheme or arrangements' shall be construed in accordance with paragraph 6(4) below.

Related transactions

6.—(1) For the purposes of this Schedule two or more transactions are related if all of them are entered into in pursuance of the same scheme or arrangements.

(2) Nothing in this Schedule shall be construed as preventing transactions with different parties, or transactions with parties different from the parties to the scheme or arrangements in pursuance of which they are entered into, from being related transactions.

(3) For the purposes of this paragraph the cases in which any two or more transactions are to be taken to be entered into in pursuance of the same scheme or arrangements shall include any case in which it would be reasonable to assume, from either or both of—

(a) the likely effect of the transactions, and

(b) the circumstances in which the transactions are entered into, or in which any of them is entered into,

that neither of them or, as the case may be, none of them would have been entered into independently of the other or others.

(4) In this paragraph 'scheme or arrangements' includes schemes, arrangements and understandings of any kind, whether or not legally enforceable.

Special rule for trusts

7.—(1) Where any profits or gains are treated, in accordance with paragraph 1 above, as income arising to trustees for any year of assessment, the relevant part of that income shall be treated for the purposes of the Tax Acts as if it were income to which section 686 applies (income taxable at the rate applicable to trusts).

(2) In sub–paragraph (1) above the reference to the relevant part of any income is a reference to so much (if any) of that income as—

(a) does not fall to be treated for the purposes of the Income Tax Acts as income of a settlor;

(b) is not income arising under a trust established for charitable purposes; and

(c) is not income from investments, deposits or other property held for any such purposes as are mentioned in sub–paragraph (i) or (ii) of section 686(2)(c) (property held for pension purposes).

(3) Subsection (6) of section 686 (meaning of 'trustees' etc.) shall apply for the purposes of this paragraph as it applies for the purposes of that section.

Transfer of assets abroad

8. For the purpose of determining whether an individual ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom has a liability for income tax in respect of any profit or gain which—

(a) is realised by a person resident or domiciled outside the United Kingdom, and

(b) arises from a transaction to which this Schedule applies,

sections 739 and 740 (transfer of assets abroad) shall have effect as if that profit or gain, when realised, constituted income becoming payable to the person resident or domiciled outside the United Kingdom.

Apportionment in the case of insurance companies

9. Section 432A (apportionment of insurance companies' income) shall have effect in the case of income and losses chargeable or relievable by virtue of this Schedule as if (where that would not otherwise be the case)—

(a) any such income were for the purposes of that section a gain accruing on the disposal of an asset; and

(b) any such loss were for the purposes of that section a loss accruing on the disposal of an asset."".—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Schedule 11

LEASING ARRANGEMENTS: FINANCE LEASES AND LOANS

Mr. David Shaw: I beg to move amendment No. 14, in page 159, line 37, at end insert—

'(bb) under which either—

(i) the lease forms part of a new scheme; or

(ii) if the lease forms part of an existing scheme, the lessee is not a relevant taxpayer;'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 15, in page 160, line 24, leave out from 'Act)' to end of line 27 and insert

'the requirements of either sub–paragraph (1A) below or sub–paragraph (1B) below are satisfied.

(1A) The requirements of this sub–paragraph are that—

(a) a lease of an asset is or has been granted;

(b) in the case of the lease, the conditions in paragraph 3 below are or have been satisfied at some time in a period of account of the current lessor; and

(c) the lessee is not a relevant taxpayer.

(1B) The requirements of this sub–paragraph are that—

(a) a lease of an asset is or has been granted on or after 26th November 1996;

(b) the lease forms part of a new scheme;

(c) in the case of the lease, the conditions in paragraph 3 below are or have been satisfied at some time on or after 26th November 1996 in a period of account of the current lessor; and

(d) the lessee is a relevant taxpayer.'.

No. 16, in page 160, line 28, leave out from 'satisfied' to 'they' in line 29 and insert—

'(a) in a case falling within sub–paragraph (1A) above, at some time in a period of account of the person who was at that time the lessor, or

(b) in a case falling within sub–paragraph (1B) above, at any time on or after 26th November 1996 in a period of account of the person who was at that time the lessor,'.

No. 17, in page 173, line 1, after 'persons;' insert—

'(bb) under which the lease forms part of a new scheme;'.

No. 18, in page 179, line 11, at end insert—

' "relevant taxpayer" means a person within the charge to tax in the United Kingdom under Schedule A, Schedule D or Schedule E;'.

Mr. Shaw: In view of the late hour, I shall not detain the House for long. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] That may be the most support that I get on the issue.

Lease finance is a complex area. My research has revealed the interesting fact that one of the people who has funded the Labour Front Bench research trust was involved in lease finance some years back. Apparently, that donator to Labour's secret fund sold his leasing business in 1987 and two years later it collapsed and went bankrupt. That shows the complexity of leasing finance and the problems of it.

The details of leasing finance were discussed in Committee on 20 February. I do not propose to go into such detail tonight. The leasing industry is concerned that it may have been misunderstood and perhaps seen as an easy way of raising money. It does not accept that it was involved in tax avoidance.

I am bound to say that the Inland Revenue is one of the organisations that has recently benefited from lease finance—for the staff college. It would seem strange if the Inland Revenue were involved in tax avoidance in financing its staff college. On the basis that it has not been seeking to avoid tax, I commend the amendments to my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary.

The leasing industry believes that it passes on any tax benefits to its customers because of the way in which it is structured. It finds it difficult to understand the way that the Treasury and Inland Revenue seem to want to tax it. One argument is that the Inland Revenue and the Treasury are seeking merely to reconcile accounting treatment with tax treatment. It is difficult to get perfection in that area because of the way in which lease finance operates and, therefore, one must question whether the changes will achieve an improvement, in terms of getting accounting treatment and tax treatment closer.

Finally, we must consider the important issue of inward investment and jobs. Commitments have been made to the leasing industry, through finance legislation, which it has passed on to foreign investors into the United Kingdom. While everyone knows that tax treatments can change, it is normal practice not to change them before a Budget, especially when no prior announcement has been made. In this area, the tax treatment can affect inward investment decisions and commitments entered into involving inward investment prior to the Budget. Surely that precedent should not be made. Surely my right hon. Friend should recognise that that was not what was desired when the changes were proposed and surely that is a circumstance that should not happen in the future.

I invite my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to give a commitment that those changes will be subjected to much greater scrutiny and that such changes and precedents, which are dangerous, will not occur. We want to maximise inward investment. It is important for the Government to continue to give inward investors strong encouragement. We have record inward investment into this country and we should not change—even to the small extent that we are discussing—taxation practice in any way that would give inward investors the message that they are not welcome or that the tax treatment might change.

I hope that we will hear strong confirmation from my right hon. Friend that the Government will not allow such things to happen again in a way that might raise question marks in the minds of those involved in inward investment and the leasing industry. After all, the leasing industry is significant and important, it is supported by a number of Government Departments and it encourages inward investment into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): I rise briefly to support my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw). As he pointed out, about one third of all investment in this country is financed by lease financing. That has formed a key part of the prosperity that has been generated in recent years under this Government.

The thing that concerns me particularly about this aspect of the Finance Bill is that it would appear that the Government are changing the ground rules retrospectively. They are doing so in the case not only of United Kingdom investors, but of foreign investors into the UK.

Money comes in on a large scale from Japan and from European Union countries, and the arrangements have been a key part of what has been on offer from GB Ltd. to persuade Siemens, Toyota and Nissan, for example, either to make or to increase investments here. I find it deeply concerning that the legislation appears to be changing the ground rules retrospectively so that investments and commitments that have already been made will end up costing a great deal more. That could send the wrong message to potential investors.

Mr. Jack: It is a great pity that my hon. Friends did not read my remarks in Committee; they would have found that their arguments were adequately dealt with. We are not anti-leasing; we are in favour of investment in this country. We want to encourage inward investment by having what we believe to be the best tax regime in Europe, if not the world. We certainly do not want those investments to be burdened by the social chapter.

We have sought to act against the leases because they are contrived tax avoidance arrangements solely to the benefit of banks, effectively, although the lessee gains something. The lessees knew what they were signing up to: their agreements clearly stated that if there were changes in the tax regime they would have to bear the costs.

The measure represents a saving to the taxpayer of £150 million, against a total of investment affected of about £3½ billion, and I believe that I am right in saying that total leased investment represents about £20 billion, so it could not be said to be a show-stopper for the United Kingdom.

The legislation is not retrospective: it is prospective in that it taxes the income on such arrangements into the future. We are not going backwards in time. For those reasons, I invite my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Salmond: I think that the Minister said a few seconds ago that Britain had the best and most favourable business taxation regime in the world. Does he seriously want to stand by that comment, given the huge range of examples of countries with more favourable business tax regimes?

Mr. Jack: My comment was directed to our mainstream rate of corporation tax and to the small companies corporation tax. On any occasion other than now, I would be delighted to debate that with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. David Shaw: I can certainly confirm what my right hon. Friend said about our not entering the social chapter being one of the main reasons why inward investors come to this country and why my constituency is doing well in creating jobs in small businesses. We do not have the social chapter and in consequence unemployment in Dover is less than half that in Calais.

I tried to read all my right hon. Friend's speech in Committee, and I am not entirely convinced that the leasing industry has been fairly treated. That industry passes on a large part of the benefit achieved through tax arrangements that have been accepted for many years by Governments of both political persuasions. It is somewhat unfair that the benefits that are passed on may not be taken advantage of as much as one would like by some of the inward investors.

However, in the circumstances, it would not be appropriate to press the amendment to a vote. I therefore beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 23, in page 160, line 12, leave out from 'where' to second 'the' in line 18.

No. 19, in page 168, line 12, leave out from beginning to end of line 38 on page 170 and insert—

'Capital allowances

11.—(1) This paragraph applies in any case where an occasion occurs on or after 26th November 1996 on which a major lump sum falls to be paid in the case of the lease of the asset.

(2) In this paragraph "the relevant occasion" means the occasion mentioned in sub–paragraph (1) above.

(3) If capital expenditure incurred by the current lessor in respect of the leased asset is or has been taken into account for the purposes of any allowance or charge under any of the following groups of provisions, that is to say—

(a) sections 520 and 521 of the Taxes Act 1988 (patent rights),

(b) Part II of the Capital Allowances Act 1990 (machinery and plant), or

(c) Part IV of that Act (mineral extraction allowances),

the group of provisions in question ("the relevant provisions") shall have effect as if the relevant occasion were an event by reason of which a disposal value is to be brought into account of an amount equal (subject to any applicable limiting provision) to the amount or value of the major lump sum.

(4) In this paragraph "limiting provision" means a provision to the effect that the disposal value of the asset in question is not to exceed an amount ("the limit") described by reference to capital expenditure incurred in respect of the asset.

(5) Where—

(a) by virtue of sub–paragraph (3) above, a disposal value ("the relevant disposal value") falls or has fallen to be brought into account by a person in respect of the leased asset for the purposes of the relevant provisions, and

(b) a limiting provision has effect in the case of those provisions,

sub–paragraph (6) below shall apply.

(6) Where this sub–paragraph applies, the limiting provision shall have effect (if or to the extent that it would not otherwise do so)—

(a) in the case of the relevant disposal value, and

(b) in the case of any simultaneous or subsequent disposal value,

[Mr. David Shaw]

as if, instead of any particular disposal value, it were the aggregate amount of all the disposal values brought into account for the purposes of the relevant provisions by the current lessor in respect of the leased asset which is not to exceed the limit.

(7) In sub–paragraph (6) above "simultaneous or subsequent disposal value" means any disposal value which falls to be brought into account by the current lessor in respect of the leased asset by reason of any event occurring subsequent to, or at the same time as, the event by reason of which the relevant disposal value falls to be brought into account.

(8) If any allowance is or has been given in respect of capital expenditure incurred by the current lessor in respect of the leased asset under any provision of the Capital Allowances Acts other than those specified in sub–paragraph (3) above, an amount equal to the lesser of—

(a) the aggregate of the allowances so given (so far as not previously recovered or withdrawn),

(b) the amount or value of the major lump sum,

shall, in relation to the current lessor, be treated as if it were a balancing charge to be made on him for the chargeable period or its basis period in which falls the relevant occasion.

(9) If there is or has been allowed to the current lessor in respect of expenditure incurred in connection with the leased asset any deduction by virtue of—

(a) subsection (3) of section 68 of the Capital Allowances Act 1990 (films, tapes and discs), so far as relating to expenditure to which subsection (1) of that section applies, or

(b) section 42 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1992 (production or acquisition expenditure on films),

sub–paragraph (10) below shall apply.

(10) Where this sub–paragraph applies, the current lessor shall be treated as if receipts of a revenue nature of an amount equal to the amount (if any) by which—

(a) the amount or value of the major lump sum, exceeds

(b) the amount or value of so much of the major lump sum as is treated as receipts of a revenue nature under section 68(8) of the Capital Allowances Act 1990,

arose to him from the trade or business in question on the relevant occasion.

(11) If there is or has been allowed to the current lessor in respect of capital expenditure incurred in connection with the leased asset any deduction by virtue of—

(a) section 91 of the Taxes Act 1988 (cemeteries etc), or

(b) section 91A or 91B of that Act (restoration and preparation expenditure in relation to a waste disposal site),

sub–paragraph (12) below shall apply.

(12) Where this sub–paragraph applies, the current lessor shall be treated as if trading receipts of an amount equal to the lesser of—

(a) the amount or value of the major lump sum,

(b) the deductions previously allowed,

arose to him from the trade in question on the relevant occasion.

(13) If, in a case where this paragraph applies, allowances are or have been made to a person ("the contributor") by virtue of section 154 of the Capital Allowances Act 1990 (allowances in respect of contributions to capital expenditure) in respect of his contribution of a capital sum to expenditure on the provision of the leased asset, the foregoing provisions of this paragraph shall have effect in relation to the contributor and allowances by virtue of that section in respect of the contribution as they have effect in relation to the current lessor and allowances in respect of capital expenditure incurred by him in respect of the leased asset.

(14) In sub–paragraph (8) above, "chargeable period or its basis period" shall be construed in accordance with the Capital Allowances Act 1990.

(15) In the application of sub–paragraph (8) above—

(a) in relation to a trade, profession or vocation set up and commenced on or after 6th April 1994, or

(b) as respects the year 1997–98 or any subsequent year of assessment in relation to a trade, profession or vocation set up and commenced before 6th April 1994,

that sub–paragraph shall have effect with the omission of the words "or its basis period" and sub–paragraph (14) above shall accordingly have effect with the same omission.'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Schedule 17

Repeals

Amendments made: No. 20, in page 214, line 17, at end insert—

'(5A) Annuity business of insurance companies

Chapter	Short title	Extent of repeal
1988 c. 1.	The Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.	In section 76(2A)(b), sub–paragraph (iv) and the word "and" immediately preceding it. Section 434B(2). In section 490(2), the words from "but if" onwards.
1991 c. 31.	The Finance Act 1991.	In Schedule 7, paragraph 16(3) and (4).
1995 c. 4.	The Finance Act 1995.	In Schedule 8, paragraph 21(1).
1996 c. 8.	The Finance Act 1996.	Section 165(3).

These repeals have effect in relation to accounting periods beginning after 5th March 1997.'.

No. 21, in page 218, leave out lines 31 to 35.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Jack.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I wish briefly to remind the House that the Liberal Democrats and some other parties voted against the Bill's Second Reading. Nothing that has happened during its passage has convinced us that it is the right Finance Bill for the country. One or two things that happened outside the House between Second Reading and Third Reading have sharpened our reasons for opposing it.

It is interesting that only this week the Confederation of British Industry said that it was concerned that the Government's fiscal stance was not tight enough, that inflationary pressures were building up and that it would prefer an increase in taxes to a rise in interest rates. The Bill cuts taxes and gives the lie to the Chancellor's previously firmer commitment to getting inflation down and keeping it down. He is using the excuse of the rise in the exchange rate, and its deflationary effect, to justify his inaction on domestic inflation. He knows that he should address the domestic pressures, but he is not for reasons that we all know: we are about to have a general election and he does not want to do anything that might damage the Government's re-election prospects, bleak as they appear.

In the past couple of weeks, the Halifax building society's vote for conversion, or demutualisation, has revealed a more substantial pool of cash than was expected. It is extraordinary that it has to give that money away rather than reinvesting it. That, too, is building up inflationary pressures.

Perhaps most important of all, we believe that, whereas the Government have cut taxes, they should have put the money into education. Improving the quality of education is not just a matter of resources, but it is not possible to expand nursery education, reduce class sizes and equip our schools effectively using existing resources. We remain convinced that we were correct to vote against the penny reduction in income tax. Indeed, we are committed to reversing that cut and putting the money where it is needed. The Liberal Democrats will vote against the Bill.

10.16 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): It is customary on Third Reading for a Back Bencher to pay tribute to the Standing Committee for all its hard work. It has been customary for a year or two for me to pay that tribute. It is also customary for me to talk about capital taxation and, once again, to express disappointment that the Budget does not abolish capital gains tax and inheritance tax. I have often pointed out that capital is the lubricant of a capitalist economy. It is wrong that we should continue capital taxes.

In the current year, capital gains tax will raise £900 million for the Treasury, after reliefs and allowances, which cost the Treasury £600 million. A tax with the potential to raise £1.5 billion has raised only £900 million. That is without counting the cost of the time and energy of the experts who have been involved in guiding people who wish to save tax on this account through the minefield of the legislation. I submit again that too many of our best brains are employed in trying to find ways around capital taxes, and that they could be better employed in creating more wealth in the economy. I hope that Ministers will look again at the question of capital taxation, which is repeatedly instanced by the wealth-creating sector of our economy as a brake on the effectiveness of that sector and should be abolished.

I greatly welcome the reduction in the standard rate of tax to 23p in the pound. That means that, in April this year, it will be a whole 10p less in the pound than it was under the Labour Government in 1979.

10.19 pm

Mr. Salmond: I too represent a party that opposed the Bill on Second Reading; we also opposed certain aspects of it, such as the penny off income tax. I am quite certain, both on specifics and on generalities, that this is incompetent legislation.

Like many other hon. Members, I was engaged with the concerns expressed by people in industry about the changes to the structure of VAT—in particular, reclaimability. It struck me that all the experts who were consulted were worried that the Bill was being rushed through without enough scrutiny. Many of its flaws, and the possibility of legal challenge, will emerge over the coming months and years. Perhaps Treasury Ministers do not believe that they will be in the firing line when those legal challenges are made. Perhaps not; still, there are good reasons for thinking, particularly with respect to the VAT provisions, that the Bill will run into trouble in domestic and European courts.

Something of the casual attitude towards the structure of the Bill was summed up by the Financial Secretary's blithe assertion a couple of seconds ago that the United Kingdom had the most favourable corporate tax regime in the world. Perhaps I will arrange for the Library to give him a list of the countries with lower corporate tax regimes than the United Kingdom. Can the Minister be unaware of the fact that, just off the west coast of the UK, there is a country that offers a 10 per cent. corporation tax regime across a range of provisions to inward investors? That rate, offered by the Republic of Ireland, is one reason—

Mr. Jack: Only to manufacturing industry.

Mr. Salmond: But that is rather important. Admittedly, we have much less manufacturing industry than we used to, but some countries think that inward investment in manufacturing industry is rather important—which is why the Republic of Ireland accounts for about 40 per cent. of inward investment in software from the United States of America. That sort of taxation regime favours research and development and capital-intensive projects, as opposed to the electronic fabrication plants that have gone to Wales, Scotland and the north of England.

The Bill has been incompetently presented and incompetently scrutinised by Ministers and Labour Front Benchers, all of them far more interested in the election campaign than in the Finance Bill. That is perhaps understandable, but the shadow Treasury team has been engaged throughout not in scrutinising the Bill but in shadowing Treasury Ministers. That can result only in failed legislation.

Labour Front Benchers imprisoned themselves by their refusal to vote against the penny reduction in income tax. There can be various reasons for voting against a financial measure. The Liberal Democrats wanted to restore the income tax cut; we wanted to raise the ceiling on national insurance contributions; both our parties at least were committed to progressive taxation. It is unbelievable to find that Labour Front Benchers want tax and spending policies identical to those of the Government across the full range of major legislation. That is a very unhealthy process, both for Labour and for democracy. It allows Bills to pass without scrutiny and without debate on their implications.

Tonight, we witnessed the farce of the leader of the Ulster Unionist party declaring that an opportunity to defeat the Government on the Finance Bill had been missed, only to hear cat calls and cries of "Untrue!" from the Labour Front Bench. On the issue of airport tax, the Ulster Unionists were so far committed to opposing the relevant part of the Bill that they would certainly not have declined the opportunity to defeat the Government on it. For the Labour party not to believe that an opportunity was there to attack the Government on the Finance Bill and to defeat this discredited Government on part of their legislation is simply incredible.

We were told by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) that he did not like the amendment proposed by the Ulster Unionists; he did not like the amendment proposed by the Scottish National party; he did not like the amendment that would have been proposed by the Liberal Democrats, had they the opportunity to do so; but what was absent from the amendment paper was an opportunity offered by a Labour amendment that could potentially have united all the diverse Opposition parties and inflicted a richly deserved defeat on the Government. That opportunity—wasted and

[Mr. Salmond]

neglected this evening—will reverberate through the election campaign, as will the Labour party's foolish decision to shadow the Government's tax-and-spend policies and to imprison itself in the policies of a failed Government. That will be an issue of which the Labour party will hear a great deal throughout the election campaign.

10.24 pm

Mr. Darling: The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has again demonstrated his opportunism. On the one hand, he says that we should have voted against the Finance Bill because it does not increase taxes; on the other hand, an hour ago, he voted for an amendment that would have removed £400 million from the Budget. No one listening to him could fail to realise that, however he approaches the Bill and whatever he does, he is motivated purely by opportunism. Perhaps he should have paid closer attention to what his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) said in the Scottish Grand Committee some weeks ago: having conceded that the nationalists would not win the next election, she then went on to say that, if there were a separate Scottish state, the Scottish currency would shadow the English and Welsh pound sterling. If ever there was an example of how the nationalists are prepared to hitch their wagon to another currency, without any control or influence over the economic policies governing it, that is it.

I am indebted to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill)—I had no idea that it was a tradition that he spoke on Third Reading. I have missed that feature for the past 10 years, but I am grateful to him for having taken this opportunity to remind the House and the country that it is the Conservatives' policy to abolish capital gains tax and inheritance tax, at a cost of £4.5 billion. They do not tell us where that money will come from, but half the gain will go to 5,000 people in this country. In contrast, we believe that, if that money was available, it would be far better to spend it on reducing the barriers that face people who are on benefit and on getting them back into work, because that will bring far greater economic and social benefits to this country. Perhaps that highlights some of the differences between the Labour party and the Tories.

This is the last Budget of this Parliament. The tradition that the Conservatives have set, never mind for the past 10 years, but in every Budget since the 1992 election, is that the Finance Bill increases taxes. There were 22 tax increases before this Budget, and there are seven new tax increases now—each one breaking an express promise made by the Tories at the last election.

On the eve of Third Reading, we should all be indebted to *The Grocer* magazine, in which the Chancellor—yet again—reminds us that he has a strong personal commitment to transferring taxes from income to spending. Those of us who listened to his interview from Beijing on the "Today" programme noticed that he did not deny having said to the lady from *The Grocer* that the challenge was to increase VAT on fuel back up to 17 per cent. His main complaint was that *The Grocer* had not made that the main story, instead of the Tory threat to put VAT on food. The Chancellor and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who is here tonight, have made no secret of the fact that the Conservatives intend to transfer the burden of taxation from tax on income to tax on spending. If the Conservatives were to win another term of office, we should not, therefore, be surprised if they increased VAT on fuel to the full rate of 17 per cent., or if they imposed VAT on other items.

The Bill has left other problems, which have been referred to both in Committee and tonight. We shall have to return to those items in future. The evidence is clear: increasingly, people do not trust the Conservatives on their management of the economy and they do not believe a word they say on tax, on economic policy, or on anything else. This is the last Budget that the Conservative Government are likely to present, because people will look for a Government who are committed to a different outlook, a Government who have different priorities and will make different choices, a Government who will create a stable platform on which we can build for the future, a Government who are committed to education and to improving the health service, and a Government who will equip this country for the future and the next millennium.

10.29 pm

Mr. Jack: This is the last Finance Bill of this Parliament, but it is fitting because it crowns five years of achievement on the economy. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) for his kind words. I might add some of my own, if I may, for my colleagues the Economic Secretary and the Exchequer Secretary, who have ably piloted their sections of the Bill to a successful conclusion.

The Bill is very much in the shape in which it started, which is a testament to the excellence of the original drafting. It is a Budget that confirms those who currently sit on Government Benches and the Conservative party as those who are committed to cutting taxes. We cut the basic rate of income tax to 23p in the pound, the lowest basic rate for nearly 60 years, and it signalled the continuing rise in living standards that has been the hallmark of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

We have taken steps in the Bill to protect the tax base; the 14 separate measures on closing tax loopholes alone will yield more than £1 billion. They have secured public finances that are very solid indeed. Our public sector borrowing requirement to gross domestic product ratio throughout our tenure of office—2¼ per cent.—was not equalled by the best that the official Opposition could do when they were in government. It is not something that even they could dream about.

The state of our public finances is strong; our tax-cutting agenda has been resumed; the tax base has been secured. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 202, Noes 21.

Division No. 95] **[10.31 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*

Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guild'd)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and Mr. Anthony Coombs.

NOES

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Ms Liz Lynne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

PETITIONS

Eruthianathan Family

10.41 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): I have a petition on behalf of the Eruthianathan family who live in my constituency. In addition to the formal petition, there is a petition in like form signed by several hundred parishioners of the St. Benet's parish in Abbey Wood. The petition is also supported by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Southwark, the Anglican Bishop of Southwark, the Eruthianathans' own local bishop, the head of St. Paul's Roman Catholic secondary school, Abbey Wood, and the head of the Christ the King sixth form centre.

The petition reads:

The Humble Petition . . . sheweth that it is the intention of the Secretary of State for the Home Department to deport Rita and Francis Eruthianathan and their two children, Llewellyn . . . and Lynette . . . ; that the family have lived in the UK continuously for 7 years and Llewellyn and Lynette have spent most of their Secondary School education in England; and that Mrs. Rita Eruthianathan's widowed mother and seven brothers and sisters are permanently resident in the UK and that her mother was granted leave to remain in the UK to be united with her family.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will call upon the Secretary of State for the Home Department to review his decision on compelling compassionate grounds and allow Rita, Francis, Llewellyn and Lynette Eruthianathan to remain in the United Kingdom.

To lie upon the Table.

Children (Sexual Exploitation)

10.43 pm

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): I have the honour to present this petition to the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. This is the first volume of nine similar volumes. In 1994, I presented a petition on behalf of the National Council of Women.

The petition reads:

The Humble Petition of Members of Action for Children Campaign, the National Council of Women of Great Britain, Affiliated Societies and Residents and Citizens of the United Kingdom

Sheweth

That we, the undersigned, hereby:

1. express our deep concern at continuing reports that citizens of developed nations travelling abroad may be encouraging the use of children in prostitution and pornography;

2. affirm our commitment to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which seeks to protect children from sexual exploitation; and

3. call upon Her Majesty's Government to seek to play an active role in bringing about concerted international action to tackle this problem and in particular to examine ways of ensuring that individuals involved in such exploitation are brought to justice within the United Kingdom.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House do introduce legislation to ensure that citizens of the United Kingdom who commit serious sexual offences against children abroad can be prosecuted in this country.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Police (Leicester)

10.44 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): On behalf of my constituents, Lynne Sellars, Elaine Burgin, Paul Newcombe and Ricki Thomas, and Councillors Mary Draycott, Stewart Foster and Walt Lindsey, I wish to present a petition in support of additional police officers in the outer estates of Leicester, East. In addition, my constituents want to ensure that the local police station at Uppingham road remains open on a full-time basis. The petition calls on the Home Secretary to allow sufficient resources to be spent to open the police station at Uppingham road, Leicester permanently and to provide additional police officers in the Thurnby Lodge area.

To lie upon the Table.

Liskeard School and Community College

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

10.46 pm

Sir Robert Hicks (South–East Cornwall): I welcome this opportunity to raise the urgent need to unify the Liskeard school and community college on a single site. It is always gratifying to know that the Minister answering an Adjournment debate is familiar with the local geography. My hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), has kindly agreed to stand in for another Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment, our hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan).

Our hon. Friend visited Liskeard in November 1995 to see for herself the very real problems being experienced at the Liskeard junior school. During that visit, she also saw something of the unsatisfactory situation at Liskeard school and community college. Her visit to the junior school had a very favourable outcome, as a new junior school is now under construction—I like to think, as a result of her intervention. Therefore, she has set a precedent for her colleague, a fellow junior Minister at the Department for Education and Employment, to respond in an equally favourable manner to my remarks this evening. We are hopeful that, by my raising this subject, we shall make some tangible progress regarding the needs of secondary education in Liskeard.

Six comprehensive schools are located in my constituency. They occupy single sites, with the exception of Liskeard, which occupies two sites at opposite ends of the market town. The first two school years—about 400 pupils—are based on the former grammar school premises. Those pupils are, in practice, isolated from important facilities offered on the main campus. This latter site—formerly the Liskeard secondary modern school—is very attractive. Needless to say, all the new facilities that were provided since the amalgamation of the two schools in the mid-1970s were built on that latter site.

Because Liskeard school is the top priority for unification on one site in Cornwall, the local education authority has decided—for totally understandable reasons—not to spend scarce economic resources on upgrading the older buildings at the lower school site. As a result, the lower school buildings and temporary classrooms are not energy-efficient. It is not a sound use of scarce resources to maintain more than 20 temporary buildings, mainly wooden Elliott Medway-type huts. Consequently, the teaching areas at the lower school are substandard.

That is the physical position at the lower school, but in addition there are the human dimension and the accompanying practical difficulties arising from the split site. To emphasise these genuine problems, I can do no better than quote from the Office for Standards in Education inspection report of May 1996:

"The school's split site poses problems for its work. The lower school buildings provide a poor learning environment . . . The school is part way through a phased development of its accommodation, designed to consolidate the school on one site and improve facilities in the future. The quality of some of the new buildings is good, for example the sixth form area and computer rooms"

at the upper school.

"However, for pupils currently in the school, the provision and standard of accommodation are unsatisfactory in a number of respects. The school occupies two sites approximately 1 km apart. The unavoidable movement of teachers, and to a lesser extent, pupils, has a negative impact on the quality of education provided."

I graduated in geography some 35 years ago—a long time ago—and therefore feel for the subject, although I have forgotten most of what I learned at university.

The report continues:

"The extent of movements reduced teaching and preparation time; for example there are 31 such breaks in geography in each timetable cycle apart from those coinciding with breaks and lunchtimes . . . The lower school presents a dispiriting learning environment. This site provides little stimulus to pupils on entry to the school . . . Some teachers spend a high proportion of their time with only one part of the age range and this on one of the two sites. This hinders the development of consistent practices and communications . . . Good formal and informal communications seek to overcome the problems of having staff on two sites; the tension between seeking to reduce staff travelling and ensuring full participation in subject teams has not yet been resolved satisfactorily".

The situation, then, is that time is wasted in travelling between the sites. There is stress on staff; inefficient use and duplication of equipment and materials; timetabling constraints; under-use of specialist facilities at one site and over-use at the other; and there are revenue funding implications for the local education authority and the school itself. My hon. Friend's Department has allowed £23,000 towards the school budget to try to cover the split site situation. Cornwall makes the figure up to £45,500. The governors' realistic assessment of the cost of the split site is £77,000.

The conclusions reached by the Ofsted inspection team clearly show the need to improve the position as soon as possible. One of the key issues identified by the inspectors was the need for the local education authority and the governors to

"continue to seek to overcome the constraints imposed by the split site, and, in the short term, to improve the learning environment in the lower school and to integrate it more fully into the life and work of the school as a whole."

The governors and the staff are attempting to do that. Certain improvements and extensions are being undertaken. I must emphasise, however, that, when those improvements are completed, the difficulties associated with a split site will still not be resolved.

The Cornwall local education authority submitted an application to the schools renewal challenge fund for £3.35 million to complete the consolidation process at Liskeard. I realise that that is a large sum of money, given the fact that the total amount of SRCF grant available in the second tranche was just £15 million. Although the application was for £3.35 million, the total cost of the scheme is £4.77 million. Approximately £1.4 million can be found from other sources, such as the basic need capital allocation, the school's bid for technology college status and capital receipts.

Cornwall LEA—like all of us—recognises the constraints on capital funding nationally. It prioritised the SRCF bid into independently deliverable components.

[Sir Robert Hicks]

The first priority is for a new technology and art block, which will cost £2.25 million. The second priority is to convert the existing outdated technology rooms into science and general teaching rooms, at a cost of £470,000. The third priority is a music suite to complement the recently established dance and drama suite, at a cost of £590,000. The fourth and final requirement is to build 16 new general teaching rooms to replace the 20 or so existing wooden huts, to which I have already referred.

That is the total need, but one reason for identifying four priority categories was to show that, once the first component—the technology and art block—is completed, it will enable the LEA to convert the existing technology and art rooms into science laboratories and general teaching rooms. That in turn will enable the greater part of the curriculum for the whole school to be delivered in permanent buildings on a single site.

Furthermore, had the SRCF bid been successful, it would have enabled the LEA to negotiate a favourable tender with the contractor now on site. That would have provided considerable savings compared with a new contract at some stage in the future. Sadly, our application for funding was not successful, and we will have to start again. Much to the disappointment of the school and the community it serves—there is genuine anger in some quarters—unless the Minister is forthcoming tonight, we shall have to wait some time before the scheme materialises.

I do not wish to dwell on the reasons for refusal given by my hon. Friend the Minister in her letter to me dated 4 February 1997. We must be positive, and look to the future. In that same letter, however, my hon. Friend not only stated that she had visited the school but confirmed that the work was urgently needed; my purpose in raising this subject tonight is to further the process.

I mentioned that the new Liskeard junior school was under construction. It was in my first Parliament, in 1972, that I initially raised the need for a new Liskeard junior school. That was 25 years ago. I only hope that Liskeard, the catchment area for the secondary school, and, indeed, my successor will not have to wait a further 25 years before secondary education in the town is consolidated on a single site.

11 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am grateful to the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall (Sir R. Hicks), and to the Minister, for allowing me to speak briefly.

The hon. Gentleman and I were sparring partners in the 1970s, and, for a brief moment—almost the twinkling of an eye—I interrupted his parliamentary career. I hope that, on this occasion, he will forgive me. I am glad to say that subsequently, in the 1990s, we have been parliamentary neighbours—and, indeed, cross-party collaborators.

I know that this may be the hon. Gentleman's final contribution in the House, and I express, from the Opposition Benches, my personal appreciation—and appreciation on behalf of many other hon. Members, and the people of Cornwall—for the work that he has undertaken on behalf of his county, his constituency and, if I may say so on a cross-party basis, those who believe in democracy and the way in which it should be represented in the House.

I live on the outskirts of the catchment area of Liskeard school and community college. I think it fitting not only to pay tribute to the talents of the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall and his advocacy of his constituents' interests, but to underline his final point: that he and, I think, all of us look to the Minister not to attempt to resist the eloquent plea that has been issued to him. It would, I think, be the final triumph of the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall's career in the House if, between us, we could persuade the Minister to be forthcoming and generous, and to use his common sense to show that, on behalf of the Government, he can respond to us positively.

I am sure that it would delight not just the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall and his successor—whoever that person may be, and whatever his party may be—and those who are present now, but, in particular, the people of Liskeard and the area it serves, if the hon. Gentleman's advocacy is successful. I hope that the Minister will respond accordingly.

11.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Sir R. Hicks) for giving me the opportunity—indeed, the privilege—to respond. I echo what was said by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) about my responding to my hon. Friend's last speech in the House of Commons. Let me make it clear that I regard him as a friend: we have known each other for a time—although not, I immediately concede, as long as the hon. Member for North Cornwall can claim.

It is a measure of my hon. Friend's status that, just after 11 o'clock on a weekday evening, a series of hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber were surrounding him to listen to his speech. In addition to the hon. Member for North Cornwall, we have the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) and my hon. Friends the Members for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) and for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who are here in recognition, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), which, we would all concede, is a slight jump from Cornwall. The key message is that their presence is in recognition not just of the status of my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall as the senior Cornwall Member, but of his role as a Member of Parliament over nearly 27 years, where he has demonstrated what I would describe as a commendable independence of spirit, and has attracted the significant loyalty of friends, including those on the ministerial Bench.

My hon. Friend raised the subject of Liskeard school and community college in a typically robust and clear way. It is an area that he has represented with considerable skill, and a subject in the general area of education that, as he made clear, he has raised many times before.

I take this welcome opportunity to underline the Government's commitment to improving the condition of our school buildings in general. We estimate that over £6 billion has been spent on county, voluntary-aided and grant-maintained school buildings this decade. That is a substantial national investment, which we wish to continue.

As my hon. Friend has said, it would normally have been the task of my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) to respond to this debate, as she is responsible for capital funding for schools, but she cannot be here this evening because of other ministerial business. However, as he said, she has first-hand knowledge, and therefore she regrets her absence. She enjoyed her visit to Liskeard following his invitation in November 1995, a visit that he knows I narrowly missed because of a reshuffle of responsibilities but a few months before. Speaking as the son of a Cornishman, my loss was my ministerial colleague's gain, and I have to some extent been able to draw on her knowledge in making my remarks this evening.

In the past couple of years, we have been able to allocate significant sums for the improvement of schools in Liskeard. This year, we have introduced the schools renewal challenge fund—the SRCF—so that we can target resources on meeting urgent needs, while increasing value for money. That has proved enormously successful and popular. Cornwall, and the Liskeard area in particular, have felt the benefits of that initiative.

In July last year, we were able to allocate to Cornwall £621,000 towards the rebuilding of Liskeard junior school. As my hon. Friend the Member for South–East Cornwall made clear in his speech and I readily affirm, that followed significant activity by my hon. Friend in pressing for such funding over a number of years, although I was unaware that it stretched to the full 25. That was on top of £756,000 that had already been allocated to Cornwall in response to bids for the two Liskeard schools in its annual capital guidelines, to which I shall return, assuming time allows.

As I have said, the SRCF has been very popular. Inevitably, it has been highly competitive, and we have been able to support only the best of the bids that we have received—those that have most closely met the published criteria and that offered the best value for money. Judged against that competition, we were unable to make an allocation for Cornwall's bid to bring Liskeard community school on to a single site.

That does not have to be, and is not, the end of the matter. It is not a once-for-all rejection. There is absolutely nothing to stop Cornwall making a further bid in 1997-98, when the SRCF will continue with at least £20 million. I recognise that that bid will not be backed in person by my hon. Friend the Member for South–East Cornwall, at least not in the Chamber, but I understand that the local education authority has been in touch with my Department's architects to discuss how the cost-effectiveness of the scheme might be improved.

In total over the past two years, Cornwall LEA has received £1.377 million specifically for Liskeard junior school and Liskeard school and community college through the various means of ACGs, supplementary credit approvals, and so on. That is a significant sum going to the schools in one town—as I know colleagues representing constituencies elsewhere would readily recognise—but is of course not the end of the story.

My hon. Friend will be aware of significant levels of capital funding that have been made available to Cornwall through annual capital guidelines, which feed through into the authority's general borrowing approval. We were able to allocate £6.156 million for 1996-97 and £6.372 million for 1997-98. To put that in context, it represents 66 per cent. of Cornwall's bid, compared with the national average of 21 per cent. That shows that Cornwall has done rather well in terms of allocations in general for school buildings, and I hope goes some way towards answering the odd comment that I have seen, which has implied that Cornwall has been treated less favourably than other authorities.

I should, of course, draw attention to the wider point, that the Government do not control the funding of projects at individual county and voluntary-controlled schools. LEAs decide their own capital expenditure priorities, and it is their responsibility to make the best use of resources available to them. It has been Cornwall LEA's decision to spend the money on schools other than Liskeard in the past. That is not a criticism, necessarily. The priorities are for the authority to set, and it must answer for them to the local community.

I have referred a few times to ACGs. They in turn do not represent all the resources available to LEAs for capital spending. There are, of course, other resources available. LEAs can invest capital receipts and use funds from revenue budgets if they so wish. We have made it easier for authorities to do that in a number of ways. For example, for two years from April 1996, LEAs have been required to set aside only 25 per cent. of proceeds from the sale of surplus assets for debt redemption, as opposed to the previous 50 per cent. That will mean that yet more is available for new capital projects.

We encourage LEAs to explore all funding routes available. Besides the SRCF, they should also consider the private finance initiative. We are committed to achieving the potential opportunities of more and better investment in schools' infrastructure that are offered by the PFI.

I cite one example—it would not be fair to cite more—of an LEA that is taking forward an innovative PFI project to replace the worn-out kitchens of its entire school stock. There has been a good deal of private sector interest from local catering companies, but some larger national players have shown an interest, too. I know that my hon. Friend would agree that it is appropriate that we should encourage all LEAs to consider the PFI options seriously in the interests of opening up investment opportunities and securing better value for money.

Substantial sums have been directed towards improving and renewing educational buildings in this decade. For 1997-98, we have announced record levels of support for capital programmes in schools—just short of £700 million. When the substantial support that we announced for the previous two years is added to it, a total of more than £2 billion in centrally available support has been made available over three years.

[Mr. Robin Squire]

To return to the subject of the debate, the picture in Liskeard is far from bleak. As I have made clear, Cornwall has received substantial sums over the past two years for schools' capital expenditure generally and for Liskeard in particular, and there remains the opportunity to bid for further funding in the near future. I very much trust that, when my Department's architects visit the area, they will not only be able to give the LEA useful advice but return with even more knowledge that will enable us better to consider what I am sure will be a subsequent LEA bid.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to set out the facts. I hope that he will understand if I conclude by wishing him, on behalf of the whole House, a long, happy and healthy retirement.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 March 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Tariff Rebate Subsidy (Northern Isles)

[Relevant documents: First report from the Scottish Affairs Committee of Session 1995–96, on the removal of tariff rebate subsidy on Northern Isles freight (HC 229), and the Government's response thereto (Cm 3492).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

9.34 am

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Good morning, Madam Speaker. I am delighted to have this opportunity to debate tariff rebate subsidy. This is an historic event, as it is the first time that the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which was formed comparatively recently, has had time on the Floor of the House to discuss a report and the Government's response. By way of introduction, I shall outline the history of the tariff rebate subsidy scheme in the highlands and islands, so that people who enjoy reading the debate later on may understand what it is about.

The Highlands and Islands Shipping Services Act 1960 commits Governments to maintaining and improving sea transport services in the highlands and islands, by giving financial assistance to the operators. The Government introduced the tariff rebate subsidy for the carriage of freight to the Northern Isles in 1979.

The subsidy is intended to reduce the cost of supplying essential commodities to customers in remote highland and island locations and to promote exports. Its primary purpose, according to Highlands and Islands Enterprise, is to sustain the economy of the islands and to retain their populations, which I am sure that the whole House would agree to be a laudable and sensible objective.

Service users benefited directly by receiving freight accounts net of the tariff rebate subsidy, while shipping operators reclaimed the discounted figure from the Scottish Office. The scheme provided freight rate reductions of 10.5 per cent. on imports to Orkney and Shetland and 47.5 per cent. on exports.

In 1989, subsidy claims from P and O Scottish Ferries were limited to a fixed amount; in effect, a capping system was introduced. That system was then extended to cover the freight services operated by Orkney Line and Shetland Line from 1991 and Orcargo from 1993. On 1 May 1995, the Scottish Office withdrew the tariff rebate subsidy on freight, with two exceptions: fish meal and fish oil retained tariff rebate subsidy for three years, reducing from 30 per cent. on 1 May 1995 to zero from April 1998; and southbound livestock retained the subsidy, but at a reduced rate of 33 per cent.

The Government argued that tariff rebate subsidy was a flawed system, and initiated a review of the market, to identify better means of supporting the shipment of bulk freight in the future. At that time, the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs decided to investigate the matter. We all enjoyed the visits to Orkney and Shetland, which gave us a great opportunity to hear for ourselves the concerns of the local people about what was happening.

Some doubts were expressed about the Select Committee's ability to understand such an intricate subject, but at the end of the day I was happy to hear at least one person say that she was astonished by the scope of the questions that we asked and our obvious knowledge; I must therefore pay tribute to the people who fed us the questions.

The Government raised specific questions about the level of subsidy paid to the bulk shipping service operators in the Northern and Western Isles, which had increased in real terms from £800,000 to £2.7 million between 1981 and 1995. Tariff rebate subsidy increases with the level of carryings, which has caused the Government to view it as flawed. The Committee felt that they had missed the point. TRS was introduced to help retain population on the islands by improving economic competitiveness and hence the productivity of island communities. It is therefore obvious that, as economic activity increases, with, for example, increased exports, the subvention will also rise. That tariff rebate subsidy increases as economic activity increases might therefore be considered an acceptable outcome.

The difficulty arises when the tariff rebate subsidy begins to exceed the finite resources that the Government allocate for shipping subsidies, and the capping mechanism is employed. The Government concentrate their attention on the effect of capping on the providers of shipping services—the competitive effect—but it should be remembered that capping must also ultimately restrict economic activity on the islands, thus adversely affecting island communities—the opposite of the intention of TRS.

The Government have also suggested that TRS encourages excess capacity in the bulk freight market. The Select Committee considered the effect of the removal of TRS on Northern Isles freight, found no evidence for that, and reported accordingly to the House. Bulk shipping services are provided on a tramp—rather than a scheduled service—basis, as in the ferry sector. That means that bulk shipping capacity tends to arrive in the market only when demand warrants it.

For instance, the Hay and Company vessel was also employed on other coastal routes around the United Kingdom; it was not used solely for Northern Isles trade. The Government's suggestion that bulk operators were forced to run under-utilised vessels on Northern Isles routes and that such under-utilisation was subsidised by TRS was not borne out by the facts disclosed by our investigation. TRS applies to the freight rate in respect of cargo carried, not the vessel's space or the capacity that is provided. Therefore, TRS could hardly be said to create excess shipping capacity in the bulk freight market.

The concept that TRS is flawed ultimately depends on what the Government's objective is. Perhaps the Minister will enlighten us when he replies. If the objective is to restrict, or even withdraw, public expenditure in respect of shipping service subsidies, then, far from being flawed,

[Mr. William McKelvey]

it could be argued that Government policy has altered and that they believe that support for bulk shipments is no longer necessary. That is a sensible point at which to turn to examples of how the public sector supports essential passenger and freight ferry services in other European Union countries. The Government may want to consider some of those methods.

The Spanish Government provide guaranteed funds for ship mortgages, corporate tax allowances for Spanish-registered ships, and exemption from transfer tax and stamp duty, and pay 50 per cent. of the social security contributions of shipping employees. Ferry services to the Canaries, the Azores, Madeira and the French Atlantic possessions are all maintained, in one way or another, with state support. Italy supports its state-owned ferry operator with contributions to vessel costs and a subsidy to cover trading losses. For private operators, the Sicilian regional government reimburses 50 per cent. of the cost of round-trips for tourist cars between Genoa and Sicily.

The tariff rebate subsidy is flawed only from a certain viewpoint. If it is there to help island communities to compete economically, to survive and to allow people to remain on the islands, it can hardly be said to be flawed, as it clearly fulfils that purpose by aiding the creation of island businesses that specialise in production or consumption of bulk commodities. It is another matter if it is considered flawed because it is an increasing burden on the taxpayer.

The Government have argued that TRS is flawed because it does not offer value for money to the taxpayer and cannot be sustained in the longer term. That statement suggests that the Government favour restricting, if not entirely removing, the subsidy. I shall wait to hear what the Minister has to say on that. I am glad that the Government have listened to the Select Committee and rejected entirely removing the subsidy. I welcome the Government's acceptance of the immediate reinstatement of TRS for the carriage of bulk freight to and from Orkney and Shetland and of putting TRS for the carriage of livestock back up from 33 to 50 per cent.

I am concerned about the four options identified by the Government as alternatives to TRS for bulk freight. The first two options both involve capping. Each would effectively place a limit on the public funds allocated for shipping subsidies. When a cap is introduced, demand for shipping capacity must fall, as must economic activity. The question is one of balance: the quantity of public funds against how much economic activity is needed and desired on the islands.

The Government's third option involves completely tendered contracts operating on a geographical basis. That probably means that one or two bulk shipping operators would serve the Northern Isles routes. Curiously, the Government suggest that that would address the problem of excess capacity, a problem that does not exist for bulk freight services in the Northern Isles. Such franchise agreements would be a subsidy to the transport provider, not to the shipper or consignee of goods.

That was a core issue in the Select Committee's report. We said that the emphasis of tariff rebate subsidy had changed and had become a subsidy for the transport provider. While the operator would be monitored, it is reasonable to suggest that conflict might arise if market freight rates were subsequently increased to take account of a decline in demand or lack of adequate subsidy for a given period.

Bulk vessels seem to be regarded as homogeneous craft, but companies on Shetland need specialised tankers to transport fish oil. Such services would need to be considered in any franchise scheme and would increase the complexity of that option.

The fourth option would place the subsidy with the public authorities in the islands, to enable them to purchase their preferred service. It is not certain that all the islands councils would want to bear such a responsibility, although it was made clear to us that Orkney would favour it. Orkney islands council is bidding for the lifeline passenger service to Orkney.

Another issue of great concern is the Government's decision not to allow CalMac to tender for lifeline services. The main argument against that is the delay that would be caused in tendering. Our investigation has already caused some delay, but it was worth while, as I am sure the Government agreed when they received our report. A further delay would allow CalMac to tender, which could prove worth while. Even at that late stage, it would not be wise to rule it out. It has been argued that CalMac has an unfair competitive advantage, but the Committee thought that, as it has been found to be as efficient as the private sector by no fewer than three different consultants' reports, it could be more cost-effective to the taxpayer.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): My hon. Friend mentioned the suggestion that CalMac might have an unfair competitive advantage. Could that not apply equally to P and O?

Mr. McKelvey: I was merely saying that the Government had suggested that there was an unfair advantage; I was not saying that. My hon. Friend is right, because the Select Committee strongly felt—I put it no higher—that there was a very cosy relationship between the Scottish Office and P and O. In effect, P and O has been subsidised at a time of loss, and I shall return to that matter in more detail later in my speech.

The competitive tendering process has more to do with dogma and a bias against publicly owned, yet—as in this case—successful operators than with any threat to competition. I am concerned also that the Scottish Office is saying that, as passenger ferries carry freight and livestock, those services do not need to be separately defined as "lifeline". Freight-only services are likely to be provided in line with demand without subsidy; and it was pointed out to the Select Committee that, if new craft were to be introduced on that route—as they no doubt will be in the future—they might not have freight capacity and might be simply for passengers and cars. That would leave the islanders in a precarious position—again, the reverse of what the subsidy was intended to preserve.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and the Committee on this interesting report. Is he aware that the Isles of Scilly in my constituency have had no subsidy at all for the operating costs of ferries from the mainland to the islands, or from St. Mary's to the off islands? Does he think that that is right? Is he

aware of the considerable resentment of the Scilly islanders at the difference in treatment between the Scottish islands and the Isles of Scilly?

Mr. McKelvey: In all its travels, the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs never had the opportunity to visit the Isles of Scilly. I wish that we had thought of that, as we could have compared the two areas.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): We slipped up there.

Mr. McKelvey: Only a certain amount of finance is allowed to Select Committees—as you well know, Madam Speaker—and we Scots are frugal when it comes to travel. However, the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) raises an interesting point and it is something worth looking at. I am not sure whether there is a need to maintain the population in the Isles of Scilly—as there is in the Northern Isles—but if so, there is scope for argument that a subsidy should be provided to improve the services to those islands.

Many matters have been raised, and many hon. Members are anxious to catch your eye, Madam Speaker. The members of the Select Committee who are in the Chamber are now specialists in the area. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) referred to the perceived losses by P and O Scottish Ferries, because of competition, and the loss in market share for freight because of the new entrants to the TRS scheme. Between 1991 and 1992, P and OSF's financial performance deteriorated by some £4.4 million. During the same period, P and O's freight revenue fell by only £1.4 million.

Other factors in the loss of freight revenue were more significant, and I recall that the members of the Select Committee were surprised by them. Higher interest and depreciation charges in respect of replacement ships came to a total of £24 million. During 1991-92, P and O undertook the purchase and refit of two second-hand vessels—the St. Clair and the St. Ola. In the case of the St. Clair, the cost of £15 million was 50 per cent. more than all investment over the previous five years. The MDS Transmodal report suggested that P and O had incurred significantly higher finance charges over that period. Coincidentally, the current cost accounts of Caledonian MacBrayne show a loss of £4.4 million for 1991—almost all because of increased provision for depreciation.

The Select Committee saw the issue of vessel replacement as of central importance to the inquiry, and the report states:

"We believe the dramatic deterioration in profitability experienced by P & OSF between 1991 and 1992 was less as a consequence of the fall in freight revenues than due to an increase in depreciation, interest and other charges related to increased capital expenditure on replacement ships."

I wish to refer to the recent tendering process for the contracts for supplying ferry and freight services. From the original 18 tenders—which did not include Caledonian MacBrayne—we are now down to three. There has been a change in the terms of the tendering for contracts, inasmuch as the three remaining firms will now be aware that—because of changes in European legislation—they would qualify for a 50 per cent. grant towards the purchase of a new vessel. That information was not known to the other 15 tenderers, which have since dropped out. That in itself leads me to believe that the Government should reconsider the tendering process.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On the acquisition of new purpose-built vessels—I refer to paragraph 81 of the Committee's fine report—I should point out that, with European funding, the contracts for the building of such vessels would have to be advertised throughout the EU. More important, however, Caledonian MacBrayne has vast experience of designing and running purpose-built vessels to transport goods and people between the islands and the mainland.

Mr. McKelvey: My hon. Friend raises a relevant and helpful point.

I am nearing the end of my speech. If I may, I shall refer to a recent cartoon that appeared in the papers in the Northern Isles and which summed up the situation as most islanders believe it to be. The cartoon depicts a sporting scene and a stadium with three runners about to take off in a hurdle race. In the outside lane, we see Orkney Ferries, which has limited routes and is involved in the tendering process. In another lane, we see Sea Containers, which has the route from Argyll to Northern Ireland. Both those runners are depicted as quite muscular. P and O, however, is drawn as slightly bent and balding—not unlike myself—and certainly middle-aged.

The runners are about to take off at the sound of the starting pistol. The hurdles for Orkney Ferries and Sea Containers are drawn as about 6 ft high, while the hurdle for P and O is about 2 ft high. That encapsulates the feeling in the Northern Isles—people feel that P and O is again being favoured by the Scottish Office and that there is a cosy atmosphere between the two. That very much concerns local people.

We are to have a general election, and my hon. Friends and I hope that it is sooner rather than later. The Government must take cognisance of that fact, and of the fact that most commentators say that there will be a change of Government. We shall have to wait and see. Because of questions about the availability of grant, the Government would be wise to suspend the tendering operation, with a view to reconsidering it after the general election. Perhaps Caledonian MacBrayne might then be given an opportunity to tender, if it so wishes.

9.58 am

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) said that this was something of an historic occasion, in that it was the first time that a report by the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs had been debated in the House. However, I believe that the Select Committee has created history since 1992. It was not constituted before 1992, and there was a gap. The hon. Gentleman is the Chairman of the Committee, and I commend him. The Committee has carried out many interesting investigations, and although I have not agreed with him on every occasion, he has always been fair and taken a positive view.

Mr. David Marshall: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, between 1979 and 1987, the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs produced a number of good reports, and that one of the Chairmen was my hon. Friend the Member

[Mr. David Marshall]

for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), who is present today? Does he agree that the reason why there was no Select Committee on Scottish Affairs between 1987 and 1992 was the failure of the Conservative party to provide enough Members of Parliament who were willing to serve on the Committee? Labour Members were only too willing to serve, but the Conservatives prevented the Committee from meeting.

Mr. Gallie: I do not disagree with any of the hon. Gentleman's comments. Had I been a Member of Parliament before 1992, I should have wanted the Select Committee to be reconstituted, and I have worked pretty assiduously within the Committee since being elected. What happened before 1992 is another matter entirely.

I want to say to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun that recently we carried out an interesting investigation into community care, and I hope that today's debate has not slowed efforts to get that report published. I should like to think that I shall be here in the next Parliament to debate that issue on the Floor of the House, because it is vital to Scotland.

This debate arises from the abandonment in 1994 of the tariff rebate subsidy, albeit in conjunction with maintaining it at a reducing level for fish oil, fish meal and livestock. One pleasing aspect of the Committee's investigation is the fact that, as a direct consequence, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has uprated the TRS for livestock, principally in support of the Kirkwall-Invergordon route. The TRS has been uprated from 33 per cent. to 50 per cent.; I welcome that, and the Government's comments. The one thing that is not stated in the Government response is whether that is against a fixed time scale. I would suggest to my right hon. Friend or his successor, although I think that he will remain in his post after the general election, that that uprating should be continued.

The subsidy for Northern Isles services was turned around to the block grant for passenger services, to be competed for by service providers. As the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun suggested, in the first instance, that certainly seemed to favour P and O Scottish Ferries and, to a degree, it allowed the company to set its own standards for that service. The results appear to be acceptable and they are welcome to Shetlanders, who receive a regular and extremely good service between the islands and Aberdeen, and there is no doubt that the service suits the commercial interests and tourism industry on Shetland.

However, concerns about the under-usage of capacity that was identified in the Committee's report are ignored. One difficulty that the Government must recognise is the difference of opinion between people on Shetland and people on Orkney. An easy answer might be for the Government to come up with additional cash to throw in different ways at the different islands, but I do not believe that that is a practical solution.

There are other issues in the report on which the Government have acted positively. They have addressed the issue of regulation of maximum freight tariffs within the passenger ferry service contract. However, in addition, we should consider the charges made in respect of cross-subsidy by P and OSF and examine the extent to which minimum freight tariffs would be appropriate. I am advised that P and OSF levies a livestock charge on the Invergordon run of £5.15 per head of cattle, which compares with a charge of £17.38 in 1992. Given Orcargo's charges, the 1992 figure appears to be more appropriate.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland) *rose—*

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman wants to intervene, but it would be better to let me run.

A start point for contract conditions on block grant might be a maximum freight charge of £5.15 plus an allowance within the contract for an X-factor increase year by year of the inflation rate. That would alleviate fears of predatory pricing, which would drive competition out of the marketplace and leave P and OSF with the world as its oyster. The provision of such a service would be a major factor in the consideration of the contract. Increased TRS on livestock and provision for peak livestock capacity within the passenger contract would be welcomed all round.

I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's decision to reinstate TRS on the carriage of bulk freight. From the minutes of proceedings in the report, it will be noted that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) and I urged that TRS should be amended or revamped, so that livestock and agricultural freight and industrial bulk and semi-bulk freight are covered. Given that the Government have addressed that matter, I am not in a position to complain about the Government's response to the report.

I want to quote a letter from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which

"has been monitoring the prices of a range of goods in Orkney and Shetland following the changes in the Tariff Rebate Subsidy".

It has determined that

"there have been relatively few changes in prices of goods in Orkney and Shetland which can be linked to the Tariff Rebate Subsidy."

That is, to the removal of the TRS. That seems to justify to some extent the concentration of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood and myself on the bulk freight aspects of TRS. The letter also suggests that

"there are considerable concerns among the Orkney and Shetland business community"

about the renegotiation of the P and OSF contract and whether that might have an adverse effect. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take note of such concerns.

On the consequences of the reinstatement of the bulk freight TRS, Highlands and Islands Enterprise says:

"This has reduced the price of sand imports from Aberdeen . . . and quarries on Shetland are in a position to resume exports of aggregates."

Members of the Committee felt strongly about that issue, and we all welcome those findings. We also welcome the fact that the Government have undertaken a bulk freight review, and I have no doubt that its findings will be welcomed.

Without resorting to a line-by-line analysis of the Select Committee's report and the Government's response, I emphasise that my concern is to ensure that maximum advantage is taken for the islanders and the taxpayer of any continuing Government subsidy. I noted the remarks

of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) in respect of the Scilly Isles ferry service, which is not subsidised, and I listened to the response of the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun, which referred to falling populations in the Northern Isles. Having been an observer on the Committee's visits to Orkney and Shetland, I believe that there is a reversal of that process there, with many of the immigrants to the Northern Isles coming from south of the border, although I doubt that few are from the Scilly Isles.

I do not believe that the matter of livestock and bulk freight can be catered for in any way other than through the TRS system, as currently established. I referred earlier to the time scales in the Government response. However, I have several questions to ask and points to make in respect of the contract for passenger services. I queried from the start the suitability of the present P and O vessels and the philosophy of adapting old vessels for that route. Members of the Committee emphasised that that was a factor. I should like a guarantee that any future contract will ensure availability of stand-by vessels on the route. The under-utilisation factors of the service identified by the Committee should be addressed.

I want to know why the availability of European regional development fund money has not become known to those who tendered, until this late stage of the tender process. I understand that 18 companies originally tendered. It is only fair, correct, and in the interests of the taxpayer and all concerned, that any of the companies that feel that they could resubmit a bid, given the availability of ERDF funding, be allowed to do so. I ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister to take account of the fact that that would be in everyone's interests.

I understand that P and O has the lease on the roll on/roll off facilities in Aberdeen harbour. Whoever is the successful bidder for the contract must have open access to that facility; it cannot be blocked by P and O. I well understand that there will be difficulties. There will be a need for regular, timed services, which could be disruptive to P and O if that facility were used, but that facility is much needed for the service that is provided, and the successful bidder must have access to it.

I find it difficult to understand how the question of cross-subsidy on general freight can be addressed in full. I suggest that, whatever the method used to determine passenger subsidies, a link be made to the level of freight charges currently made and the level of freight volumes currently carried, and a substantial amount of subsidy made if no freight cross-subsidy is to be considered.

The list goes on, but as the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) keeps pointing to me and to the clock, I recognise that other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. I look forward to hearing what they have to say and, above all, to hearing the response of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister.

10.11 am

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I pay tribute to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs and its Chairman, the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), for giving the House, the communities of Orkney and Shetland and those of Scotland as a whole, the benefits of the Committee's report. The Committee has many pressing needs to consider in addition to this one, so we were very grateful in the islands that its members took time to visit the isles to take evidence and to prepare what has been a valuable contribution to the debate.

That debate has raged since October 1994, when the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), announced that the tariff rebate subsidy on freight to the Northern Isles would be abolished with effect from 1 May 1995. In the meantime, there was to be a negotiated level of subsidy to P and O Scottish Ferries for its passenger and car services.

That decision caused outrage among my constituents. The Secretary of State for Scotland got a taste—or perhaps an earful—of that when he visited Orkney in September 1996. Soon after his announcement, there was controversy about the content of the KPMG consultants' report on which that decision was apparently based. I shall not go over all the ground and ask for the report to be published or ask what was in it and what was kept secret.

The aspect that caused most anxiety among my constituents was the fact that those who were involved in the delivery of shipping services apart from P and O Scottish Ferries—Streamline Shipping and Orcargo—were barely consulted by the KPMG consultants. I believe that in both cases the conversations lasted about half an hour and in one case there was a follow-up telephone conversation, which shows how little the consultants had understood in the original conversation.

There was much dissatisfaction regarding the consultants' report on which the Secretary of State's decision was based, so it would be valuable—although it may be a little late in the day—to have the full study that the Select Committee undertook. This time, proper consultation took place with the various shipping lines, with the local authorities, with the local enterprise companies, with the National Farmers Union and with local businesses, which was welcomed and appreciated. It should have been done before.

In 1993, consultants prepared a report for the Scottish Office, with specific relevance to the Western Isles, evaluating the impact of ferry subsidies. I understand that the study concluded that any variation of subsidy level would lead to fare increases and result in loss of employment in all the main economic sectors in the islands. Notwithstanding that report, the following year the Government went ahead, without evaluating the likely effect on the Orkney and Shetland economy.

As a consequence of pressure and representations, the Minister agreed to monitor the position in the aftermath of the removal of the tariff rebate subsidy. A report that reflects much of that monitoring and contains an analysis of what has been going on has been prepared by EKOS—a firm of consultants—and is almost ready for publication. Any advance information that the Minister can give the House today of its contents would be welcome.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun emphasised the importance of the subsidy in helping businesses. Partly as a result of the oil industry, my constituents have enjoyed unemployment rates below the Scottish average for several years. Many businesses have been built up, not least around the route between Kirkwall and Invergordon—a subject to which I shall return.

However, if one of the objects of the TRS system and of the fact that the Government and the House approved undertakings that admitted Streamline—

[Mr. James Wallace]

Orkney line and Shetland line—and Orcargo to the scheme was to promote competition and allow businesses to develop and benefit from the lower freight charges that resulted from subsidy, to a considerable extent it was a success. We are now in danger of losing some of the benefits that we have enjoyed in recent times.

Although existing companies may be able to monitor how they might be affected by the change in freight rates, we can never know how many potential firms have not invested there. One of the key factors in any business investment in the isles is transport and its costs, and one cannot tell how many people have been driven away by transport costs.

The Select Committee rightly said in its first recommendation

"that the sea transport needs of Orkney and Shetland differ significantly and that each island group requires specific sea transport services which meet their particular needs."

I hope that the Government will bear that in mind when considering the current passenger service.

There is obvious concern about increased costs. My information is that, during recent months, P and O has increased its published tariffs by 3 per cent., Streamline has done so by 6 per cent. and Orcargo has done so by 18 per cent. I emphasise that those are only the published tariffs.

The Government have said throughout that they are prepared to impose a ceiling on the amount by which freight rates increase. That would appear to be a ceiling based on published tariffs, whereas the last thing that most people who use the service ever pay is the published tariff. Such has been the competition that, in most cases, there are discounts, and any potential bidder must find out the discounted rates. However, it would be reassuring if the Government were to say today that, when they talk about imposing a ceiling on freight charge increases, they mean a ceiling on what the charges have been in practice—the discounted charges, not published rates.

Concern about the re-emergence of a monopoly flows from that point. In its evidence to the Select Committee, Shetland Islands council, in a conclusion, phrased it very well, when it said:

"The present level of freight tariffs on P&O services are the result of serious competitive pressure in recent years. The unanswered question is whether the creation of a monopolistic operator will be beneficial in the longer term when the memory of competition recedes."

Competition has managed to reduce prices. In its evidence to the Select Committee, the National Farmers Union for Scotland said:

"Previously, as a monopoly P&O had imposed high tariffs and had been unreceptive to customer requirements."

There is the important question of maintaining equality in the service, and the re-emergence of a monopoly gives rise to concern. The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) pointed to what might be described as signs of predatory pricing. He referred to the P and O service between Kirkwall and Invergordon, but in fact he meant between Stromness and Scrabster, outward bound. That is an important point, because he almost undermined his argument. The hon. Gentleman cited the much lower prices for cattle now than in 1992.

When I responded to the passenger franchise specification in the new year, I suggested to the Minister that there may be an argument for introducing floor prices to combat predatory pricing. While the Minister was sympathetic to my argument, he responded:

"However after some consideration we decided that this is not a practical option. Pricing floors are difficult to monitor and enforce given the many ways of discounting prices and would no doubt be perceived by the ferry operator as an unacceptable restriction on commercial discretion".

Nevertheless, I hope that the Minister will be alive to the possibility of predatory pricing and will explain how he intends to monitor it. I understand that the Office of Fair Trading is examining the matter, and perhaps the Minister could tell us the stage that the investigation has reached. One of the problems is the definition of "predatory pricing". However, if a problem is perceived in that area—evidence to the Select Committee highlighted such concerns—we should know how the Government intend to address it.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I welcome the involvement of the Office of Fair Trading in the matter. We understand that, if there were evidence of predatory pricing, it would take strong action.

Mr. Wallace: I am somewhat reassured by the Minister's response, but the problem will be resolved only by experience over time.

The loss of routes is also important, particularly the loss of the Kirkwall-Invergordon route. In paragraph 73 of its recommendations, the Select Committee said that it should

"be designated a lifeline freight and livestock route."

The operation of that route could not be described as opportunistic or as cherry-picking, but that is how the Government refer to it in their response to the Select Committee report when they accuse some operators of opportunism. The route did not exist previously and was built up by Orcargo. It is much favoured by Orkney farmers, and particularly by the auction mart as cattle may be transported from Orkney and down the A9. The scheduled service fits in well with the auction mart's arrangements. There is concern about the route's future unless it receives some recognition as a lifeline livestock route.

I have argued previously that the route should be franchised in its own right. I regret that that argument has not prevailed to date, but it is worth maintaining. The Minister may say that the TRS has been gone for almost two years, and that the Government responded to some extent by restoring the subsidy on livestock and by increasing it slightly—it went from 47.5 per cent. to 30 per cent. and then back to 50 per cent. The Government may say, "Orcargo is still there, and you have been proved wrong." However, we could turn that argument on its head, as the Government's case is based on access capacity, which is the same two years later. I know that Orcargo is finding things difficult. Preserving the route does not necessarily mean preserving a particular company. That route has proved to be of considerable importance, and I hope that it can be franchised and saved.

The mixture of passengers and livestock has been addressed. In a recent letter to me, the Minister said that he had not heard about that issue before. However,

I was present at a meeting in September 1995 when the convener of Orkney Islands council told the Secretary of State about his concerns. At present, there is a smaller mix of livestock and passengers on the P and O sailings between Scrabster and Stromness, because most of the livestock travels on the Invergordon route. There is concern that a switch back to livestock on that route would impact on tourism.

Shetland is worried about the movement of large volumes of livestock at peak times. I am grateful that the Government have acknowledged that point, and confirmed that any specification would require the operators to ensure that there was sufficient capacity to move livestock at peak times.

One of the continuing concerns in Shetland is the configuration of services. I share the Government's view, which was expressed in the passenger franchise specification and in their response to the Select Committee, that two vessels are almost certainly needed to serve Shetland if we are to secure daily sailings. However, I am unhappy at the suggestion that only daily sailings five days a week will be required during the winter months. The salmon and fish processing industries would prefer to have daily sailings six days a week in order to ensure that produce gets to market in a good state.

I hope that the Minister will answer several important questions. Is there an element of cross-subsidy? He has told me that the lifeline freight service might be covered by the fact that the Government are supporting a lifeline passenger service. It has been admitted that there will inevitably be a bias to the existing operators in the tendering process. I endorse the call for a delay and a suspension of the tendering process to allow CalMac to participate. At what stage was European development funding made available to potential bidders? When were they told about it?

The exercise began when P and O announced that it could not provide new vessels. The Minister has told me that there must be new vessels by 2002 in order to meet the Stockholm agreement on shipping safety. What do the Government have in mind in that regard? Why is the question of new build not focused more clearly in the draft specification?

As the bidding process proceeds, will the Minister confirm whether he will involve the islands councils in the final decision making? Several aspects of the specification are not hard and fast: qualitative decisions must be made about a marketing plan, timetabling, cleanliness, customer satisfaction and consultation. With the best will in the world, I do not believe that civil servants or Ministers in the Scottish Office can make those qualitative decisions. Those issues intimately affect the life style and the ways of the islands.

Therefore, I ask that the Government involve the islands councils in evaluating the bids where qualitative issues are at stake. They should also be involved in the monitoring process. The Scottish Office will rely on those councils, the NFU and other operators to assess how well the franchisee is performing.

The services are vital to my constituency. We suffer the disadvantages of geography, but they can be mitigated. Business development depends on the availability of transport at affordable prices. We want to secure a safe, efficient and cost-effective system of transport for freight and livestock as well as for passengers and cars. We do not want to see the re-emergence of a monopoly. I do not believe that the Government have yet responded adequately to the Select Committee report, but we live in hope.

10.27 am

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I shall be brief, as I know that many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate. There is a feeling that the Government have not fully met the specific and important conclusions of the Scottish Affairs Committee, which were designed to be fair and to provide a long-term solution to the problems faced by the people of Orkney and Shetland. I have some specific questions for the Minister, which I hope that he will answer today.

Do the Government acknowledge that freight is an essential element of the lifeline service? If not, why not? We need an explanation. Is there under-utilisation of the existing P and O ferry fleet, with the consequence that public subsidy is being used to support excess capacity? The Secretary of State has declared that he is not able to deliver what people have asked for because it does not represent what he calls the "best value" for the taxpayer. Will he therefore confirm that the number of vessels operating the services will be reduced in order to prevent a mis-spending of public subsidy? I would like him to be more open about the Government's intentions so that the people may make a judgment about the fate that awaits them under Government policy.

The Committee expressed concern that the current interim subsidy arrangement appears to provide no incentive for the lifeline ferry operator to achieve potential operating efficiencies. That concern has not been addressed, and the Minister has a duty so to do.

The Committee highlighted the fact that the changes have given P and O Scottish Ferries an unfair competitive advantage. The Minister stated in evidence that the expected earnings from freight carrying were based on what he called "reasonable market rates", but the managing director of P and O stated in evidence that "net freight revenue"—that is, after the deduction of subsidy—was used in the P and O financial model submitted to the Scottish Office. It has been pointed out to me that the market rate should have been construed as the gross freight rate—that is, with the subsidy included—as that was the actual revenue earned by the operators before the changes.

The impact of that anomaly was compounded by the fact that P and O Scottish Ferries gave a guarantee as part of the interim arrangement with the Scottish Office that customers would pay the same net rate. That effectively undercut market rates by the amount of subsidy previously applied. Can the Minister justify P and O's position, or is the accusation of unfair competitive advantage true? I look forward to his detailed response.

Does the franchise specification favour older, depreciated ships, and hence act against newer vessels—

Mr. Robert Hughes: And crews' wages.

Mr. Welsh: —and crews' wages, as my hon. Friend says—as newer vessels would be less well placed to submit a lower bid?

[Mr. Welsh]

I have been brief and specific. There is a clearly expressed concern on Orkney and Shetland about the possibility of the creation of a monopoly service. The view from Edinburgh may be different, but the issue affects everyone on the islands and their entire economic and social life. I ask the Government to address the questions specifically and to give the assurances being sought on a matter that is crucial to the future of every man, woman and child on Orkney and Shetland.

10.31 am

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I know that there are still hon. Members who served on the Select Committee who want to speak in the debate, so I shall restrict myself to one point, which concerns the recommendation in paragraph 55 that Caledonian MacBrayne be allowed to tender for the Northern Isles service.

In the Government's response on page 6, they say that one of the reasons why they rejected that recommendation was:

"CalMac's core business activities are the operation of ferry services in the Western Isles and the Government believe it would be detrimental to the efficiency of operations on the West Coast of Scotland to extend CalMac's responsibilities to the Northern Isles."

That is not the view of the people in the Western Isles or of the communities that are served by the ferries. We believe that CalMac should be allowed to tender for the Northern Isles routes. We believe that that would consolidate and enhance the services and the provision of CalMac. I hope that the Minister will not use that rationalisation in his reply to the debate.

10.32 am

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I shall be brief, as several of my hon. Friends have posed serious questions to the Minister and we want to give him the utmost opportunity to respond.

I, like my hon. Friends, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) not just on his contribution to the debate and on securing it, but on the excellent way in which he has chaired the Scottish Affairs Committee. Before becoming a Member of Parliament, I watched the Committee's work closely, and I am well aware of the depth of knowledge and expertise that is applied to many significant issues that affect Scotland.

Through detailed examination of the issues raised in the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun has done us a great service by bringing down to more simple terms an extremely complex but interesting subject that is of considerable import to the people of the Northern Isles.

The important point that my hon. Friend made relates to the reasoning behind the Government's decisions involving ferry services to the Northern Isles. I reiterate his concern about the value judgments that are being applied by the Government in their responses to the Select Committee report. He drew attention to a considerable misgiving that has been articulated to me by people from the Northern Isles, and a point that has been raised by a number of hon. Members today: the close relationship that seems to exist between the Scottish Office and P and O Scottish Ferries.

The fact that people from the Northern Isles raise the matter is an important aspect to be taken into account. The people of the Northern Isles require reassurances that their best interests are at the front of Government policy, not some other arrangement that the Government have yet to explain to us.

The decision, taken by the former Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), to change the basis of tariff subsidy to the Northern Isles is still questioned. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) drew attention to the consultants' report, over which there is a great question mark. Many of us want more detailed information about the way in which the right hon. Gentleman came to his conclusions on the future of tariff subsidy to the Northern Isles.

I share some common feeling with my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun about whether the decisions in relation to P and O and the services that it provides to the Northern Isles have some dogmatic origin, rather than being directed to the best interests of the public in the Northern Isles.

My hon. Friend made a detailed point about the decline in the financial performance of P and O over 1991–92. The same point was made by the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) when he drew attention to the depreciation of second-hand ferries and where they appear in the accounts of P and O.

Is it not ironic that I, on the Opposition Benches, am challenging the Government about their creation of an artificial monopoly for P and O, and advocating the free market and competition? Adam Smith must be turning in his grave at the Government's decisions that have led to this cosy relationship with P and O—and to £7.6 million being given to the company. It has been allowed to operate with an artificial monopoly.

In his closing remarks, my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun made a plea for a sensible examination of the situation in the run-up to the general election. That is a reasoned request, and I do not wish to make any partisan point. A general election is looming. There are significant issues to be addressed. The Minister is a sensible man and takes his responsibilities seriously. I urge him to delay decisions on the tendering process to allow the Government elected in the next few weeks—whatever the colour of that Government—to re-examine the issues.

The points made in the Select Committee report about the involvement of Caledonian MacBrayne are very serious. I find it bizarre, to say the least, that a publicly owned company has been excluded from the tendering process for Northern Isles ferries. I find it questionable that we discovered the European regional development fund elements only after 15 of the companies that had entered the tendering process had withdrawn.

The cynicism of the people of the Northern Isles and the rest of Scotland must be addressed. The best way to do that would be to take the issue out of the fevered run-up to the general election and allow a more reasoned re-evaluation. That would provide an opportunity to re-evaluate the Kirkwall-Invergordon ferry as well. We must seek a resolution to the difficulties that have arisen in the case of the Northern Isles that takes into account the most economically efficient, as well as the most socially reasonable, option.

If the general election results in a change of Government, a Labour Government will seek to reopen the tendering process to allow CalMac to tender, and will seek to re-evaluate the issue of ferry services to the Northern Isles. We will try to find a solution that suits the Exchequer, and takes into account the concerns of people in the Northern Isles.

Let me make a more general point. I am worried about the apparent vendetta against CalMac. My hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), who is probably more able than anyone else to analyse CalMac's performance because it provides a vital lifeline to the Western Isles, has referred to the importance attached by people there to CalMac's being given an opportunity to secure the contract for the Northern Isles. We have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) about CalMac's expertise in operating custom-built ferries, and we know of its commitment to securing continuity of service to remote Scottish communities. It is bizarre that it should have been excluded from the tendering process.

I regret having to say this, but, when we look at what happened in relation to the Northern Ireland contract, we must ask what on earth was going on when CalMac was excluded. What makes the situation even worse is the fact that, having been excluded, CalMac was forced to sell one of its vessels at a knockdown price to Sea Containers, which won the contract. That alone is cause for re-evaluation of the issues.

In view of what KPMG has said about the Northern Isles service, there may well be a case for a monopoly to continue. I leave the judgment open, but, if there is such a case, is there not a pressing public responsibility to ensure that a public sector operator operates with the taxpayer's best interests in mind, rather than the profitability of an individual company? Reading the Government's responses to the issues that have been raised, I was surprised to note that P and O's financial performance figured so strongly. I wish that, just occasionally, the Government would take into account the requirement to ensure that CalMac, a well respected ferry operator, is given a level playing field in which to compete.

The issues involved are extremely serious. We are talking not just about the future viability of services to the Northern Isles, but about the economic viability of the Northern Isles. I listened carefully to the reasoned arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun and, in particular, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland who, in his final remarks, made a number of important points about the role of the islands councils, their inclusion in the assessment of the qualitative aspects of tenders and the role that they should play in monitoring the operation of the service. The councillors are the elected representatives of the people of Orkney and Shetland, and their concerns should be taken into account.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) asked some pertinent and serious questions, which I hope the Government will answer. For instance, he questioned the suitability of the secondhand vessels that P and O has used, and spoke of the impact that that has had on P and O's accounts in terms of the depreciation of those vessels. He asked for guarantees that standby vessels would be available: such provision is important in remote communities. He also asked what the Government would do to deal with under-utilisation.

One of the hon. Gentleman's most important questions about the tendering process was, "Why was the issue of the European regional development fund raised so late in the day?" He also raised an issue that has caused me considerable anxiety since it was brought to my attention yesterday—access to ro-ro facilities for P and O at Aberdeen harbour. I am also a bit concerned about the fact that the Government have sought to appoint P and O's chief executive to Aberdeen harbour board. We must be assured of transparency in all decisions relating to the Northern Isles.

I think that my comments have been very restrained. I have not, for example, drawn attention to the fact that, since 1991, the Conservative party has benefited to the tune of £100,000 a year from P and O, because I feel that that would have made the debate partisan. It is, however, crucial in the run-up to the general election for us to stand back from the issues, and to give the new Government—whatever their persuasion—an opportunity to take account of the concerns of the people of the Northern Isles about monopolies, the concerns raised by hon. Members about the tendering process and the concerns about ensuring continued economic viability for the remote communities of the Northern Isles.

10.45 am

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): This has been a very good debate, in which a number of important issues have been raised. I pay tribute to the Chairman and members of the Select Committee for their perseverance and application in inquiring into these complex matters.

We share the Committee's view that efficient and affordable sea transport services are vital to the movement of essential imports and economically important exports for the islands communities. As evidence of our commitment to support essential shipping services to the islands, we shall this year provide subsidies of £7.6 million for P and O Scottish Ferries for passenger services, £700,000 for P and O and Orcargo for livestock exports and £300,000 for bulk shipping operators. That is in addition to grant assistance for pier and harbour works at Scrabster, Stromness and elsewhere in Orkney and Shetland. The Government have paid Orkney and Shetland some £11 million in piers and harbours grant in the past five years.

Our policy is to allow the private sector, wherever appropriate, to deliver the necessary services, but I have been asked why CalMac is not being allowed to tender. CalMac is wholly owned by the Secretary of State, and the undertaking with the Secretary of State is to provide an approved lifeline ferry service on the west coast. There is no undertaking to provide services to the Northern Isles. We examined the matter carefully, and it was decided that, on balance, it would not be appropriate to allow CalMac to tender.

A number of factors influenced that decision. First, CalMac's core business is the provision of lifeline services on the west coast; secondly, we believe that the role of the public sector in the economy should be restricted and that, wherever possible, services should be provided by the private sector. Furthermore, the

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

Government wanted the tendering process to be seen as entirely fair. If CalMac had been allowed to tender on the back of Government funds, that would have been unfair to private sector competitors.

Mrs. Liddell: Why is public sector operation not considered advantageous? Private sector operators have considerable expertise in operating lifeline services in the Western Isles. Is there not an impeccable logic in transplanting that expertise from the Western to the Northern Isles? Are the Government not taking part in a narrow sectarian vendetta against CalMac?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Certainly not. CalMac has an extremely good record, but, if a public sector organisation subsidised by the state were allowed to compete against the private sector, private sector tenderers would be deterred from coming forward. That could be seen to make for unfair competition.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) asked whether the councils would be consulted. I give him an undertaking that that will certainly happen. The hon. Gentleman went further, however, and asked for the councils to be involved in the decision on the tender. While there have been extensive consultations on the specification, the final decision on the award must be for Ministers. After all, given that one of the bidders is Orkney islands council's own shipping company, involving the council in that decision would be hard to justify, and would lead to a conflict of interest.

Mr. Wallace: I agree with that, but surely the Minister recognises that the franchise specification leaves a number of matters open. The bidders must come back with proposals of a qualitative nature. Is the Minister saying that, once the bids are in, there will be further consultation with the islands councils on aspects of the final bids submitted, which will be of a qualitative nature?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am only too happy that there should be consultation on the terms of the specification, but the decision has to be for Ministers of the Government of the day.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) asked whether passenger vessels will carry freight in future. I can assure him that the service specification requires the operator to provide capacity for the carriage of passengers, cars, commercial vehicles, freight and livestock.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the European regional development fund. It has always been possible since the beginning of the tendering process for ERDF money to be made available for vessel replacement. That is not a new issue. The Government's response makes that clear.

Some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), asked whether I could delay the tendering process. It would not be sensible for the Scottish Office to halt it at this late stage. To do so would cause further uncertainty before lifeline services could be secured by block grant contract. There could also be a danger that tenderers would withdraw. We believe that final bids are due this week, so we do not believe that that would be in the public interest. Of course, if a general election is declared, the normal rules will apply to decisions made during the election period.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) asked a very relevant question about standby vessels. The final service specification requires tenderers to make proposals for continuing service during refits and repairs. These will be examined very carefully during the evaluation of bids, and we will be keen to ensure that proper arrangements are put in place in respect of breakdowns and relief vessels, and, indeed, cover for annual overhauls.

My hon. Friend also asked about new vessels. It is probable that the requirements of the Stockholm agreement on passenger ferry service safety survivability will make it inevitable that new vessels are introduced in 2002. New build options are being considered as part of the competitive tendering process.

Mr. Gallie: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Very quickly, as I have a lot of points to answer.

Mr. Gallie: My right hon. and learned Friend emphasised the involvement of the private sector and the importance of competition—which I welcome—which was demonstrated by the 18 bids that came in. However, if factors have changed, it would not be unreasonable to give any of those bidders a further opportunity to be involved, particularly in relation to the comments on ERDF. Will he give further consideration to that point?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If my hon. Friend is asking for special pleading on behalf of any of those who have not made the shortlist, I cannot do that; he is asking that the whole process be started again. I cannot give that commitment at this stage, and one reason why I cannot is because I am totally opposed to cross-subsidy—a point echoed by the hon. Member for Monklands, East. In determining the subsidy to be paid to P and O Scottish Ferries under the interim arrangements, we have attempted, as far as possible, to ensure that cross-subsidy will not occur.

In negotiating the subsidy, explicit account was taken of P and O's expected earnings from freight carryings on the basis of reasonable market rates. The Scottish Office's objective was to achieve a transparent contract designed to provide the minimum subsidy in the interim period to secure P and O's continued operation of the passenger ferry service. By minimising subsidy in that way, we have sought to avoid any cross subsidisation of freight services. For the longer term, I believe that competitive tendering of the block grant contract will be a strong safeguard against cross-subsidy, to which we are wholeheartedly opposed.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun raised the issue of bulk freight subsidy support. The key point is that we have restored the rate of bulk freight support, but recognise that there are flaws in the system and in the way in which the scheme operates. That is why we have sought views from all interested parties on various options to amend the scheme so that it meets the needs of bulk product producers and users in the islands as efficiently as possible. The deadline for responses is 19 April.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland asked about the ceiling on published tariffs. We will set a ceiling in relation to current market rates. He also asked about EKOS. One of the commitments that we gave the Select Committee was to continue to monitor freight prices and the market generally. To fulfil that, with Highlands and Islands Enterprise and with Orkney Enterprise we commissioned EKOS to undertake a study to evaluate the trends in freight process and to assess the impact of transport costs to the Orkney economy. That work is under way, and EKOS is due to report shortly.

Many of the Select Committee's recommendations have been acted upon. Its report carried great influence with the Government. We have decided, first, to consult Orkney and Shetland council and other passenger interests on the service specification; secondly, to regulate maximum freight tariffs; thirdly, to provide sufficient capacity for the carriage of livestock; fourthly, to increase the rate of tariff rebate subsidy for the carriage of livestock, from 33 per cent. to 50 per cent.; fifthly, immediately to reinstate TRS for the carriage of Northern Isles bulk freight; sixthly, to consult towards identifying more suitable long-term subsidy arrangements to support bulk freight; and, seventhly, to commission, with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the study with EKOS.

We have not been able to accept all the recommendations.I was asked, for example, about the Kirkwall-Invergordon route. I accept that Orcadians perceive there to be distinct benefits associated with that route for the carriage of freight and livestock, but subsidising that route would perpetuate the problems of excess capacity in the freight market. It would encourage the continuation of excessive price competition in the freight market, threaten the commercial viability of the passenger freight operator and make it much more difficult to conclude the new block grant tendering process. We have therefore concluded that it would not be appropriate to subsidise the route at the expense of the taxpayer and to the detriment of the competitive tendering process for the passenger ferry contract.

Considerable concern was expressed that a weakening of competition in the freight market could lead to the emergence of a monopoly. There is no evidence at present—two years after the withdrawal of TRS—that competition for general freight has weakened. We intend to provide the contract with a regulation on maximum freight tariffs. We believe that that would be a significant safeguard against the abuse of monopoly power.

I recognise the desire of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland to ensure that there is adequate consultation. We will certainly ensure that that happens. We regard that as extremely important.

I should make it clear that the Government took the view in 1995 that continuing competition in the freight market, as well as customer resistance to price rises, would act as effective restraints on any significant increase in freight tariffs. We have promised to review the position on freight subsidies if evidence emerges to show that, over a period, prices charged in the freight market as a whole have risen substantially. That is why we commissioned the report.

I should also make it clear that our overriding objective remains to secure the long-term commercial viability of lifeline ferry services to Orkney and Shetland, which are central to the continuing social and economic development of the islands. Final tenders from the ferry operators bidding for the ferry services contract have been invited by 14 March. It is intended to reach agreement in principle on the contract terms with the preferred operator towards the end of April. Normal procedures and rules governing election periods will be followed.

Mr. McKelvey: Will the Minister give an answer to the problem that could arise from the appointment of the P and O Ferries managing director to the Aberdeen harbour board for three years, as many people would imagine that that implies that the tender has already been won?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am very sympathetic to the point made by the hon. Gentleman and by my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, that whoever wins the tender—I have no idea who it will be—should have the necessary access. It is for the Scottish Office Minister at the time to use his or her good offices to ensure that that is implemented. I wish to ensure that the services are carried out effectively in that connection.

I think that I have answered most of the points raised by hon. Members. The new vessels issue is very important. I have made it clear that the Stockholm agreement requires the new vessels to be on the route by early next century. We are working on an agreement to give operators sufficient reassurance to allow them to invest in new build. The quality objectives laid down in the service specification were tightened after consultation with islands representatives.

We shall continue to monitor the effect of the present subsidy arrangements, in consultation with representatives of the islands' interests, to ensure that essential shipping services continue to be provided to the islands at affordable cost.

I thank hon. Members, and I would like to say how much I enjoyed being a member of the Select Committee that visited Shetland during the Falklands war when we were considering transport.

Dairy Industry

[Relevant documents: First report from the Agriculture Committee of Session 1995–96, on the UK dairy industry and the CAP dairy regime (HC 40), and the Government's response thereto (HC 708 of Session 1995–96).]

11 am

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston–super–Mare): It has been the practice of the Select Committee on Agriculture, since I had the honour to become its Chairman in 1987, from time to time to examine major sectors of the agriculture industry. It had been clear for some years that we should undertake an inquiry into the dairy industry, but we felt it right to await the ending of the Milk Marketing Board's statutory monopoly before proceeding.

The most well-known, perhaps infamous, aspect of the common agricultural policy dairy regime is the milk quota system. Quotas were an afterthought that were added to the regime after its other mechanisms had encouraged the over-production of milk and dairy products, and resulted in over-expenditure on the CAP budget. Milk quotas were a crude means of capping production, and to that extent they have worked well. However, it is a fact that the United Kingdom has never been allocated enough milk quota to be self-sufficient in dairy produce, because quotas were implemented in 1984 on the basis of historic production levels.

The United Kingdom dairy industry as a whole and with one voice believes that it is being disadvantaged because of its quota allocation, and there can be no doubt about that. Many of the witnesses who came before us sought some relaxation in the quota system to permit increased production. We explored a number of ways in which to achieve that. The simplest of the proposals was the suggestion that the UK should press for a larger quota in the Agriculture Council. In their reply to our report, the Government said that they would continue to register with the Commission the dissatisfaction felt in the UK about this matter, and that they would oppose any moves to cut the national quota.

We also explored suggestions that milk quota could be traded across national boundaries—cross-border trading—or that over-production in one country could be balanced against under-production in another—cross-border balancing. We concluded that there was little prospect of cross-border trading, given the different ways in which quota is administered in different member states. Should quotas remain after 2000, we believe that systems of administration should be harmonised to facilitate trade.

The Government agreed with the first part of our argument, and restated that their ultimate objective was the complete abolition of the quota system. We propose that the Government suggest to the Agriculture Council that a cross-border balancing system should be introduced. Although they agreed to continue to argue for increased flexibility in the quota system, the Government did not believe that such a proposal would be palatable to other member states, given that most of them had, in recent years, achieved or exceeded their quota allocations, leaving little scope for balancing.

A further means by which the quota system could be relaxed is the introduction of a two-tier system. Milk produced under the first 'A' tier would be sold on the European Union market in the usual way. Secondary 'B' quota milk would be restricted to export markets, and would be subject to the prices prevailing on world markets. We were sceptical about the proposal for two reasons. First, it would be an additional administrative complication; and secondly, it would further entrench quotas into the structure of the EU dairy industry while increasing opportunities for fraud.

We viewed all those measures as no more than a short-term means by which the flexibility of the current dairy regime could be increased. For the longer term, we were convinced that radical reform of the dairy industry was inevitable and desirable. There is no doubt that the task of reform will be hindered by the fact that in several member states, including the United Kingdom, milk quota has achieved a significant monetary value.

Some have argued that reforms to the CAP that result in the abolition of quota should also compensate farmers for the loss of that asset. The Committee did not support that view, not least because when quotas were originally imposed they had no value. Indeed, in member states such as France, where quotas cannot be traded and transferred, they remain without value other than providing the holder with the right to produce milk.

We did, none the less, recommend that farmers should be given as much warning as possible of any changes that would result in the removal of quotas, or in a dramatic reduction in milk prices, and a consequent drop in the price of quota. For that reason, the removal overnight of import tariffs, export subsidies and quotas would, in the Committee's view, be highly problematical. In their reply to our report, the Government endorsed our analysis, and stated that that would not be a viable option. They favoured instead progressive cuts in support prices leading to the complete removal of price support, thus removing the need for any production controls. Even so, it was the Minister's view that, after 2000, when the current quota regulations expire, quotas will remain.

Our report was published in July 1996. At that time, we were told that the Commission intended to open debate on the possibilities for reforming the dairy regime this year, with concrete proposals unlikely to be introduced until spring 1998. The Committee was surprised to find that there was little sense of urgency on this matter among officials of the other member states that we visited, or in the Commission.

It is clearly vital that the Government push the Commission to bring forward its proposals as soon as possible. There are rumours that announcements will be made in the next few weeks, but that is not a minute too soon. By the time such proposals are agreed and implemented, farmers will have little time to adjust their businesses to the new circumstances that they will face.

In reality, nothing is likely to happen before 2000, so we suggested that, over a five-year period from 2000 onwards, support prices should be cut to world levels, import tariffs should be progressively reduced to zero, and milk quotas should be abolished at the end of the transition period in 2005. We also recommended that, to compensate for lower prices and not for the loss of the value of quota, farmers should be paid time-limited transitional payments via a dairy cow premium, which could be linked to requirements for environment and welfare-friendly farming techniques. On the whole, the Government endorsed our suggested approach, but it would be foolish to suggest that achieving those goals will be easy.

During our inquiry, we visited France, Italy and Ireland. The structure of the dairy industry in those countries is different from that of our industry. In France, we found strong support for the retention of milk quotas among farmers, Government officials and the Minister. Lower support prices and the removal of quotas were not appealing to their small farmers. Some dairy producers in France and Italy are very small indeed by UK standards. Our average herd size is 68 cows and rising, and almost half the national dairy herd is in herds of more than 100 cows.

In Italy, we visited a farmer who makes his living from 12 cows. He has stall spaces for 12 cows, has always had 12 cows and, as far as he is concerned, always will have 12 cows. United Kingdom dairy farmers may deride such a small enterprise, but there were aspects of that farmer's business and those of his neighbours from which our dairy industry could learn a great deal. He and his colleagues were part of a co-operative producing expensive Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. They saw themselves not as milk producers but as cheese producers. For them, that meant being paid not when the milk went to the dairy, but when the cheese was marketed many months of maturation later.

The unified approach to milk production, cheese making and marketing in Italy, France and Ireland was in marked contrast to the conflicts that we have encountered in the UK dairy industry.

In 1994, the Committee held a very short hearing into the deregulation of the milk industry and the delays in negotiations. At that time, we suggested that Milk Marque had been guilty of "brinkmanship" in its negotiations. Once the revised scheme of deregulation had been approved by Ministers, the Dairy Industry Federation made its first priority, on the establishment of the deregulated market on 1 November 1994, a formal complaint to the Director General of Fair Trading. The DIF had maintained that Milk Marque was abusing its powerful position in the marketplace, accounting as it did for 65 per cent. of the market for raw milk in England and Wales, to push prices to artificially high levels.

We investigated the matter and found no firm basis for the DIF's claims. Through negotiations with Milk Marque, Mr. Bridgeman, the Director General of Fair Trading, secured a number of assurances on issues of concern in Milk Marque's trading practices. In particular, Milk Marque introduced more transparency into its selling process—a process that in any case results in lower prices to dairy farmers than many of the purchasing schemes operated by the dairy companies themselves. Indeed, given the prices being offered today, Milk Marque's price is at the bottom of the table.

In line with the Committee's recommendation, Mr. Bridgeman, having asked for our views, declined the DIF's request for Milk Marque to be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. We hope that, in line with another of our recommendations, the industry will be left in peace to adapt itself to its new circumstances. Indeed, it seems ironic that at least one industry commentator, Barry Wilson, suggested in February's edition of *British Dairying* that dairy companies have become so good at manipulating Milk Marque's selling system that milk producers might have a case to refer the dairy companies to the OFT—the other way around.

It became clear to us during our inquiry that the primary motivation of the DIF's main objection related not to Milk Marque's trading practices but to its very existence. Those who are acquainted with the history of the UK dairy industry will know that the milk marketing boards and the milk marketing schemes were set up in the first place to help to redress the balance between small milk producers on the one hand and increasingly large dairy companies on the other. It was the Committee's view that the need for farmers to have a strong stake in the marketing of their milk continues.

It is reasonable to say that we had some understanding with Mr. Bridgeman of the OFT that, when the matter was resolved, he would allow Milk Marque—and the Dairy Industry Federation—to get on with its business. I however have a copy of a letter addressed to Andrew Dare, the director of Milk Marque, from the OFT on 22 January, which is headed: "Monitoring Milk Marque's Assurances". Part of the letter reads:

"We shall be seeking information from a range of participants in the market but will obviously look to Milk Marque itself as a key source. Apart from the obvious data on prices and volumes etc we will be asking you to provide information which will cover:

1. How the starting prices were reached for the various contracts.

2. How individual bids were dealt with.

3. The criteria used for the allocation of supplies.

4. How any further contract prices and supply allocations were arrived at during subsequent bidding rounds.

We will be looking for information down to individual customer level and would ask you to ensure that all information relating to the current selling process is retained by Milk Marque."

Milk Marque does not feel that that is entirely leaving the matter alone. I endorse the comment that evidence is beginning to emerge that the dairy industry is learning to manipulate the Milk Marque selling system. I fully recognise, as does everyone else, that the recent drop of 2p a litre is not entirely due to the change in currency—although it is largely. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to bear very closely in mind that it is not difficult for a handful of large companies, once they understand the system, to mutter to each other. I am not casting any direct aspersions, but I ask both him and the OFT to ensure that both sides of the industry, which have been at war for far too long, are not seen to be blameless. If he is going to look so closely at Milk Marque, he should look just as closely at some of the big purchasing dairies.

During the Committee's inquiry, the DIF claimed that the UK's dairy producers were among the most efficient in Europe yet the UK as a whole imports high value; added products such as speciality cheeses, fromage frais and yoghurt, and exports low value-added products such as butter and skimmed milk. We asked why UK dairy manufacturers, for the most part, were not able to match the performance of their continental competitors, despite the fact that prior to deregulation, UK farmers received some of the lowest prices in Europe for their milk.

Our report shared the views of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and independent industry analysts that some restructuring of the processing industry was inevitable and that the root of the problem lay in the historic inefficiencies of the UK processing industry, which had been fostered by the milk marketing scheme, and the institutionalised and anachronistic system of end-use pricing. That system, in which milk prices were set by a formula depending on the intended use, protected inefficient processors and stifled innovation.

[Sir Jerry Wiggin]

The effect of deregulation was to allow manufacturers to compete for milk according to their own needs and costs of production, with the result that inappropriate, inefficient or simply surplus processing capacity is being lost while more innovative processes are thriving, as we saw in my constituency when we visited Yeo Valley Dairies. It is imperative that, if the UK is to make the best use of any opportunities to increase production when quota restrictions are removed, our dairy industry continues to develop in a manner compatible with modern markets and consumer preferences.

We were nearing the end of our inquiry when the fateful statements on bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfelt-Jakob disease were made on 20 March. The Committee's members were determined to confine ourselves in the report on the dairy industry to covering issues directly affecting the dairy industry only. We considered other aspects of the BSE affair in other inquiries.

We noted that the selective or accelerated slaughter scheme, which the Government decided initially not to implement but then agreed to undertake, and which the National Farmers Union at first opposed and then supported, is not being undertaken for reasons of public health. We argued that compensation for cattle slaughtered under the scheme should therefore be closer to the replacement value of stock than to the market value, and that farmers who will lose a significant proportion of their herd should receive additional compensation. The legislation implementing the selective cull, which came into force on 24 January, sets compensation rates at 90 per cent. of the replacement value of cows or the market value, whichever is higher. In addition, farmers who lose more than 10 per cent. of their herds will receive additional payments. I certainly think that that is a fair balance.

Coming from the west country, I need hardly add that we looked at the contentious issue of bovine tuberculosis, which is accepted by many in farming and veterinary circles as being spread by the burgeoning badger population, especially in the south west and the midlands. In our report, we recommended that my hon. Friend the Minister should have farmers at the forefront of his mind when it came to any decision on future badger control strategies, and that, in addition, compensation for TB reactors should be raised to 100 per cent. of the animals' market value. As the House knows, the Government have established an independent scientific review to look into that matter.

This is definitely the last time that I shall present an Agriculture Committee report to the House. Perhaps I might take the opportunity of thanking all hon. Members on both sides of the House who have served on my Committee since 1987, when I was first elected as its Chairman. I hope that they have found the experience rewarding and feel that we have contributed in our small way to exercising the power of the House in monitoring the business of the Government. I should also like to thank the Clerks, their assistants, secretaries and advisers who have worked so hard to produce our end product, which is inevitably always in the form of a report. I am happy to say that I think that, with the wisdom of hindsight, we have been more often right than wrong—although clearly that is a matter for others to judge.

In the summer of 1969, I made my maiden speech on agriculture, and I am glad that I am addressing the same subject this morning. It remains our most important industry, and its prosperity is the strength of our countryside and our nation.

11.18 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I did not expect to be called so soon in the debate. On behalf of my colleagues, may I thank the hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) for not only the report but his leadership of the Committee over a number of very difficult years for the industry, and the way in which his particular advocacy of the industry has informed debates in the House? I found the report so helpful that I shall confine my remarks to the points made in it. They will therefore follow the report's format.

In paragraph 37, the Select Committee says very firmly:

"we would expect Ministers to take a very robust stand before and during negotiations."

Many hon. Members, I think on both sides of the House, believe that, because of the distractions of internal problems with which the industry and therefore the Ministry have been faced in recent years, far too little attention has been given to the United Kingdom's position in those crucial negotiations over the future of this sector of agriculture. I endorse the Select Committee's view that a much more robust attitude will be necessary in the new Parliament. When and if there is a new Government, a different attitude will no doubt be taken, but the importance of the negotiations cannot be underestimated.

There will have to be a triple-track approach to the issues with which the Select Committee has been concerned. First, the hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare referred to the subject of the national quota. Clearly, it would be totally unsatisfactory if other countries bid for more quota in the coming years and Britain did not make its claim as well. It may be that the total pool of quota is not going to change, but it would be devastating to British agriculture and to the dairy sector in particular if the same pool were sliced up, if a pool can be sliced up, in a way that is unfair to British producers. That is one of the major concerns of the farmers unions throughout Britain. If other countries are going to bid, we must be in there too—that is track number one.

Secondly, if there is to be some transition towards a new quota regime—a much lighter regime, perhaps—after 31 March 2000, it follows that, during that transition, there will be an urgent need to harmonise the existing different regimes in different member states. Ours is perhaps the exception that proves the rule. Ours is exceptional in terms of the speculative value that is attached to quota here, which has had a devastating effect on new entrants in particular, but has also damaged those who are seeking to develop in this sector.

Other countries have managed to avoid that speculative element. Members will recall, because our postbags were full of it, that, just two years ago, we were told that football clubs, pop stars and redundant Cabinet Ministers were all investing in quota because it seemed to be the best product for a quick return. We know that they did not, but that is not the point. The very fact that there was speculation about speculation caused a speculative price. Unless we can get away from that position, it could return.

It would be devastating if we were to find that we were the ones that were out of step in a transitional period that could otherwise benefit other competitive countries.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): One of the reasons why those companies were not able to speculate was that the quota remained attached to the land. The difficulty that the hon. Gentleman mentions is that, if quota were detached from the land, that speculation could take place.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. There is a consensus that detaching quota from the land would be a backward step. The Select Committee made that point and the Government in their response made it too. No one is now suggesting that, but there must be some way in which the management of quota is more effectively undertaken in the public interest, not just in the industry's interest.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): What exactly is the hon. Gentleman's party's policy on the future of quota? Is he in favour of abolishing it, phasing it out or keeping it?

Mr. Tyler: There is absolutely no question of quota being abolished. It would not be possible for Big Ben to strike midnight on 31 March 2000 and the quota to go completely. No one in Europe wants it to go like that, but, clearly, there will have to be a new regime. My point is that Britain must be in those negotiations to ensure that the transition is not to the disadvantage of our industry and to the advantage only of our competitors.

Thirdly, the Select Committee considered seriously and very well the issues of cross-border quota trading and cross-border balancing. That is the third track that we should be pursuing because, if there is to be a different regime after 2000, it will have to be on a much wider basis than the present national basis. There is room there for some horse trading to ensure that other countries recognise the value of that. If we run all three tracks at once, there is a chance of making progress. That is the view of many in the industry not just in Britain, but in some of the other member states, which share our view.

Here is an example. In the past, the British veto was perhaps necessary to preserve the position of British agriculture in common agricultural policy reform, but with the enlargement of the European Union, there may be more allies there and in future the Greek or Portuguese veto may hold us back from reform. That could be an area where majority voting may be to the advantage of Britain and its farmers.

On two-tier quotas, I have carefully considered the report and I have heard a great deal elsewhere too. Recently, I spoke at the conference of the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers in Malvern. I heard some convincing arguments for reconsidering the issue of two tiers. It will not be easy—I do not think that anyone could deny that—but, after 2000, that may be the way in which we get some fluidity into the cross-Europe milk quota system. We should not discard it as readily as the Select Committee appeared to do and as the Minister did even more. I fear that farming unions are perhaps putting their heads in the sand in anticipating that it is a non-runner. It may be a runner for other EU states as well as ourselves.

On support prices and compensation, I notice that, in paragraph 66, the Select Committee says firmly:

"The NFU's position was in stark contrast to MAFF's."

I hope that we will find that those positions come together, because it is critical to the future prosperity of this sector.

I want to move from quota to other wider issues that the Select Committee wisely felt it had to consider, but in passing I must make the comment that I think that this is the first time that anyone in the House on an official basis or indeed anyone outside has placed such a neat summary on the record of what happened with the 1992 CAP reforms. In paragraph 79, the Select Committee said:

"To avoid the problems of 'over-compensation' which have occurred in the arable sector following the 1992 CAP reforms, the level of compensation payable should be automatically adjustable to take account of fluctuations in world dairy prices."

Hon. Members on both sides of the House must all accept now that the so-called Gummer reforms of 1992, which placed no cap or adjustment mechanism on the arable aid payments and which paid no attention to world cereal prices, were a disastrous mistake. They have drained away from the CAP budget huge sums of money, which both the taxpayer and the rest of the industry do not feel is justified.

On the way in which any compensation regime should be introduced, I take seriously the comment in paragraph 80 that any attempt to introduce some form of modulation that could result in distortion is dangerous. The Select Committee is absolutely right. I hope that today the Minister will tell us that, in approaching the issue of modulation in any future negotiations, it will be central to the British Government's position that modulation, if there is to be any, must be a matter for derogation, so that it can be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each member state. I suspect that it will come down the track sooner or later. It may not come in 2000, but sooner or later it will come, simply because of taxpayer resistance throughout the EU. If that is to happen, clearly subsidiarity must be the order of the day.

Before I leave the subject of the dairy sector and its marketing process, I have to say that the Chairman's remarks about the relationship between Milk Marque and the Dairy Industry Federation were apt, appropriate and extremely topical as a result of the cuts in pricing in the past few weeks. There is concern that the oligopoly among the dairy companies is just as likely to be a threat to competitive forces in the industry, and to the consumer's interest, as the position of Milk Marque, which after all does not have a complete monopoly—the situation is very competitive.

In the past few days, I have been disappointed that the Labour party—in a classic attempt to make post hoc propter hoc the basis of its policy—has started again to say that the creation of Milk Marque has destroyed the doorstep pinta. That is absolutely ludicrous, because we all know that the doorstep delivery of the pinta has gone for many social and economic reasons. I give the example of my own home. I am not there that often now, and my children are grown up. Our doorstep pinta eventually ceased when the milkman was no longer prepared to deliver a pint every other day, because it was not worth his while. Increasing numbers of women are going to work and realise that they do not want a pint sitting on the doorstep, going bad during the summer or demonstrating that the house is empty, and people inevitably have chosen other means.

[Mr. Tyler]

The doorstep pinta did not suddenly disappear because the House passed a law; it was part of a general social trend. It is quite absurd—it is essentially taking a dinosaur approach to social trends—for the Labour party to pretend that the pinta disappeared because we introduced a new form of milk marketing. That is ridiculous, and it shows how out of touch the Labour party is with reality.

Some extremely important issues were not given quite so much room in the report. However, we should give them some attention now, because they have loomed large in our affairs since the report's publication. I noticed the comment on the over-30-month scheme, in paragraph 150, which states:

"it would be unduly harsh to be over-critical of the delays associated with getting the scheme up and running".

Surely that is the understatement of the century. Being "over-critical" reflects the fact of life. Everyone in the dairy sector and in farming knows that the scheme was a shambles, and it was rightly categorised and castigated as such at the time.

Since then, at long last, the selective cull proposals have been presented to us, to the Commission and to other member states. In its report—which was published before the details of the proposals were known, although the rough parameters were—the Committee states:

"In our judgment, it lies at the boundaries of political acceptability."

The Chairman did not refer to that paragraph—which is also an understatement—in opening this debate.

In the coming weeks, if the cull level in some of our prime, closed and most productive herds reaches a point at which milk production is severely damaged for some time—because replacement will not be easy, particularly if sourcing must be from equally well accredited herds—we will have a problem. I hope that the Minister will address that issue—although it may lie in the territory beyond 2 May, and perhaps in someone else's field. Nevertheless, I hope that the Ministry still has a bit of soothsaying ability.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): A few moment ago the hon. Gentleman vigorously castigated the Labour party for playing politics. I wonder if I can tempt him to say something about the consequences for the dairy industry, abattoirs and others—particularly in the south-west, where concerns have recently been expressed—of the Labour party playing politics over meat hygiene?

Mr. Tyler: I do not think that I should be diverted on to that matter, except to say that farmers are fed up with living with the consequences of the shambles, the mismanagement and the culture of secrecy that has take over in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. That is the real complaint. The complaint is not about information coming to light—in many cases very properly so.

The Committee also dealt with the problem of the welfare of dairy cows. However, there is another problem which is very much connected to public concern and interest in genetic development, and about going down a one-way street in developing genetic improvements in dairy cows. The report contains a very interesting section on lameness in cows, which I discussed yesterday with the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

I notice that some hon. Members are indicating that I should not allow any more interventions to my speech and should bring it to a conclusion. Before I do so, I should say that the long delay in establishing the Krebs inquiry into the connection between tuberculosis and badgers has been a disaster for the industry, particularly in the south-west. Its chairman was appointed last summer, after a wait of many months. The other members were not appointed until last autumn, and the committee is only now starting. I can understand the Government trying to avoid embarrassment before polling day, but that delay was absurd.

The Ministry's credibility is at an all-time low at home and abroad, and it was not helped by last summer's counter-productive and ludicrous beef war, which delayed progress on eradicating BSE not only in the United Kingdom but across Europe and on introducing the certified herd scheme and effectively regulating meat processing in the single market. If we are able to persuade the Commission and other member states to accept our criteria and standards in certifying herds and controlling meat processing, those criteria should apply across the Union. I believe that that is critical. If there is a single market, it is absurd that our exports should be controlled in a manner different from that applying to German exports to this country, for example. The same rules should be applied.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: No, I will not give way; other hon. Members want to speak.

As a direct result of the way in which the Government played their cards last summer, we are now marginalised in some of the most important discussions and negotiations that will ever affect the agriculture industry, and particularly the dairy sector. I hope and pray that we will have a new start after May 1.

11.36 am

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): I shall try to make a few points very briefly, as this is such a short debate. I, too, compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) on his eight years as Chairman of the Agriculture Select Committee. I have had the privilege of being on it for two years, and have come to respect his great support for agriculture, knowledge of the industry and the way in which he has created a cohesive and happy Committee.

The only complaint that I would make of the Committee—it is a feature of all Select Committees—is that its very cohesion tends to produce reports containing conclusions that are designed to attract maximum support in the Committee. The reports are therefore less abrasive than they might be, which thereby enables Ministers always to respond by saying that they agree with the conclusions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare mentioned one of those conclusions, and said that, on a matter of fundamental importance, the Government agreed

"with the Committee's conclusion that the sudden removal of support prices and quotas in the dairy sector is not a viable option."

However, we did not come to that conclusion, although the Minister agreed with it. Before that, we said:

"the 'Big Bang' solution of drastic cuts . . . and the abolition of quotas overnight . . . would appear to be highly problematic".

"Problematic" was a carefully chosen word. If one goes back to our report, we said something that I think is more significant. We said:

"the 'Big Bang' solution should not be rejected. It could be that a rapid radical reform would be more advantageous to producers as well as consumers if accompanied by a well-engineered programme of compensation."

The matter must be examined within the context of a much wider-ranging discussion about what should happen in 2000. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) mentioned our earlier comments—which could have been interpreted as criticising the Government's position, and which the Government have sensibly chosen to ignore. The comments contain some criticism, although it is not a specific criticism of this Government. It is the expression of worry about a general lack of zeal, determination and robustness in ensuring that we have a proper solution by 2000 and that we tackle the problem soon.

According to paragraph 37 of the report:

"Mr. Hogg told us that MAFF's approach to the question of dairy regime reform would depend on the Commission coming forward with specific proposals."

We could wait a long time for that. It continues:

"Mr. Hogg stated that 'the sensible man . . . decides what is attainable and then negotiates for that, otherwise you end up with egg on face'. This view contrasts with the strong statements of policy by MAFF. Given the vigorous and critical nature of the extended debate that will undoubtedly take place . . . we would expect Ministers to take a very robust stand . . . during negotiations."

That robust approach had been reflected in Ministry documents that were extremely impressive. Page xxi of the report refers to

"a scathing critique of the dairy regime"

in which

"MAFF claimed that it was 'manifestly absurd to operate a support price system which encourages excessive production while at the same time imposing quotas to offset this'".

That is the background to the issue. There is widespread concern that we shall end up with half-baked proposals from the European Community, a serious entrenchment in defence of the present position and only mild changes in 2000, so that the present regime, perhaps with some minor changes, may well continue for years.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend accept that one reason why he is almost certainly right is that there is absolutely no desire on the part of other member states to make the necessary adjustments to ensure that the British dairy farmer who is efficient gets reasonable treatment? The problem has been plagued by a determination to ensure that the British dairy farmer does not get the fair deal that he deserves.

Sir Roger Moate: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. Ultimately, of course, there has to be agreement, unless, by some miracle, we can negotiate, or—to use the same phrase as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health—renegotiate ourselves out of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. We have to have agreement. Unless the British position is put robustly, it is unlikely that we shall secure the right deal for British agriculture.

There is no difference of view between us. The Government's position is clearly stated in their documentation, but will the British Government take a robust position in favour of significant reforms in 2000? I am worried about that. I have heard nothing from hon. Members on the Labour Front Bench to suggest that a Labour Government would take a more robust line. In fact, it is the reverse; they are determined that Britain should not be isolated in Europe or be a lone voice. We have to take a strong position, however, because the British consumer and the British dairy industry are seriously disadvantaged by the present regime.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Does my hon. Friend agree that, whatever new regime is introduced in the European Union, it should not repeat the experience of the imposition of quotas in 1984? They were introduced retrospectively and at great disadvantage to Britain. Does he further agree that our dairy industry needs time to introduce change so that it is not severely disadvantaged?

Sir Roger Moate: We have to move rapidly to a position where we are not restricted by present quotas, or prevented from producing as much milk as under the present regime. UK Ltd. is probably disadvantaged to the tune of £1 billion or £2 billion, and many individual dairy producers are seriously disadvantaged. Although there might be historical arguments for those quota levels, how long can we continue to base the system on historical factors that are no longer relevant?

Even if we had a rapid and radical solution, no one suggests that anything could be achieved overnight. However, our objectives and policies must be clear. Our objective must be to maintain a healthy dairy industry in Britain.

Finally let me point out one or two disadvantages. The table on page xxiii of the report sets out the disadvantages to Britain in direct expenditure on support to the dairy industry. It shows that the average support per cow in the Netherlands is £434. In Ireland, the figure is £193; in Denmark, it is £407; and in the United Kingdom, it is £81. That is pretty dreadful.

Most subsidies provide export support, and we cannot export because of quota restrictions. Many other subsidies provide price support, but that is uniform across the Community. The direct support discriminates against the British industry, and that is quite unacceptable. The biggest discrimination against the United Kingdom, as my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare made absolutely clear, is that we are required to produce much less than our needs and are therefore obliged to import dairy products. We cannot allow that discrimination to continue, so we must present a strong and robust case at the Council of Ministers and the general negotiations that are likely to take place.

It is also worrying that dairy farming is not included in negotiations at the intergovernmental conference so negotiations will have to take their own slow and separate course. We have threatened to veto the IGC negotiations unless we get satisfaction on quota hoppers in fishing. How much more sensible it would be if we refused to allow progress at the IGC unless there were serious reforms of the common agricultural policy.

[Sir Roger Moate]

For how much longer will we be told that there will be reform, while year after year we have to tolerate certain unacceptable features of the CAP such as the high cost to the consumer of £20 per week per family? We spend £34 billion a year on supporting agriculture in Europe. The British taxpayer still subsidises the production of bad wine in France and of tobacco in Greece. It is universally agreed that the system is unacceptable and we really must make a determined attack on it and press for the reform of the dairy regime in 2000 and the rapid phasing out of the present system thereafter.

11.46 am

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I shall speak only briefly, as the report refers to Northern Ireland.

Many of us are sorry that the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) is leaving the House. He has been a very robust Member and has always expressed his views clearly. Although I do not necessarily agree with everything he says, he puts his views firmly and I respect him for that. He will be a loss to the House and to his party.

The hon. Gentleman will be a loss, especially to the farming community, given the attitude of the Minister of Agriculture, who appears to negotiate on the basis of what might be attainable. The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare would have said, "This is what my country needs and, regardless of what happens, I am going to get it." If the Minister took that approach to Europe, we might end up with what the country needs rather than what we will graciously be given. I do not think that the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare would have been as soft in securing what the country needs.

One of my pet subjects is tuberculosis in badgers. In my opinion, the disease is a consequence of the British attitude to wild animals. Man is the supreme predator. As we got rid of all the other predators in Britain many years ago, we have a duty to manage the remaining wildlife and to maintain a balance. Unless we do so, some parts of the country will be overrun with badgers and foxes.

Folk will remember that some years ago there was a considerable trade in fox skins out of Northern Ireland. It faded because of all the hullabaloo about wearing furs. When it was over and done with, I tabled a parliamentary question on how many fox skins had been exported from Northern Ireland over five years. The average for each year was 23,000. If anyone had tried to tell me that 23,000 foxes a year could be killed in Northern Ireland—I suppose that some of the foxes probably came from the Irish Republic—I would have laughed them to scorn, but the figures are there. There are a lot more wild animals than most people think.

Mink have caused immense damage. We should have made a serious effort to wipe them out. All sorts of other animals also cause damage, such as magpies and raptors—an issue that will come back whether we like it or not. We had better start thinking straight about these matters rather than allowing ourselves to be ruled by emotion, as we have for far too many years. Some hard decisions will have to be made. Some of us will have to express and defend our attitudes more clearly against all those who look at little furry animals or nice little birds and shut their eyes to the consequences of the imbalances that have arisen among our wildlife.

That is a pet subject of mine that I shall not pursue too far, because I can see that you are becoming a little uneasy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have lots of badgers—I have some on my land. The foxes come round every year and stink them out, breed and then go away again and the poor old badger has to clean his house out. We shall return to TB in badgers when the scientific evidence is available. Whatever that evidence shows, my earlier remarks will still apply.

Northern Ireland is the only part of this country with a land boundary—with a nation that is a strong competitor for our milk and dairy products. The report refers to the fragmented nature of the Northern Ireland dairy processing industry. In another context, instead of lamenting that fragmentation, we would praise it as evidence of strong competition for the market, giving people choice.

We lament that fragmentation because the Republic has built up a strong, vertically integrated milk products industry. It has purchased far too much of Northern Ireland's processing capacity and is still buying far too much of our milk production. Too many decisions are being taken south of the border rather than in the United Kingdom. A dangerous situation for the Northern Ireland dairy industry in the long term has been created and is steadily expanding.

As well as noting and agreeing with the Committee's comments on the structure of the dairy industry, I hope that the Government note the concerns expressed by dairy farmers in Northern Ireland and my comments on the processing sector in Northern Ireland, the long-term dangers and the need for the Government to do something about it. If they do not, heaven only knows where we will end up. I fear that we shall end up entirely in the hands of processors outwith the United Kingdom. That should not be acceptable to the House or to the Government.

11.53 am

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): This has been one of the last inquiries conducted under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin). This morning we have heard probably his last speech in the House. The debate may feature the last speeches from some others of us, but that is for the electors to decide.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his chairmanship over the past 10 or 11 years. His professionalism and his dedication to agriculture have been admired by his colleagues throughout that time. He has been a firm and fair Chairman, running his Committee with authority and always with a sense of humour. He has shown great friendship to us all, regardless of party. I know that those sentiments will be shared by all members and former members of the Select Committee on Agriculture. We wish him well.

We have had quotas since 1984, and they are an established part of the dairy farmer's way of life. They were widely objected to at the outset, as I remember well from my constituency, but now they are widely accepted, as happens with most changes. The system was renewed in 1989 and 1992. It will expire in just over two years, unless it is extended again, which seems unlikely. Because of the uncertainty, farmers need to know what the situation will be after 2000.

It goes without saying that quotas are a valuable asset for the farmer fortunate enough to have them. The change in 1984 was traumatic for farmers. Cutting off quotas and

going for a completely free market after 2000 would be equally traumatic, resulting in a huge loss of asset value for dairy farmers through no fault of their own.

We cannot, however, ignore the fact that there must be some change in 2000, or at a reasonable time after that. The report and the debate are therefore timely, enabling both major parties to set out their thinking on how the situation should be resolved. When they do so, I hope that two factors in particular will be uppermost in their thinking.

First, we must make it clear that any return to the Commission's original idea of the early 1990s of limiting compensation according to a maximum number of cows would be unacceptable. The Commission was thinking of a maximum of 40. It called the idea modulation. British farmers, with their much larger herds, would call it something else, seeing it as another back-door way of harming a settled and prosperous part of our agricultural scene. I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend the Minister and from the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) that the Commissioner will be told that the plan is a non-starter. We do not know what the Commission will propose. We are saying that we must not allow drift beyond 2000, which would result in uncertainty and quotas by default. If we are going to have quotas for the foreseeable future, we should be told.

Secondly, we should insist that there should be no reduction in this country's quota in the meantime. We are not self-sufficient in milk and we have a strong case for more quota rather than less. The impression hitherto has been that the Ministry is unlikely to press for additional quota. I regret that. Other countries, with records perhaps less authentic than ours, are robust in asking for extra quota in the price-fixing negotiations. We should do the same, and we should certainly argue against any suggestion of quota cuts. I would welcome assurances from those on the two Front Benches that that is their thinking.

It is tempting to say that we should not alter the quota system. It is not broke and does not need fixing. Farmers like the system, which protects them against cuts in support prices and is a capital asset in their hands. If we continue as we have done, comfortable though it may be, we must recognise that, according to the Commission's figures, in seven years there will be a surplus of 8.6 million tonnes of milk. To deal with that surplus, we are likely to have to end production controls.

That will mean a reduction in price for the producer, but that could be balanced over the years by greater access to world markets, perhaps coupled with suitable compensation for loss of a capital asset. Other countries are expanding and exporting their milk production, and we should do so too. We have the option of protecting the present regime for as long as we can or of getting into world markets. We cannot do both.

I am not too attracted by the idea of 'A and B' quotas; neither was the Select Committee. They have operated in the sugar regime for some time. They produce stability, but the price is uncertainty when each round of negotiations looms. We are in a minority—one country out of many—when it comes to those negotiations. Our competitors are not widely known for protecting Britain's interests in sugar or in anything else.

Another price of quotas is the inability to produce more for world markets. To produce more, British Sugar has to set up plant abroad, whereas it should be able to produce more in this country, in excess of quota, and sell abroad. Milk 'A and B' quotas would defeat the object of getting into world markets—markets that the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand are already getting into with some success, leaving us and our access to those markets behind. As my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare said, while "A and B" quotas might tide the farmers over for a little while, the imposition of two-tier quotas would add an unnecessary administrative complication to the milk regime.

The uncertainty needs to be resolved soon. We should do so now, as farmers are fully aware that the quota system is likely to end. We received evidence from the National Farmers Union that it is advising its members that

"they must not budget for quotas being there after the year 2000".

In addition, the president of the National Farmers Union told farmers:

"the time is getting nearer when the best interests of UK dairy farmers may be to seek an end to the milk quota system".

Whatever new system is proposed, we shall have only a voice; decisions will be made by the European Commission. We must make it clear to the Commission that it must recognise the loss of value that would follow—perhaps time-limited over five years while support prices and import tariffs were reduced.

We must remember that the dairy industry is valuable and profitable to this country. If we destroy that value and profit overnight without a fair lead-in period, we shall hand the industry over to the expanding milk producers in the world. The object of the reform, whatever it may be, must be to be up there with them, competing in world markets, not to hand it over to them.

We must look after the industry, which has served the country and agriculture communities well for many years, particularly since 1984. Things will have to change but it is the task of my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that that change comes about in a sensitive way with a firm eye to the industry's future prosperity and its future opportunities in the world.

12.3 pm

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I should like to add my thanks to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) for the work that he has done on the Select Committee on Agriculture. I wish him well, badgers or no badgers.

Milk is one of the most important foods and, given the damage that the Government have inflicted on the dairy industry, this morning's debate is useful. It is unfortunate, however, that we cannot include the European Commission's Green Paper on the proposed reforms to the common agricultural policy dairy regime, because it is not expected until next month. The Labour party believes that the Council of Agriculture Ministers will have to take some hard decisions to reduce protectionism within the EU milk regime. I doubt whether the Minister will be too worried about that after 1 May, as it might no longer be his job.

I remind the hon. Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate), before he starts complaining, that the Government have been in power for 18 years, and the Labour party has not had a chance to deal with the CAP in Europe.

[Mrs. Llin Golding]

A priority will be to get rid of the quota system, which keeps prices to the consumer up by preventing farmers from producing more milk. While I am grateful for the excellent briefing that I received from Consumers in Europe, Milk Marque, the National Farmers Union and others on quotas, it would be far better to await the Commission's Green Paper before entering into detailed discussions on that matter. Perhaps I should put it on the record that we share the Government's scepticism about the possibility of obtaining increases in quota, cross-border trading of quotas and other devices to reduce the damage done by the quota system. We believe that we must now concentrate on ensuring that quotas are phased out.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Golding: I am sorry, but I am strapped for time and do not intend to give way.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) has made abundantly clear, it is imperative that the cost of the milk regime, which is now approaching £4 billion a year, is cut and the money spent more wisely. Much of the British and other European taxpayers' money spent on the EU dairy regime is wasted. For example, why should the EU spend more than £1,500 million on export refunds and £390 million on skimmed milk, to feed calves on the continent?

Our objective is to ensure that the CAP will take explicit account of its influence on food standards and diet. By linking agriculture policy to food policy in that way, we could ensure that the diet of our people, particularly our young people, improved. Anyone who doubts the great value of milk to young people should read the pack on milk and children prepared by the National Dairy Council. I do not intend to spend my time performing a commercial break by listing all the nutrients contained in milk, which are vital to our nation's health, but I must draw attention to the importance of providing calcium, for both young children and older people.

Because the Labour party is convinced of the value of milk to young people, we continue strongly to oppose the decision to end taking up the European subsidy on secondary school milk and milk for school meals. CAP money should be used to subsidise milk in schools. It is an investment in people and an important element in improving the nation's health. We simply cannot understand the Conservative party's change of attitude towards milk. It was not long ago that a former Tory Agriculture Minister, the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), was telling us of the

"nutritional benefits that derive from establishing a milk drinking habit at an early age and maintaining it through the teenage years, when it is especially important for adolescent girls, for whom it may help osteoporosis in later life."

In another context, the Government constantly tell us that they follow scientific evidence. On what scientific evidence have they gone from the positive attitude of the former Agriculture Minister to the negative, uncaring attitude towards the health of young people expressed by the current Agriculture Minister?

It is clear that the philosophy shown by Thatcher the milk snatcher has come to pervade the whole of the present Government. They remove milk from our schools and stand by and watch our doorstep delivery system disappear. The week before last, following a campaign waged by the Labour party and the National Dairyman's Association, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East presented to the House a petition signed by thousands of people in support of the doorstep pinta. The signatories know how important the doorstep delivery service is to the whole community as well as to the dairy industry, and they are concerned about its rapid decline.

In 1982, 86 per cent. of households in England and Wales received doorstep deliveries; by 1996, the figure was only 39 per cent. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food does not help by saying merely that that reflects the difference between supermarket and doorstep prices: what about those who cannot get to the supermarket—the elderly, the sick, the housebound and those with responsibility for others whom they cannot leave? They depend on the doorstep pinta.

Far from hitting the delivery services, as they did by taxing milk floats, the Government should be asking for CAP money to help such services. If £390 million can be spent on feeding calves, some can be spent on helping that useful service to the community.

The threat of applying value added tax to our pintas must be removed. The Chancellor said that a strong case could be made for putting VAT on food, children's clothes, transport, sewerage and newspapers and added that no amount of lobbying need put the Government off. Lobbying might not, but a general election certainly will, especially when people realise that the price of a doorstep pinta could be raised to 44p.

The Dairy Industry Federation has severely criticised the Select Committee report. It said:

"the section on the UK Dairy Industry, however, was based on inadequate research and was generally dismissed in the industry. It contained serious factual errors . . . In particular without seeing any of the economic evidence which has been evaluated by the Office of Fair Trading, the Committee expressed a view on how the OFT should exercise its powers in a competition investigation of Milk Marque Ltd. under the Fair Trading Act 1973."

It is clear that relations between the Dairy Industry Federation and Milk Marque are still far from satisfactory. In particular, the federation is concerned about stories that Milk Marque, which controls about 60 per cent. of the supply of raw milk, is discussing with the City the possibility of its acquiring processing capacity. That could operate in ways that would be extremely unfair and detrimental to existing processors.

The Select Committee said:

"We would not wish to see Milk Marque attempt to develop its own processing capacity whilst it remains a strong force in the market for the supply of raw milk."

The Dairy Industry Federation would like the Government to reaffirm the stance they took in response to the Select Committee, when they said:

"This is a matter for competition law and the competition authorities."

It would be helpful if the Minister could reassure the Dairy Industry Federation that they have no intention of supporting any acquisition by Milk Marque of processing plant, until a thorough investigation has taken place.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): Does my hon. Friend agree that the competition authorities do not police the industry adequately in Scotland, where there is a

danger of Wiseman Dairies acquiring the milk-producing side of Scottish Pride, which would give it about 80 per cent. of the milk market in Scotland? That has not been halted by the competition authorities, and there is no reason for us to have any faith in the ability of those authorities to safeguard the industry's future.

Mrs. Golding: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. Perhaps the Labour Government who take office in a few weeks' time will take a much sterner attitude to competition in the industry.

I emphasise the importance that the Opposition attach to milk. In the few weeks that remain to them, we hope that the Government will in turn do all that they can to encourage this most important of our industries.

12.14 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): This has been a most interesting debate. I hope that the House will forgive me if I make one or two preliminary points.

First, many issues can be raised in relation to the dairy industry and dairy farmers, and in recent days many of those issues have been raised in relation to meat hygiene. The House will be interested to know that, with Madam Speaker's permission, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food intends to make a further statement on meat hygiene later this afternoon; the House will understand if I do not anticipate his comments on such matters.

Secondly, I hope that the House will forgive me for pointing out that my responsibilities and those of the Select Committee include not only farming, but fisheries and food. I am the Minister with responsibility for fisheries, and today is undoubtedly the bleakest day for the fishing industry for a long time; I am sure that the whole House will join me in sending condolences to the families of the seven fishermen who lost their lives yesterday.

That is a sorry reminder to us all that fishing is probably still the most dangerous occupation, and I hope that that fact will always be remembered by conservationists and others, who sometimes attack the industry. I am sure that the marine accidents investigation branch will carry out the necessary inquiries, but nothing will take away from the fact that it is a dangerous industry.

I add my compliments to my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin), who has chaired the Select Committee so ably for nearly a decade. His excellent speech today was a model of the wisdom that he has brought to bear during his chairmanship. He has given sterling service on the Committee for many years and he has brought considerable knowledge and expertise to bear on all the proceedings on agriculture in the House. I know that I speak for all hon. Members when I offer him our thanks for his contribution over the years.

Other members of the Select Committee have made excellent speeches: in particular, my hon. Friends the Members for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) and for Newark (Mr. Alexander). Other Conservative members of the Select Committee, including my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), have been here throughout the debate, as have my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) and my hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), for Stafford (Mr. Cash), for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton–Brown) and for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen).

It is interesting that, so far as I can see, not a single Labour member of the Select Committee has been present for any part of the debate. I am sure that the agricultural community and the dairy industry will recognise the fact that, despite whatever honeyed words come from the hon. Member for Newcastle–under–Lyme (Mrs. Golding), when it comes to it, the Labour party is not interested in farming, the countryside or, in truth, the food industry.

I shall endeavour to reply to the specific questions posed in the debate. The Select Committee's inquiry into the dairy industry and the common agricultural policy regime was both thorough and wide ranging. In its analysis and its conclusions, it revealed considerable common ground with the Government. In our response to the report, the Government were able to agree with most of its comments and recommendations.

With the current quota regime due to expire on 31 March 2000, farmers are understandably increasingly putting their minds to the question of what lies beyond. That is crucial for planning their businesses, and it impinges on decisions about expansion or whether to buy or lease quota. Hon. Members have only to listen to "The Archers" on Radio 4 or visit dairy farmers in their constituencies to get a flavour of the uncertainties facing the dairy industry.

The Select Committee's detailed analysis of the way forward for the CAP dairy regime could not have come at a better time. As the report says, most of the hard policy choices lie in the future. However, I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham that, in taking those difficult decisions, the Government will, of course, bring to bear the zeal and determination that he, the House and our dairy industry expect of us.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend do everything possible to ensure that other member states do not get more quota unless we get more for our farmers? Will he ensure that the Italians cough up the fines that are due and that they obey the quota rules? Can he give the House an assurance, as I suspect he was about to, on modulation of compensation and ensure that farmers do not bear unreasonable income loss, but get proper compensation if the CAP dairy regime is reformed?

Mr. Baldry: It would be unacceptable for another member state to get more quota if the UK did not get more. As the House knows, we are deficient in quota. We have continuously made it clear that we do not believe that other member states should receive further quota.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: Let me deal with one intervention before I tackle another.

Spain, Greece and Italy are in deep financial difficulties with the Commission in respect of making payments, because they have failed to cough up last year's super-levy. The Commission is, at last, getting tough with member states that do not comply with the rules, and not before time. We must ensure that, when we are not

[Mr. Baldry]

self-sufficient in milk quota, other member states play by the rules, and that the Commission insists that they abide by the rules.

Mr. Jones *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I should like to make some progress before I take another intervention.

The debate on the hard choices has already started. Our views on reform of the dairy regime were published in our response to the Select Committee report. We tabled the response at the Council of Agriculture Ministers as a contribution to the discussion in Europe. We proposed progressive reductions in support prices over five years, to bring them into line with world prices. At that point, quotas would become meaningless and could be abolished. During the transition period, cross-border transfer of quotas should be introduced, with a time-limited income payment scheme to dairy farmers designed to help them to adjust to the removal of support prices and quotas.

It is clear from our discussions in the Council of Ministers that several member states and the Commission share our analysis of the pressures on the quota system. As the Select Committee states in its report, at some stage, the European dairy industry must come to terms with trading at world prices. As a way of preparing the ground, we have called on the Commission to propose cuts in support prices as part of this year's price fixing, along the lines advocated by the Select Committee.

Regrettably, negotiations on the future shape of the CAP regime will not be as clear between now and March 2000 as hon. Members would like. The message that should go from the House to the Commission and to Europe is that we all owe it to the dairy industry to take early decisions. We are determined to put pressure on the European Commission and the Council of Ministers to ensure that early decisions are taken, so that dairy farmers can plan sensibly for the future.

Quotas are not the only concern of dairy farmers; there is also the selective cull. Many farmers stand to lose a number of their cows in coming months. We fully understand that, and that is why we have made it clear that we shall be as flexible as possible in the operation of the cull. In our package of measures to compensate for animals slaughtered in the selective cull, we have sought to be fair. We recognise the difficulties of balancing production against quota towards the end of the quota year, and have secured an extension of the quota leasing deadline for this year for producers affected. Some 15,000 dairy farmers have registered their interest in using that facility, although I suspect that few will have cows taken before 1 April.

Farm visits under the selective cull are well under way. Slaughtering has started. In Great Britain, the first visits to natal herds—the herds where bovine spongiform encephalopathy cases were born—started in the last week of January. By the end of last week, 517 natal herds had been visited and 1,300 animals were subject to provisional slaughter notices. Slaughtering is expected to start this week, with the slaughter rate building up over the next few weeks.

In Northern Ireland, farm visits started a week earlier and all but one of its 124 natal herds have been visited. The first slaughter, of 206 animals, occurred on 28 February. We hope to be able to complete the selective cull in Northern Ireland in the near future.

The quota regime affects not only farms but dairy processing. The UK dairy processing industry is likewise held back by quotas. As we never tire of reminding colleagues in the Agriculture Council, the UK is seriously in deficit in milk, but we are one of the EU countries best suited to milk production. The quota system deters investment, inward or home grown, in dairy processing. In an ever more global marketplace, world markets are growing. Multinational companies will site their processing facilities where raw materials are readily available at world prices.

The constraints of our commitments under the general agreement on tariffs and trade Uruguay round, to reduce subsidised exports, mean that large-scale investment in dairy processing in the European Union, let alone the UK, is unlikely as long as quotas and high support prices remain. The GATT constraints are already starting to bite. Reform of the dairy regime is as crucial for our dairy processing industry as for farmers.

Another important issue in recent years, as the Select Committee made clear, has been the deregulation of the milk market. That, too, has impinged as much on the processing industry as on dairy farmers, and the Committee was right to devote as much time to the subject as it did. As we stated in our reply to the report, the Government welcome the Committee's endorsement of deregulation. To some extent, the industry is still adapting to its new freedom after the abolition the milk marketing boards. By industry, I mean both processors and farmers. Some farms chose to stay with Milk Marque, some have joined forces to form milk groups and some chose to deal directly with the dairy companies.

After sharp price increases, as buyers competed for supplies for the first time, milk prices returned to their previous levels. While other factors, notably the strength of the pound, have been at play, I think that that is evidence that the deregulated market is bedding down. Although dairy farmers remain as shackled as are farmers by the quota system, the abolition of the milk marketing scheme has removed one obstacle that hampered the development of an efficient, innovative dairy processing industry.

Mr. Davidson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman wandered into the debate at about 12.20 pm, the only Labour Back Bencher to grace us with his presence. Perhaps he cannot tell the time. Ten minutes' attendance by one Labour Back Bencher is not much.

Mr. Davidson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to make an outrageous slur without seeking to ascertain why I was elsewhere? I have a shipyard on the verge of closing today—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I have got the hon. Member's message. The Minister is responsible for his own speech.

Mr. Baldry: The agriculture industry will regret that a false point of order has prevented me from responding to some of the points made in the debate. Again, that sums up the Labour party's attitude towards agriculture.

Deregulation has led inevitably to some restructuring and a loss of employment, but employment in the dairy processing industry has declined in recent years, and the best protection for jobs is an efficient and successful industry. We shall ensure that the competition authorities continue to determine competition policy.

The past 12 months have been difficult for dairy farmers, and that is why it was such welcome news that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was able to announce last month that the residuary milk marketing board would shortly be making a cash repayment of some £15 million to dairy farmers, as a further step in winding up the old board's affairs. Dairy farmers are shortly to benefit from a share of that £15 million. It has also been a difficult year for the milk processing industry, but we must look forward—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We now come to the debate on the development of democracy in central and eastern Europe.

Democracy (Central and Eastern Europe)

12.30 pm

Sir Geoffrey Pattie (Chertsey and Walton): Seven years ago this month, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) invited me to take over Conservative central office's responsibility for assisting centre-right parties in central and eastern Europe. In the first two years from 1990, we had to work extremely hard to try to scrounge air tickets to visit the region and to encourage people from the region to come to the United Kingdom.

I pay tribute to members of the team who worked with me then, and to those who have taken over and carried the heat and burden of the day since. In those early days, I was assisted by Edward Llewellyn, Angus Cargill and Julian Lewis, under the direction of John Guthrie. In more recent times, the international office has been under the leadership of Richard Normington with my executive assistant, Sally Tipping, the international desk officer, Catherine Fall and Ingrid Ainley, who has run the department so well. I pay tribute to the person in my staff who has worked brilliantly with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in the past few years, Jadranka Porter, who has been ably assisted by Abbey Rosemont.

I thank all the agents in the party's organisation and the voluntary workers who have attended weekend conferences in this country and have visited central and eastern Europe to give their advice and support. At times, it has been hard work and, occasionally, it has been slightly hairy. I know that all concerned have found it to be a stimulating and uplifting experience.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy was founded five years ago this month, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer), who has been the chairman since its inception and has led the organisation superbly. It was essential that we had a foundation in this country, as we were lagging behind our continental friends—particularly Germany—and we still do in terms of the scale of finance. But with no foundation on the Foreign Office vote, we had no means of funding the promotion of the cause of democracy on an all-party basis. We work on an all-party basis, and we are primarily interested in the development of democratic values. However, we like jam on both sides of our bread, and if we can have a centre-right Government in the country concerned, central office is particularly pleased.

I made my first visit to the region in April 1990, when I went to Prague in what was then still Czechoslovakia. In those days, even the lexicon had to be changed, as the word "party" meant the Communist party. One needed an "alliance" or a "front" or something of that nature. I made a mistake once when I was waiting with a group of Czech friends for a group of party activists from the UK to arrive at the hotel. I glanced at my watch and said, "Our agents will be here in 20 minutes," and I wondered why everyone had gone as white as a sheet.

In those days, parties tended to be driven by personalities. I remember returning to a hotel in Sofia with a colleague and seeing a heated argument on a street corner. I said to my colleague, "I am sure that that is another political party being formed." Sure enough, there were no fewer than 57 political parties at the Bulgarian election that year. Not only were there 57 parties, but

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there were two electoral systems existing side by side—half the Parliament was elected by single transferable vote, and half by first past the post. The electorate were, let us say, less than completely sophisticated in such techniques.

At that time, anyone who was not a communist was virtually bound to be elected, and the people were united in one sense—they all had no previous experience of any form of government. When the history of the past five or six years is written, people will regard this as one of the most startling developments of the century. People with no previous experience were asked to manage the transition from a demand, centralised economy to a market economy. That is extremely difficult to achieve, and many failed to make a success of it.

In early 1991, there were centre-right Governments in Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. In Poland, I recall that there was no threshold in the proportional representation system, which meant that there were at least 20 parties in the Parliament. That caused chaos. In many ways, that was part of the thrill and excitement of democracy in those early, heady days.

In 1991, we had three contrasting experiences. The Czech Republic and Slovakia separated and, to their enormous credit, did so peacefully. We should contrast that with what happened in former Yugoslavia. Following the implosion of Yugoslavia, we were able to develop contacts with centre-right parties in Slovenia. Since then, we have attempted to create cautious relationships with other parties in other parts of former Yugoslavia.

The Soviet Union collapsed in the same year, and we had hardly finished digesting the arrival of democracy in the rest of central and eastern Europe before that happened. We then had the opportunity to visit countries such as Ukraine, Belarus and, particularly, the Baltic states. I remember going to the Parliament in Vilnius, where I zig-zagged through the anti-tank barriers outside the Parliament and went up the stairs past sandbags for a meeting with the Soviet military command. As a former Defence Minister, I never thought that I would see any of these countries at first hand, let alone find myself in a room talking to Soviet military commanders. It was a startling experience.

In early 1992, the Albanian elections were held. Albania had been crushed by 50 years of the most appalling dictatorship. At the time of the elections, I stood with Mr. Berisha in a football stadium where a crowd of 15,000 had gathered. It was noticeable that the country had intermittent food supplies, and many in the crowd that day had no knowledge of whether they would get food later that week. Certainly, the hotel had no hot water or heating of any sort. Yet the people were sustained and buoyed by the knowledge that they were at least going to be free. I will return to the tragic events in Albania later.

Six weeks after the Albanian election at the beginning of 1992, I was in my constituency and participating in the British general election. People complained to me about matters such as the frequency of the bus service or the fact that a bus stop had been moved. Before my eyes flashed the faces of people whom I had seen in Albania, but there was no point in upbraiding my constituents and saying, "You should have been in Tirana six weeks ago," because they would have been astonished had I done so. Nevertheless, my experience in Albania gave me a useful sense of perspective of what is important.

In the second wave of elections in central and eastern Europe, many of the former communists—almost all of whom had renamed themselves socialists—were returned to power. They knew that all they had to do was bide their time, because the electorates in almost all those countries had unreasonable expectations. I am not saying that some of those expectations had not been encouraged by fledgling politicians—it would not be the first time that that has happened—but many people in the region genuinely believed that they only had to exist to achieve the living standards they had seen on German television. Of course, life proved to be much harder than that, which led to considerable disillusionment. Only in the Czech Republic have the Government of Vaclav Klaus been able to hold on to power, and even Mr. Klaus lost his overall majority.

Many of the good people from central and eastern Europe whom we brought over for weekend gatherings in the United Kingdom were former Prime Ministers—we were in danger of having a former Prime Ministers' club—but at least they were learning the lessons of the democratic process. Those lessons were that they had to be properly organised, have policies that appealed to the electorate, and be united. So often, we found that, in certain countries, there were seven, eight or more parties that we in this country would recognise as centre-right, and all were vying for the same section of the vote. We are now witnessing what might be called the third wave. Centre-right parties, having lost elections and been forced out of office, went back to the grass roots, reorganised and proposed new policies. They have now won power in Lithuania, Bulgaria and Romania and have good prospects in Poland.

I want to speak briefly about events in Albania. Those events are tragic, especially in the light of what that country has already suffered. It is right that we should ask whether the European Union, through its various member states, has done enough for Albania since 1992; or whether it has been preoccupied with the intergovernmental conference and single currency, while on its doorstep a country has been suffering. It is no coincidence that the centre of much of the so-called rebel activity in the south of Albania is Vlore, because that is the well-recognised centre of mafia operations in that area and the mafia have been infuriated by the president's efforts to close down their operations.

The problems in Albania were set out extremely well in yesterday's *Wall Street Journal* leader, from which I shall quote. The leader talks about the Albanian Socialist party—another former communist party that has sought to dress itself in the socialist label—and states:

"The ASP's plan is so good it could be a model for disgruntled Communists everywhere: You pull out of the election if opinion polls predict you are going to lose, complain that the country has become a one-party state, wait for a cause celebre, and then encourage criminal gangs and former Communist secret police and military leaders to take up arms against the government. The cause celebre in this case was the pyramid scheme wave that got out of control before the government quashed it."

The conclusion of the leader is:

"If opposition groups don't immediately start working with Mr. Berisha to hold free elections in the coming months, and instead press for military gains, it will become clear that what they are aiming for is not democracy but a military coup. If that happens, will we still hear news reports that it is a popular uprising?"

Not only is Albania suffering a tragedy, but events there are being misreported on a spectacular scale.

I conclude by saying that the opportunity that has been given to me to serve in this way and to work with so many of the new democrats of central and eastern Europe has resulted in a profoundly stimulating and memorable experience, for which I extremely grateful.

12.45 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): I welcome the debate introduced today by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie). I greatly regret the absence of any Opposition Members save one, and that of any other Conservative Members; however, that does not detract from the fact that this is an extremely important issue. It is right and proper that it should be debated in the House.

I shall deal with the specific points relating to Albania before turning to the more general issues of the debate—the welcome spread of democracy throughout central and eastern Europe. The position in Albania is, as my right hon. Friend said, extremely precarious and no one can predict the outcome of the current violence. It must be in the interests not only of all Albanians but of the international community that peace and law and order should be restored to Albania as soon as possible.

The Government profoundly welcome the agreement between President Berisha and the other political parties, particularly the Socialist party, to form an interim Government of national reconciliation, and the appointment of Bashkim Fino of the Socialist party as the new Prime Minister. As my right hon. Friend said, we sincerely hope that all democratic forces in Albania will now unite to restore peace and law and order and to ensure that the elections that are to take place next June fully comply with international standards and so create a new and legitimate democracy in that troubled country.

Albania is probably the last of the countries in which problems are likely to continue. We hope that Bosnia will settle down and that the other countries that have experienced instability between the ending of the Soviet dictatorships and the present day have all stabilised. I therefore trust that we will now see the progress towards democracy continue satisfactorily.

I add my congratulations to those already expressed by my right hon. Friend to the teams from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and, indeed, Conservative central office who have greatly contributed to the creation of democratic systems in all the countries of central and eastern Europe and who have put enormous effort into that successful endeavour. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy is an all-party body, so I should pay tribute on a cross-party basis to that organisation.

The establishment of democracy in central Europe gives the United Kingdom a unique opportunity to expand our trade and political influence into that part of the world. I have been travelling through all the countries in the region over the past 20 months and I have been extremely impressed by the interest shown in doing business with the United Kingdom and our companies. Last week, I was in Latvia, where I met what I can honestly describe as the most enthusiastic team of British business men whom I have ever met on my travels. There are huge opportunities for British business, and the Government are offering as much encouragement as we can. All the effort that we put into promoting business in that part of the world will pay great dividends for our national interests as well as for the companies that take advantage of the opportunities that we lay before them.

Trade is only one way in which democracy can be developed. We have put enormous effort into helping the Governments of each of those countries to establish proper systems. I pay special tribute to the work that is done by the know-how fund, the British Council and the Overseas Development Agency. All the countries of central and eastern Europe have been extremely active in promoting good government, education and, perhaps above all, the knowledge of the English language, which is essential if countries are to take advantage of international trading opportunities. Almost all international trade deals now have English as a principal language.

The European Union is the forum into which most of those countries wish to be brought. Ten of them in the central European group are already associate members of the European Union, and it is Her Majesty's Government's policy to encourage advances in those countries so that they can be brought fully into the European Union with minimal delay.

To that end, the know-how fund in particular is paying close attention to trying to bring the standards of those countries up to the standard that is demanded by the Commission. Specifically, it is helping them to answer the voluminous questions that they are being asked by the Commissioners so that an opinion on each of those countries may be published shortly after the intergovernmental conference. We shall then discover which of the countries fulfil the criteria, so that they can immediately start negotiations for full membership of the European Union.

We believe that the current state of affairs with the EU is only partly completed, and that we will not be content until the European Union fully represents all those European nations that wish to become members. I believe that progress is being made on that front, but two specific difficulties must be overcome.

The standard of the common agricultural policy must be adjusted to make it possible to bring in other central European countries, and the structural funds must be altered so that the countries that contribute to those funds do not find themselves ruined by the huge numbers of new entrants that are able to draw on them for support. In both cases, we are doing everything we can with our European partners to encourage the necessary alterations so that the EU is able and ready to bring in the new members that wish to join.

Similarly, the expansion of NATO will help to underpin democratic systems in central Europe and give countries that have not had a feeling of security in my lifetime confidence that they will no longer become the battlefields of the world. The expansion of NATO must be undertaken cautiously and in due time. It is a matter for NATO, and NATO members alone, to decide which countries should join their organisation, and when, but I am confident that the first entrants will be allowed in—or at least will be allowed to start the negotiations for entry and named—at or around the Madrid conference this summer. That will give hope to those nations, and to others who will be able to continue to benefit from the

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prospect of membership, as the doors for NATO membership will be left open at that stage and we shall gradually expand the organisation in such a way as to secure the necessary peace for central Europe.

We must, however, be careful not to draw new cold war lines, so in the process of NATO expansion we must take fully into account Russia's legitimate concerns. I hope that we shall be able to conclude a charter between NATO and Russia at or about the same time as the Madrid conference. If we are able to do so, we shall defuse what might otherwise be a difficult situation. We have made it clear throughout that Russia cannot be allowed to veto the expansion of NATO although her legitimate concerns should be met.

We should also expand the role that Partnership for Peace, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe can play in ensuring the democratic freedoms of the peoples of central and eastern Europe, and enhance what is done in those forums to that end.

The results of the democratisation of central Europe will enormously benefit us all, not only in trade but in acting together to enhance the well-being of the citizens of all countries of Europe. The fight against international crime is one of the gravest difficulties confronting the international community. We are in grave danger from the flood of illegal drugs that is inundating the whole of Europe. Those drugs, depending on their type, come mostly from the far east or South America, but some are grown nearer to our shores, in the form of Ecstasy and other chemical drugs.

In all cases, we need a joint international effort if we are to defeat that appalling phenomenon of our time. The latest estimate that I read was that, last year, the profits of illegal drug dealing amounted to about US$500 billion—a much larger sum than most small countries' gross domestic product. With resources like that, no single country can take on the drug barons and expect to win; only if we unite in our efforts can we do so. The role of the central European countries in that effort will be crucial, and we are making tremendous efforts to combine our Customs and Excise and police efforts with those of emerging nations.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman for the fact that I was not present for the opening part of his speech.

Regarding the national effort to combat distribution of drugs, will the right hon. Gentleman bring to the Home Secretary's attention the fact that in our clubs and pubs there is now a major network of organised gangs in the bouncer movement, which has led to a huge increase in the distribution and sale of drugs and is leading to the use of guns and all types of other weapons against innocent customers and the owners of those premises?

The Government need to impose proper regulation and remove from the security industry these gangsters, who are parading as business people as a front for distributing drugs and horrifically damaging our young people.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about that danger. I have no doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is addressing it. He is addressing a great many law and order issues, but he does not receive much support from Labour Members in his campaigns. I nevertheless welcome what the hon. Gentleman says and hope that, when we introduce legislation to solve that specific problem, it will not, unlike the rest of our anti-crime legislation, be opposed in the Division Lobby.

The efforts of the Home Office and the Foreign Office are closely co-ordinated and the House will know of the appointment of the drugs supremo, Mr. Derek Plumbly, who has taken on overall responsibility for a joint effort to crack down on the supply of drugs from abroad and their distribution. That new joint effort is having substantial results. The fact that we have captured a much greater quantity of drug supplies this year than ever before reflects an increase in our efficiency rather than an increase in the flow of drugs.

In summary, the emergence of democracy in central Europe gives us new and exciting opportunities. Our businesses there will flourish. I am glad to say that our bilateral relations with those countries are excellent. I have visited all of the central European and most of the eastern European countries while I have held my current job, and visited many of them when I was Chairman of the Defence Select Committee.

I believe that we are held in especially high esteem in central Europe. It is a pity that we do not often get more publicity in this country for the work that the Government and our independent agencies do and the effort that our business men make; obtaining any media coverage for those efforts appears to be an impossible task. It is very important that we in this country unite in our determination to support the democracies in central Europe. It is essential that we bring them in to western European organisations, and that we keep in the closest possible contact with them to ensure that there is no backsliding.

As to Bosnia and Albania, I believe that we must concentrate enormous international efforts to ensure that peace is maintained in the former Balkans so that we do not see a conflagration that could undo much of the good work that has been done.

H. H. Robertson (Pension Fund)

12.59 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): It was interesting to listen to a thoughtful speech about important world affairs by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). It shows the strength of the House that we can move immediately from an important debate on world affairs to a much more parochial issue that affects ordinary citizens in our constituencies.

In introducing the debate, I record my thanks to hon. Members on both sides of the House who have contributed to the enormous amount of information that I have gathered relating to the case. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), my hon. Friends the Members for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), and for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), the deputy leader of the Labour party. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) will not be able to participate in the debate as he has not yet made his maiden speech. Hopefully, he will catch your eye later today, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

H. H. Robertson has a long history in Ellesmere Port, having started its life as the Wolverhampton Iron Works more than 90 years ago. Some of the original workers walked along the Shropshire Union canal from Wolverhampton to Ellesmere Port to get their jobs. Today I shall concentrate on the activities of its two most recent parent companies, Robertson Ceco Inc. of the United States and the 1W Group, which took over on 1 January 1994.

On 23 January this year, it was announced that H. H. Robertson had sold to British Steel the intellectual property rights and plant associated with its only profitable product. As a result, the principal wage-earners of 150 families in the Ellesmere Port area will lose their jobs. In 1989, the then owners entered into a pension holiday. At that time, the fund had a surplus of £4.4 million, but by October 1992 there was a deficit of £2.4 million. However, it was not until Christmas eve 1991 that the consulting actuaries, Sedgwick Noble Lowndes, advised the managing director, Mr. Ian Wood, of the problem—that is the way that he described the situation to me.

However, for reasons yet to be explained, the pension holiday continued until April 1992. Therefore, my first series of questions is: what happened to the investment strategy during that period? When were the trustees first notified of the problem? Why, when the managing director knew of the seriousness of the problem, did contributions not recommence until April 1992? It seems to me that, irrespective of the difficulties that the company may have faced, there are some serious issues surrounding the management of the pension fund at that time.

I now move to 1994 when the 1W Group took control. One of its first actions was to reach an agreement with the workforce about a 10 per cent. pay cut—that is a real contribution by any workforce to a company's well-being. A slow process of repaying pension fund moneys was put in place, and large-scale redundancies occurred. It is alleged that pension fund moneys were used to boost redundancy payments at that time. It is now obviously impossible to prove that one way or the other from the enormous pile of information that I have gathered. However, it raises the question whether the fund should have been used in that manner, irrespective of the discretionary powers held by the trustees, while it was in deficit. The fund was clearly in deficit from some point after 1989 throughout the time in question.

I now bring the House to the present. When I was told about the proposed closure and an apparent £5.3 million sale to British Steel, I began an investigation into the company and its parent group. I shall briefly describe the structure of the company. H. H. Robertson is owned by the 1W Group whose managing director is Mr. Ric Wharton. In turn, that company is owned by Midmar Investments Ltd, which Mr. Wharton describes as a trust in the name of his children. The 1W Group owns, or has a shareholding in, a string of other companies. Mr. Wharton is, or has been, a director of about 28 companies, some of which are in liquidation, some of which have failed to file their accounts in the normal time, and some of which appear to be not trading. At the time of the H. H. Robertson acquisition, there was a significant share issue in the 1W Group. I draw to the Minister's attention the fact that, if H. H. Robertson is sold at a negative value, presumably those shares will be worthless.

The structure that I have described so far is complex, but not unusual. I then discovered that the deal with British Steel was not for the figure that I was first told, but for £7.4 million, and that it also involved a company called Chester Plant and Leasing Ltd. The plant that British Steel was interested in was leased to H. H. Robertson by Chester Plant and Leasing Ltd. There is nothing terribly unusual about that: people lease all sorts of business needs, from photocopiers to buildings. However, it is a little odd to lease plant that is at the core of the business.

I also discovered that Chester Plant and Leasing is owned by H. H. Robertson, and that the directors of the company are Mr. Wood, the managing director of H. H. Robertson, and Mr. Wharton, the owner of the parent company. It also appears to have a mysterious offshoot known as Gardenia Holdings, which is registered in the Bahamas. Mr. Wood has so far denied knowledge of Chester Plant and Leasing and of Gardenia Holdings, although he is a director of the first company.

Any reasonable person examining the structure that I have described would ask whether the directors are in breach of their fiduciary duties. It is clearly impossible to answer that question without accessing the management accounts of all the companies—even then, it would not be easy. I wrote to Mr. Wood on 5 March, asking him a series of questions and pointing out that I had secured this Adjournment debate. I asked him about Gardenia Holdings, Chester Plant and Leasing Ltd and the exact date of the takeover—which I have since discovered. I also requested any information that he had about various financial issues. Thus far, he has chosen not to reply.

The third and final complication arises from H. H. Robertson's attempt allegedly to protect creditors. The firm has transferred all the remaining assets, including land and buildings, to another company called Ledge 313 Ltd., which was incorporated in Scotland on 17 December 1996. Mr. Wood told me a fortnight ago that that was done in the best interests of the creditors, especially the pension fund. However, Ledge 313—whose particulars I have received thanks to the good offices of

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

Mr. Ross Ramsey of Companies House in Scotland, who has been extremely helpful—appears to have three charges associated with it: in the names of the Bank of Scotland, Chester Plant and Leasing, and Gardenia Holdings.

Mr. Wood has meanwhile been trying to argue that, if the borough council gave him planning consent to build a supermarket, there would be enough money to pay all the creditors, including the pension fund. As every hon. Member knows, a local authority could not unilaterally grant consent, even if that would help the pension fund. The authority must base its decisions on planning grounds alone. However, a planning application was lodged on 18 February 1997.

Even if that application went ahead on the most favourable terms, how—given the charges on Ledge 313—can the pension fund be protected? Why was the pension fund—H. H. Robertson Pension Trust Ltd.—not listed as having a charge on that company, bearing in mind that Mr. Wood told me specifically that the company was created to help the creditors, particularly the pension fund?

I have always argued that the Pensions Act 1995 would not stop another Maxwell. Whether this case falls into that category, one cannot be certain.

Mr. David Hunt (Wirral, West): I thank the hon. Gentleman for kindly agreeing that I might intervene. I share his concern about the rights of the pensioners. Their position is stressed by a letter sent to me by one of my constituents, who writes that the trustees met on 3 March, and that Mr. Wood has since given notice to members of the pension plan that the plan is to be wound up and that trustees will be advising members direct. No advice has been given and no pensions surgeries have been held, so everyone is in a state of uncertainty. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must know the truth as quickly as possible, so that we can tell our constituents.

Mr. Miller: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention. According to the latest information given to the trustees by professional advisers, the fund is underfunded in excess of 50 per cent.—in other words, it is forty-something per cent. funded.

A friend of mine, Councillor Brian Jones, works at H. H. Robertson. If he took his pension at the point of his dismissal, bearing in mind that he has only about six years to go and that he would have to take a reduction because of taking his pension early, which he may have to do in the circumstances, he would receive a pension of about 14 per cent. of the amount that he has paid for. That is appalling.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): My hon. Friend will know that I also have constituents who are in that situation. Will he comment on the activities not only of the firm in relation to the pension fund, which seems to have been raided, but of those whose duty it is to protect pension funds? Clearly, something odd was going on that led to the emptying of the pension fund as the firm was getting into difficulties. Does not he think that those charged with looking after deferred earnings should have done a better job?

Mr. Miller: Indeed. Serious questions must be raised about the activities of the trustee, the professional advisers and the investment company from 1989 until 1994, or possibly 1995 or even up to the present day. The situation is complicated because there has been a change of personnel over time with the change of ownership of the company, but there must have been a point when it was known that the fund had dipped into deficit. At that time, surely it must have been the duty of the professional advisers, the directors of the company and the trustee to reinstate the funding of the scheme. That did not take place. My hon. Friend makes an important point, which should be the subject of investigation.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I thank my hon. Friend for the work that he has done on the matter, which affects not only his constituents but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said, people throughout Wirral, Chester and Merseyside. As well as looking at the past, important as that is, it is also important to look to the future. This is the first such tragedy to come to notice as the Pensions Act 1995 takes effect. Will not the occupational pensions advisory service—OPAS—and the pension ombudsman be in the spotlight as people watch how effectively they carry out their functions? Sadly, this may not be the only case that will come to our attention in the next five years.

Mr. Miller: That, too, is an extremely important observation. We do not yet know how the new Act will work. The fund was conveniently wound up just before relevant parts of the Act come into effect. There may have been good advice; I do not know. However, even if the trustee took bad advice, made bad decisions or acted improperly during the period in question, where on earth will the money come from to refund the people who have been so poorly treated? It can only be from within the structure of companies that I have described.

The company structure is convoluted. There is a possible theme suggesting that Chester Plant and Leasing, with its offshore shoot Gardenia Holdings registered in the Bahamas, may be an important area of investigation, especially as those two companies hold a charge over the company that has allegedly been set up to protect the staff, including the pension fund.

I agree with my hon. Friend that the matter will highlight important new functions of the pensions ombudsman and OPAS, but we must also get to the bottom of the company structure, or we will simply be taking academic steps in relation to individual trustees who might lose their house, but that would not solve a funding problem of the scale that I have described.

I have always argued that the Pensions Act 1995 would not stop another Maxwell. Whether this case falls into that category, one cannot be certain. It is certain, however, that 150 families in constituencies of hon. Members on both sides of the House, and many other creditors, including to a considerable extent the Department for Education and Employment, will have to wait a very long time to recover anything from such a sorry state of affairs.

I have spoken to the Minister about this important matter. I know that he is sympathetic to the plight of my constituents and other creditors, and I appreciate the time that he has already given me on the matter. I ask him, however, to take action urgently—action that includes asking the DTI inspection branch to investigate immediately the matters that I have raised. I shall make all the documents that I have received available to him, and I shall co-operate fully with the investigation.

The House has a duty to help my constituents, and the neighbouring constituents of hon. Members on both sides of the House. I should like the Minister to respond with a strong message of hope for the 150 families who face an awful plight.

1.20 pm

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on securing the debate, and on the considered way in which he and others have raised questions that concern us all. I acknowledge the presence of, not least, my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), who—like our new colleague, the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman)—cannot speak in the debate, for his own proper reasons. I also acknowledge the presence of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), who has just joined us.

I share the concern that has been expressed about the security of pension funds, which is important to the Government and, indeed, to all of us; but I must utter a word of caution. This is a discipline that, perhaps, binds me more than anyone else in the Chamber, but the company that is the subject of today's debate is not, to my knowledge, in any form of insolvency, and we must hope that nothing that we say here will damage its prospects.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston has discussed his anxieties with me at some length. Although I may have to be somewhat circumspect, I shall introduce him to my appropriate officials immediately after the debate—in nine minutes' time. We spent more than half an hour together last night. The hon. Gentleman is necessarily more informed than I am at this stage, but I shall catch up, in the spirit of sympathy that he invited me to adopt for his and other hon. Members' constituents.

I note that only eight minutes remain. Let no one doubt that I am limited in what I can say in that time. My reply to the debate is not an end to the matter, and the hon. Gentleman's raising of the matter constitutes the beginning of what I shall endeavour to do. If time does not allow me to deal with all the issues, I wish to leave the House in no doubt about my attitude.

A range of protections already exist in pensions legislation and trust law, on which most pension schemes are based. All trustees have a duty to ensure that schemes are run properly, and to act in the interest of members at all times. Whether, and to what extent, pension funds can be used to provide early retirement benefits will depend on the rules of particular schemes, and on the powers of trustees to make such awards; but I repeat that trustees have a duty to protect all members' rights. That point was raised by the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle).

According to our information, although there was a deficit in the Robertson scheme three years ago, recovery was made within six months. The latest solvency statements about the Robertson pension scheme put to the Department of Social Security in respect of its contracted-out status show no evidence of underfunding.

Mr. Miller: Will the Minister give the exact dates of those statements?

Mr. Taylor: I hope that there is enough good faith between the hon. Gentleman and me for him to accept that I will clarify that for him behind the Chair after the debate. He should, of course, feel free to share the information that I give him with other participants in the debate.

Trustees can make investments of any kind, but cannot normally invest more than 5 per cent. of a scheme's assets in the sponsoring employer or associated companies. That restriction substantially reduces the risk of loss should the employer become insolvent; but, if the employer does become insolvent, a trustee must be appointed who is entirely independent of the employer and any associated companies. The independent trustee is responsible for looking after the resources of a final salary scheme, and for protecting the interests of members. If there is a shortfall of assets in the fund, the deficit becomes a debt due from the employer to the trustees. It is the trustees' responsibility to pursue such a debt.

The protections to which I have referred are about to be strengthened. Important new measures, stemming from the Pensions Act 1995, will come into effect on 6 April. All those measures are geared towards safeguarding the security of pension funds and protecting members' rights. We must accept that the Act cannot be seen as an absolute guarantee that there could never be another Maxwell—as the hon. Gentleman pointed out—but it will introduce clear duties relating to the procedures that trustees must follow, and the controls that they must implement. That will increase trustees' vigilance in ensuring that pension schemes are properly administered and protected, and adequately funded.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): One of the crucial new checks will be the solvency requirement. In other words, pension schemes must have funds so that, whenever they are closed, they can afford to buy annuities. It was said at the time that it would have been better for the industry to have an insurance scheme, so that when such cases arose the whole industry would ensure that those who had paid into pension funds received their pensions. Sadly, the solvency requirement does not have such an effect.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is an acknowledged parliamentary expert on pensions, and I note his opinion with appropriate respect. I do not think, however, that he wants me to reopen that previous debate; he wanted to put a point to me, and I take it in that spirit.

There will be stricter rules on record-keeping, and the separation of pension scheme bank accounts from those of the company. Let me give a specific example: trustees will be required to set up and monitor a formal schedule of contributions due from the employer, and an amount that the employer fails to pay into the scheme by the due date will become a debt due to the trustees. Trustees will

[Mr. Taylor]

be expected to pursue that debt immediately, and will be required to make a report to the pensions regulator. New rules will be introduced to specify a minimum level of funds that schemes must hold to meet their liabilities, and the restriction on employer-related investment will be tightened.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): In the investigation that could be held under the Pensions Act, could the actuaries themselves be investigated for professional misconduct, given their potential role in failing to act appropriately to defend the pension fund?

Mr. Taylor: It would be a great mistake for me to prejudge the outcome or outcomes, or the action or lack of action, that may flow from my officials' consideration of the evidence that they will be given by the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston. I hope that the House will understand that I cannot make a judgment from the Dispatch Box.

The hon. Gentleman has called for my Department to undertake an inspection. As he and the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) know, the DTI has a range of powers at its disposal; but, as I have said, I will not make any prejudgment.

I will ask the investigation and enforcement directorate in my Department to consider the comments that have been made during today's debate. Should the hon. Gentleman have further evidence to support his call for an investigation, I invite him to send it to me, and I will refer it to the directorate for further consideration. He has said that he has substantial information at his disposal that he will give to me. However, I do not wish to prejudge the matter, and accordingly repeat my invitation to the hon. Gentleman and to other hon. Members to send me whatever evidence they have for proper consideration by my officials.

As my time draws to a conclusion, I invite the hon. Gentleman to accompany me—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up.

National Lottery

1.30 pm

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid–Sussex): I am delighted to have won the Speaker's lottery and to have secured the debate today on the national lottery. It will be the last Adjournment debate that I have in the House, and I am particularly pleased to have won it, because today is the birthday of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, who has done so much to advance the cause of the national lottery.

It was Santayana who said that there is no cure for birth and death save to enjoy the interval. One of the remarkable things about the national lottery legislation is that it has the specific purpose of increasing our enjoyment of life. Playing the lottery, we can all become—for a few seconds—dream millionaires. At that moment just before 8 o'clock when the balls are turning in that great wheel and before the first one comes out, we can all think about swimming pools, jacuzzis and holidays in the Caribbean. Perhaps just a few minutes later, after the bonus ball has come out, we are back to reality again—worrying about supper, the children, the mortgage, and so on—but for those few seconds we have had the thrill of a taste of champagne, perhaps, and that adds to the sparkle of life for most families in Britain today.

As we all know, the lottery has a very serious purpose as well: to raise money for good causes, which previously received little or nothing from the public sector. In that regard, it has been a howling success. There are no other words for it. It has greatly exceeded expectations. When I was Minister for the Arts and first pressed for the lottery, we talked about a possible turnover of £2 billion to £3 billion a year. In fact that has rapidly gone up to £5 billion or £6 billion a year.

It is commonplace to think of ourselves as a nation of grumblers. I often think that the Germans are worriers, that the French are optimists and that we love to carp and grumble, but it is impossible, other than on a few small specifics, to grumble about the lottery. It is transforming the face of Britain. Galleries, museums, libraries, sports tracks, football grounds, forests, churches, village halls are all being rebuilt, renewed, restored. So far, £3 billion has been committed to more than 19,000 projects.

It is fair to say that what the Medicis did for Florence and Napoleon did for Paris, the lottery is doing for Great Britain. I pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage and to my right hon. Friend the Member for the City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) for their tremendous commitment to getting the lottery on the road and ensuring its success.

It was not my intention today just to follow John Betjeman's words:

"Sing on, with hymns uproarious,
Ye humble and aloof,
Look up! and oh how glorious
He has restored the roof!"

It was my intention to talk rather more about the future of the national lottery and what might—and should—happen to it in the next five years, extending through the millennium.

In that time, inevitably, funding will largely move away from buildings and capital projects to current expenditure—particularly, for example, helping with the training and tuition fees of talented individuals: artists, sportsmen, dancers, potential Albert Finneys and Margot Fonteyns. The Arts Council's announcement last week that it would make lottery money available short term for 4,000 students in drama and dance who will start their courses in autumn 1997-98 was clearly part and parcel of that new development, that new dedication of lottery money.

I wholeheartedly applaud all of that. That is the right direction in which grant-giving bodies have to move, but I see dangers in it, the first of which—I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will not object to my saying this—is the increasing likelihood, as the lottery gets a little older and we become more accustomed to it, of Ministers tending, subtly and delicately, to try to override the grant-giving bodies and to back their own pet projects. It follows that the principle of additionality may be put at risk.

The House will remember that it was very much on the principle of additionality that the lottery legislation went through the House—that money raised by the lottery should be additional to the Treasury's commitment to public expenditure, for example, to the Arts Council. Preserving that principle is of absolute importance to the lottery, just as it is in the minds of those who buy their tickets every week: it is the basic principle on which the lottery was started.

Let us consider the terrible possibility—the unlikely possibility—of Labour winning the next election. We have already been threatened with a windfall tax, and I gather that there is a possibility that the windfall tax might be required to raise not £3 billion but as much as £10 billion. The first windfall that would be easily available to a Labour Secretary of State for National Heritage would, of course, be the £1.5 billion that goes to good causes: it would be all too easy to try to grab that and push it into a favourite project.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): When the right hon. Gentleman talks about additionality, will he bear in mind the charities that have suffered a loss of income as a result of the introduction of the national lottery? The additionality to which he refers does not apply to community charities, which are suffering. Will he address that point, as it is a significant factor?

Mr. Renton: I intend to address that specific point, because it is one area in relation to the grant-giving bodies that worries me, as it does the hon. Gentleman.

There is no firm, foolproof solution to the dangers, but if I may offer advice to those who are on the Front Bench after the election, when I shall have left the House, I would strongly counsel my right hon. Friend, who I very much hope will be in her post as Secretary of State for National Heritage, to agree a firm budget with the Treasury for a full five-year period, covering museums, galleries, the national heritage memorial fund, the Sports Council and the Arts Council, and to announce publicly the amount of Treasury funding. The Treasury should be tied to those figures. Then, if lottery money goes into an area where there is an overlap with grant in aid, such as tuition fees and training for students, that will not be able to reduce the Treasury element of funding, because the Treasury will be committed to firm figures that were publicly announced.

It is worth remembering that a 12 per cent. tax on the total lottery turnover goes to the Treasury—£600 million per year on a turnover of £5 billion. It is a voluntary tax, so if the lottery became unpopular for any reason, or were seen as a substitute for public expenditure which people properly expect the Government to provide, sales could fall off and that £600 million might disappear overnight.

My other advice is to the grant-giving bodies. They should form themselves into a consortium or an informal council at chairman and chief executive level, so as to work together and develop a common approach to the sponsoring Minister and to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, which would prevent their being picked off one by one by the Treasury in tight public expenditure rounds.

I agree with the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) that the position of charities should be reconsidered. Although the work of the Charities Aid Foundation shows that the income of the 500 largest charities continues to grow, albeit at a much slower pace than before, it is clear that smaller, community charities are suffering. They depend not on planned giving and covenants, but on raffles and on rattling boxes outside supermarkets on Saturday mornings.

Figures given to me by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations suggest that the total loss to charities was about £350 million in 1995, which is rather more than the £300 million that they received from the lottery. One possibility is that, as the millennium fund expires, some of that share of the lottery should be diverted to the National Lottery Charities Board. I am sure that the Minister will agree that that aspect requires further thought.

I am opposed to the mid-week draw, because it detracts from the Saturday draw. I regret the position of some newsagents and tobacconists. There may be two of them in a village, one with a national lottery machine and the other without. The one that does not have a machine can stand his turnover falling by 20 per cent. on Friday or Saturday because of the lottery, but if it were also to fall by 20 per cent. on Tuesday or Wednesday, he would be driven out of business. I have raised such cases with Camelot, which says that it has sufficient outlets and does not require any more. That is one of the dangers of the second lottery draw. There is also the danger of Camelot appearing too greedy, and it should be wary of that.

There is talk of keno—a sort of electronic perpetual bingo—being introduced. I played it at the Taj Mahal casino in Atlantic City and it is horribly addictive: all the dollars in my wallet were removed very quickly. I hope that Camelot will not introduce it in the United Kingdom.

On the other side of the coin is the 49s, which is being introduced by bookies and betting shops. At fixed odds, one can bet on three up, five up or the bonus ball. It presents a serious threat to the lottery as the bookies do not pay anything to good causes and do not give anything to charities. There is talk of £1 billion being knocked off the national lottery turnover if the 49s is not examined and perhaps stopped. The legislation needs clarification. No skill is required to play the 49s: it is clearly a lottery and seems to fall foul of the gaming legislation. I hope that the confusion between lottery and gaming legislation will be clarified.

[Mr. Renton]

Finally, I come appropriately to the millennium, which is now just over 1,000 days away. It should be a time for celebration, change and a new start. It is easy to carp about it and to ask why money is being spent on redoing the Greenwich peninsula, but that is the wrong approach. It is much more important for us and our constituents to have a positive attitude with a view to participating in local planning and enjoying the national celebrations.

I salute my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for her work in this area. In a recent lecture, she referred to the 11th century monk who wrote that the period immediately after the year 1000 saw the world clothing itself in a mantle of white churches. What a lovely epigram. What a lovely thought. I hope that out of the millennium celebrations Britain will clothe itself in a mantle of new and exciting buildings that will reflect this century and, like the museums at South Kensington, will be admired and used throughout the next century. If that happens, all of us who have been involved in the lottery—as I have been since I was Minister responsible for the arts—may remember with some justification Sir Christopher Wren's epitaph in St. Paul's cathedral: "If you seek his monument, look around you."

1.45 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) for initiating this debate on a subject that the House seems particularly and rightly fond of discussing. I know that he has a great interest in the lottery, having been involved in its introduction at an early stage.

The lottery has been enormously or, as my right hon. Friend would say, howlingly successful in its own terms, with sales far greater than anyone predicted when its licence was awarded, and awards more widespread and larger than anyone could have dreamed of. Total sales are fast approaching £11 billion, and an independent study by Terri la Fleur, a leading world lottery expert, has shown that the United Kingdom lottery is the most successful and efficient in the world. The mid-week draw, which was launched on 5 February, is building on that success.

As I have already mentioned, the lottery has been a huge success measured by the amount that it has raised for good causes. To date, a total of £3.1 billion has been raised for sport, the arts, charities, heritage and the millennium, with the distributing bodies making awards to more than 19,000 projects. The availability of such money for those sectors in such a short time is nothing short of a revolution, and it has been instrumental in many of the great advances made in the Department of National Heritage's areas of responsibility in the past almost five years.

It is also worth commenting on the way in which the lottery has already become a part of everyday national life. Camelot estimates that 65 per cent. of the adult population regularly play the lottery, and that around 90 per cent. have played at some time.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments about the relationship between lottery money and existing public expenditure. The Government have made it clear that the money raised by the lottery for good causes was—and is—intended to be additional to public expenditure. The Government will not reduce public spending programmes to take account of awards from the lottery.

That commitment does not mean that the Government can or will give automatic protection to programmes that are able to benefit from lottery funds: what we can afford to spend on such programmes will be decided in exactly the same way as we decide on other programmes not eligible for lottery funding. It would be absurd to give automatic protection to lottery-supported programmes when that protection is not available for other programmes.

No deal with the Treasury of the type interestingly proposed by my right hon. Friend is likely to be appropriate, even if it were possible to commit future Governments in advance. Whatever the affordable level of any given public expenditure programme, lottery funds are available to add to it—including projects similar to those which might once have fallen within that programme.

That approach is a sensible means of ensuring that with the public funds available—of which the lottery is a part—the real objectives for supporting the heritage, the arts, sport and charities are met. It follows that areas such as the national health service and education, which are clearly major continuing responsibilities of the Government, should be funded from public expenditure voted each year by Parliament, and should not rely on the public's propensity or otherwise to buy lottery tickets.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex is also worried that Ministers might try to ensure that lottery funding goes to projects that they favour. It was precisely to prevent such interference that the Government appointed the 11 lottery distributing bodies to take all specific funding decisions independently of the Government. My Department has also issued guidance to other Ministers and Departments explaining the part that they may or may not play in supporting lottery applications. I can assure my right hon. Friend that both we and the distributing bodies maintain a close watch to ensure that those rules are not broken.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex is also concerned about the introduction of the mid-week draw. Under the terms of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, the licensing of the draw was a matter for the Director General of the National Lottery, not the Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State emphasised, however, that the director general must ensure that the decision is compatible with the provisions set out in section 4 of the National Lottery etc. Act, which require the director general to exercise his functions in the manner that he considers most likely to ensure that the national lottery is run with all due propriety, that the interests of participants in the lottery are protected and, subject to those overriding considerations, that the revenue to the good causes is maximised.

The director general judged that the introduction of a mid-week draw was consistent with those duties, and allowed the licence to be changed accordingly. However, I take the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex about the two newsagents: it is a very difficult point to deal with and one that the Government should be aware of. The director general, especially, might consider it again with some rigour.

I cannot emphasise enough that the protection of players is the uppermost requirement in the mind of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My Department and the director general will monitor carefully the effect of the mid-week lottery to ensure that the interests of participants are not being undermined and that the players continue to receive the level of protection which Parliament intended when the Act was passed.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the new mid-week game, and one which has not been considered sufficiently—not by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Sussex, but by others less well informed outside the House—is the effect that it will have on the amount raised for good causes. Hon Members may be aware that sales of lottery tickets have been decreasing slightly in recent months. Experience in other countries suggests that the introduction of a mid-week draw is likely to halt that decline and increase the turnover of the draw game by about 20 to 30 per cent.—from about £70 million to between £85 million and £90 million per week—and is therefore likely to push the lottery's turnover back to its peak level of about £5.5 billion per year.

Sales to date have borne out that prediction with an overall increase in sales for the on-line game of 30 per cent, representing an increase of 30 per cent. in the amount raised for good causes. It should be remembered, however, that Camelot held super-draws with an increased jackpot for the first four of the five mid-week draws to date, and that the mid-week draws' true impact on overall sales will not be clear for some weeks.

I note the concerns of my right hon. Friend about the introduction of a keno game and his interesting anecdote about it stripping his pockets of his money. The Government and the director general have already made their views clear about keno. Although it would be for the director general to consider any application to run keno-style games, no such application has been made. I should make it clear that we view keno as at the harder end of the gambling spectrum and therefore not appropriate as part of the national lottery.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex also expressed concerns about betting shops taking bets on lotteries. I am sure that he is aware that the National Lottery etc. Act specifically prohibited bookmakers from taking bets on the national lottery, and despite some pressure from the industry the Government have not changed their view. Bookmakers are, however, taking bets on the Irish national lottery and their own new 49s game. Although we are keen to ensure that the national lottery is not associated with what we view as a harder form of gambling, regulation of the bookmaking industry is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who I understand is content with the developments. I shall, however, draw his attention to the concerns of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Sussex.

Mr. Renton: I think that it is right to say that the matter of the 49s is up for judicial review at the moment and therefore being actively considered. There clearly seems to be some confusion, some overlap, between gaming and betting law.

Mr. Sproat: That is certainly an argument.

The primary aim of the lottery is of course to raise money for good causes. A successful lottery bid brings a number of benefits for communities, including, for example, regeneration, job creation, new opportunities for businesses and tourism, and new and improved cultural and sporting facilities. We want to ensure that everyone derives reasonable benefits from the opportunities that the lottery has brought about.

Alongside the flagship projects, smaller awards are the quiet lottery success story, as the reader of any local newspaper can testify. More than 74 per cent. of awards announced to date have been for less than £100,000. Lottery funds are having a real impact on the lives of everyone right across the country. However, the Government are aware that some areas of the country are still not doing well enough from the lottery, and to that end shall shortly be launching a new information leaflet to guide those interested in making an application for lottery funding. We shall also be encouraging local business men and those from the professions to offer their services to groups who are not familiar with grant systems.

Mr. William O'Brien: I am grateful for the Minister's comment, because my constituency is one of the few that have received very little lottery funding. I believe that we are third or fourth from the bottom of the list. I hope that it will not be too long before the information is circulated so that my constituents and organisations in my constituency—I referred to the problems with smaller charities—will be able to take up the offer of improved distribution of lottery resources.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman has taken a long and admirable interest in the matter and, indeed, in the effect on charities. I will try to remember to send him a special copy of the leaflet. If he wishes, we could discuss how best to ensure that those who can benefit from the advice therein can be helped by him to make their applications so that his area gets its fair share of lottery awards.

In its first two and a half years of operation, the lottery has already made a remarkable difference to the capital infrastructure of good cause areas. Nevertheless, my Department is continuously reviewing the way in which the lottery works so as to achieve the best effect. After only approximately two years since the first awards were made, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has issued new policy directions to allow sports councils, arts councils and the heritage lottery fund greater flexibility in what they fund.

The sports councils have already launched revenue schemes under those new directions, which will provide support for our most talented athletes and attract and stage major international events in the United Kingdom. Further programmes to be announced later this year will provide community sports coaches and assist in identifying and developing talent in schools and sports clubs.

The arts councils have also launched revenue programmes under the new directions. The Arts Council of England has launched a two-stream revenue programme, "Arts For Everyone", aimed at established arts organisations—professional and amateur, youth or voluntary groups—putting together their first creative project, and at small professional arts organisations.

[Mr. Sproat]

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex will be interested to know that the first arts revenue awards under the new directions were announced today by the Arts Council of Wales. They include grants of £5,000 to the Abergavenny arts festival towards the running costs of a small literature festival and workshops for teenagers and £1,758 to Llandysul primary school—I apologise to the Welsh for not, I dare say, pronouncing that properly—to stage the musical show "Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" in Welsh.

On 8 August 1996, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State issued another new direction to the Arts Council of England, allowing it to fund a stabilisation programme for arts organisations. The purpose of the programme is to help arts organisations to gain long-term financial viability and to improve and secure management skills in those organisations. The programme will help organisations to consider and perhaps change their mission and the markets in which they operate, to inject new skills to help to achieve that mission, to provide balance sheet stability, and to deliver better value for money. The first successful applicants under the pilot stabilisation programme were announced in January.

The National Heritage Act 1997 will enable the heritage lottery fund to support a wider range of projects to provide greater public access to our heritage, support for education and youth-oriented projects and for information technology initiatives, and to preserve—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sri Lanka

1. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current political situation in Sri Lanka. [18294]

8. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current situation in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [18303]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Dr. Liam Fox): We believe that the tragic ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka can be resolved only through peaceful negotiation. We continue to support the Sri Lankan Government's efforts to find a solution and we have called on the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to reach a negotiated settlement.

Mr. Battle: In view of the continuing and escalating oppression of the Tamil people, particularly in the Jaffna province, may I urge the Minister to suggest to the United Nations that, in seeking a peaceful resolution to the conflict, it involves the world solidarity forum for justice and peace in Sri Lanka, which seeks to give a hearing to, among others, the more moderate Tamil voice in Sri Lanka. The forum is a well-respected body with international support. It is supported in my constituency by the Bishop and diocese of Ripon, who have had a long-standing relationship with Sri Lanka and are anxious that urgent action be taken to resolve this conflict and to achieve a peaceful resolution.

Dr. Fox: The situation in Sri Lanka is complex, but the political parties there, which already cover a wide spectrum of Sri Lankan society, are increasingly aware of the need for a negotiated settlement. To that end, it is important that they achieve in the first instance a negotiated devolution package, which they are working on at present. The House will no doubt wish all politicians in Sri Lanka well on that matter.

Mr. Gerrard: I welcome what the Minister has said, but he obviously appreciates that there is still a civil war in Sri Lanka and that Tamils from the north of the country particularly are trapped, effectively, between two warring armies and have no internal route of escape. He has said that the British Government are calling on both sides in the conflict to negotiate a settlement. Does he agree that there may potentially be a role for the British Government to do more than simply call for a settlement, and that, if the opportunity arose, the Government would be prepared to facilitate—and, if necessary, even mediate in—reaching a settlement, while accepting that, obviously, we cannot possibly impose a settlement from outside the country?

Dr. Fox: It is self-evident that the UK would neither be able nor would wish to impose any settlement on another democratic Commonwealth member. There are two parts to the hon. Gentleman's question. The first relates to the civilians and, of course, we remain concerned about the impact of the fighting on the civilian population in the north, particularly displaced persons in the Vani. We have impressed on the Sri Lankan Government the need to get humanitarian supplies through to those people. We are extremely impressed by the willingness of the Sri Lankan Government to do so.

On mediation and facilitation, we have always made it clear that our good offices are there should two parties in any dispute seek to use them, but both parties would need to do so and, at present, there is no sign that that will happen.

Romania

2. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals he has to improve relations between the United Kingdom and Romania. [18295]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): We are very keen to build on our excellent relations with Romania, which I recently visited. We have offered every assistance to the Romanian Government's ambitious reform programme. Later this week, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) plans to lead a trade mission there.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Secretary of State aware of the grave danger in the well-meaning donations of drugs to Romania by almost 700 charities in the United Kingdom? Has he heard that more than 60 children were killed in Haiti this year by a contaminated type of paracetamol which was donated by a major country? That incident is similar to one that occurred in Nigeria, in 1991, in which 100 children were killed. Has he read about the tragedy in Lithuania in which seven pregnant women were blinded by a drug intended for animal use, because they could not read the instructions, which were in English?

Is he aware that many companies in other countries gain tax and other financial advantages by not dumping drugs in their own country and instead sending them overseas? What will he do to reduce the number of deaths? Those very well-meant drug donations are leading to drug deaths.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is making some serious allegations. I think that we all wish to praise those charities and individuals who are trying to help Romania receive the drugs and other medical supplies that it urgently needs. Efforts must of course be made to ensure that there is no abuse in such arrangements. If he has evidence suggesting that there is a serious problem of the type that he mentioned in Romania, he should make it available so that the case can be properly investigated.

Kashmir

3. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had recently with the Indian Government regarding Jammu-Kashmir. [18296]

Dr. Liam Fox: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed Jammu and Kashmir last

month with Prime Minister Deve Gowda and Finance Minister Chidambaram in the margins of the World Economic summit, in Davos. I raised the subject in all my discussions when I visited Pakistan and India, from 26 February to 1 March.

Ms Lynne: Is the Minister aware that we are still receiving reports from Indian-controlled Kashmir of killings, torture and rape? Does he agree that a just solution that involves not only the Governments of India and Pakistan but the people of Kashmir must be found urgently? The situation is becoming even more urgent, as we now know that Pakistan and India are nuclear powers.

Dr. Fox: It has always been the Government's position that a solution to the Kashmir question must be between India and Pakistan, as the nations involved. However, it is also self-evident that we have a humanitarian interest in the welfare of ordinary Kashmiris. During my visit two weeks ago, I met Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and the Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir, and we discussed the very issues that the hon. Lady mentioned—the need for prosperity, order and reconstruction in Kashmir, for the sake of the welfare of ordinary Kashmiris. The Government attach great importance to that goal.

Mr. Lidington: Is my hon. Friend any more optimistic after his meetings with the two Kashmiri representatives about the chances of restoring respect for human rights and moving towards a political settlement that is acceptable to the people of Kashmir? Does he think that there will be any role for the United Kingdom in using its good office to help promote such a settlement?

Dr. Fox: At the risk of repeating myself, given my answer to a previous question, we make our good offices available should both sides of a conflict wish to use them. The settlement must be between India and Pakistan. It is extremely encouraging that the new Pakistani Government have used their large mandate to undertake an early dialogue with India. Overtures are being made in both capitals, and the responses are encouraging. We hope that a wider and deeper dialogue will emerge from those. I am delighted by the signs that high-level talks will be held later this month. That bodes well for the future.

Mr. Robin Cook: I congratulate the Minister on being the first Minister for decades to pay an official visit to Srinagar, and I join him in welcoming the forthcoming talks at ministerial level between India and Pakistan. Does he agree that, if there is to be a successful settlement to halt the loss of life and breach of human rights in Kashmir, it must be acceptable to the peoples of Kashmir? Will he assure the House that there will be no let-up in the pressure for information on what has happened to the missing hostages until they are released or their relatives are told the truth of what has happened to them?

Dr. Fox: To start with the right hon. Gentleman's second point, one of the main reasons for my visit to India and Pakistan was to discuss the hostages and show both Governments that the issue is high on our political agenda. We have made it quite clear that we continue in our efforts to resolve the matter. The right hon. Gentleman has the Government's complete assurance on that. We have always made it clear, as one of the Government's three points on a Kashmir settlement, that we believe in an improvement in human rights and a genuine political process that has to be underpinned by stability and prosperity. I am quite encouraged, therefore, by the return to civilian policing in Kashmir as increased civil order is a prerequisite to the solution that hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to see.

Hong Kong

4. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the funding of the education of employees of the Hong Kong Government being educated in British independent schools. [18299]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): Policy on the payment of education fees for the children of employees of the Hong Kong Government is a matter for the Hong Kong Government.

Mr. Jamieson: Is the Minister aware that education is a highly valuable British export and that some foreign Governments, such as Hong Kong, are paying for pupils to attend private schools here, some of which—for example, the Quantock school in Somerset—have been shown by the Office for Standards in Education to be seriously deficient? What measures does he propose to ensure that the Hong Kong Government receive the Ofsted report on Quantock school and, more importantly, what does he propose to do to make sure that the good reputation of many excellent schools and universities in Britain is not undermined by a small minority of seriously deficient private schools?

Mr. Hanley: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we make available information about British schools and colleges to countries throughout the world, not least through the British Council. As for the report to which the hon. Gentleman refers, what the Hong Kong Government choose to read is a matter for them. Perhaps it would be helpful to the hon. Gentleman, however, if I say that the Quantock school is not on the list of FCO-approved schools.

5. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of China about the future of Hong Kong. [18300]

Mr. Rifkind: I met Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen on 14 February. Most of our discussion focused on Hong Kong.

Mr. Davidson: Is the Minister aware of the great concern among Opposition Members about the Provisional Legislature and that many of us take the view that the Provisional Legislature as presently constituted is in breach of Sino-British agreements? What steps is he taking to make sure that the Chinese are aware of our position, which is that the role of the Provisional Legislature should be minimised until a proper legislature can be elected?

Mr. Rifkind: We very much agree that the proposal to replace the elected legislature by a provisional one is at

the very least contrary to the spirit of the joint declaration, and may be in breach of it. The joint declaration provides for an elective legislature, not one appointed by people who have themselves been appointed by the Chinese Government. We made that clear in a firm statement last December and said that we would be willing to have the matter tested by the International Court of Justice. That requires the agreement of both parties to a dispute and, so far, the Chinese have declined to agree to the ICJ being invited to rule on the matter.

Mr. Redwood: Does my right hon. and learned Friend intend to pass the £40 billion of reserves in Hong Kong as a free gift to China at the date of transfer, or would he consider levying a success fee on the colony to reflect the many good years of British administration, which has been so successful in building up the prosperity of the colony, as some of that money would be most welcome here?

Mr. Rifkind: While I understand my right hon. Friend's question and have some sympathy with the thought behind it, the reserves of the Hong Kong Government belong to Hong Kong. Therefore, I regret to inform my right hon. Friend that, when sovereignty passes to China, the reserves will pass with them, hopefully to the benefit of Hong Kong.

Sir Russell Johnston: Did the Foreign Secretary have an amicable meeting? If he were an independent-minded journalist in Hong Kong, would he feel confident after that meeting that he would be able to pursue his trade unfettered after the handover?

Mr. Rifkind: The Hong Kong economy remains remarkably robust. Economic growth has slumped to just 6 per cent., which people in most parts of the world would think fairly satisfactory. Confidence in Hong Kong is fragile because there is unavoidable uncertainty. I believe that Hong Kong opinion has welcomed the statement by the chief executive designate that all the senior officials of the Hong Kong Government are to continue in office. We also welcome that. However, some other developments, particularly on human rights, have been disturbing.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Bearing in mind this country's continuing legitimate interest in Hong Kong after 30 June, will my right hon. and learned Friend give serious thought to the establishment of a special committee of both Houses to monitor developments in Hong Kong up to 2000 and for the remainder of the 50 years written into the joint declaration?

Mr. Rifkind: Our interest in Hong Kong will certainly not cease on 30 June. Under the terms of the joint declaration, the Joint Liaison Group, which consists of British and Chinese officials, will continue to meet until at least 2000. We shall therefore have a continuing legal responsibility to help monitor the implementation of the joint declaration. I shall certainly undertake to give serious consideration to my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Intergovernmental Conference (Ministerial Group)

6. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many meetings of the ministerial group of the intergovernmental conference on a new European Union treaty Ministers have attended in 1997; and at which meetings the proposed protocol on the place of national parliaments was discussed. [18301]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): In answering this question, I ask for your indulgence for the second time, Madam Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is standing down at the next election and I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to him for all the work that he has put in, particularly his nine years as Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee, at a time when that Committee was less fashionable. As to his question, there have been two IGC meetings at ministerial level this year. The protocol on national Parliaments was last discussed on 25 November.

Mr. Spearing: I thank the Minister for his kind words and pay tribute to the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall (Sir R. Hicks)—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—who has had 22 years on the Committee against my 18. He has presided with impartial courtesy.

Will the Minister tell those at the conference that the Select Committee and, I think, all hon. Members, have doubts about the advisability of giving COSAC—the informal meeting of representatives of member state Parliaments—specific powers or duties, or even hinting at that? National Parliaments are the unique democratic institutions that express the continued existence of nations and the continued democratic freedom of their peoples.

Mr. Davis: I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point. I add my voice to his tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South–East Cornwall (Sir R. Hicks). Many people have put a lot of work into the Committee.

The hon. Gentleman made an important point. I have argued about the importance of leaving to nation states what their Parliaments do and how they structure their democratic accountability. The Government have supported the more informal and less constrained approach argued for by the Committee and put forward in the Irish text.

Sir Robert Hicks: I remind my right hon. Friend that, at the Dublin meeting of the European affairs committees of national Parliaments, it was agreed unanimously that all documents, regulations and directives emanating from the Commission should go to national Parliaments at least four weeks before the Council of Ministers takes any decision on the provisions contained in those documents. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government fully support that position to allow due scrutiny of all the provisions emanating from Brussels?

Mr. Davis: I shall say more than that. The proposal that there should be a legal requirement written into the treaty came from a Select Committee, supported by the Government. It is probably unique for a protocol to be put into a substantive treaty in that way. We shall support the proposal, because we were the first advocates of the argument.

Ms Quin: I join the Minister in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South

for all the work that he has done to ensure proper scrutiny of European legislation.

In the few remaining opportunities that the Minister will have to attend European meetings, will he explain to his colleagues and the House why the Government have so frequently ignored recommendations from the European Scrutiny Committee for a debate on the Floor of the House? Will he take a leaf out of the Swedish Government's book and allow for much greater scrutiny of the second and third pillars of the European Union—common foreign and security policy, and justice and home affairs—which, so far, have had little scrutiny?

Mr. Davis: I say two things to the hon. Lady. First, she should read the Select Committee's report, which makes it clear that our scrutiny procedure is as good as any in Europe—a point that she has obviously not taken on board. Secondly, with respect to the treatment of second and third pillar proposals, third pillar matters, which have legislative import, are obviously brought to this House. It is significant that we argue for unanimity on those actions, which makes the Government's accountability to the House absolute.

Sir Irvine Patnick: Did my right hon. Friend have an opportunity to see the reported comments of the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) in *The Times* of 7 March, where he undertook to make surrenders and six changes to the Government's policy? Is that not an abdication of Labour's responsibility? Will it not undermine the British negotiating position?

Mr. Davis: I did see the report of the right hon. Gentleman's comments at the weekend. My hon. Friend is right. The Labour party has undertaken to make six surrenders of British sovereignty in six weeks. If it were ever in government, we would never get those back.

Iran

7. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's relations with Iran. [18302]

Mr. Rifkind: We have serious concerns about many Iranian policies; until those are addressed satisfactorily, there can be no question of Iran having normal relations with the international community.

Mr. Purchase: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. May I remind him that a Select Committee recently completed an inquiry into arms to Iraq, during which papers that had been promised in the House were denied to that Committee? Even the Crown jewels procedure was denied to that Committee in respect of certain papers. Why do the Government intend to subject some 3,500 documents taken from the Astra files to public interest immunity certificates when it was those files that first disclosed the arms to Iran scandal and when the House has said that it will use those certificates much more sparingly? Will he explain his and other Departments' actions in that matter?

Mr. Rifkind: This question is about Iran and I am not certain about the relevance of the hon. Gentleman's supplementary. Any proposals that involve the use of public interest immunity certificates are subject to well-recognised criteria. As the hon. Gentleman knows, those criteria have been reformed in the light of the Scott inquiry's recommendations. The hon. Gentleman can therefore feel satisfied that there are proper safeguards.

Sir Cyril Townsend: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that neither western Europe's critical dialogue nor the United States' policy of dual containment have been particularly successful in recent years? When a new course is being decided, will he resist the temptation to turn Iran into a pariah state, beyond the bounds of the international community? Does he agree that Teheran is just the sort of place where a British ambassador, with his skills and expertise, would have plenty of work to do?

Mr. Rifkind: We have made it clear that we would not be attracted by proposals for economic sanctions unless they were likely to have the support of the United Nations Security Council as a whole, and that is not likely to arise. However, it is simply not possible to have normal relations with Iran. There have been significant examples, which, I am afraid, continue, of Iran assisting subversion and of the likelihood that it supports terrorist organisations. We have a particular problem with regard to the British citizen, Salman Rushdie. That continues to see no improvement whatever, and some aspects have deteriorated in recent weeks. Against that background, we regret that it is not possible to have proper relations with that country.

Mr. Fatchett: We certainly agree with the Foreign Secretary's condemnation of Iran's record on human rights and involvement in terrorism. Against that background, can he explain why, in the very week in which the regime in Iran yet again confirmed the fatwah against Salman Rushdie and increased the price on his head, the Government decided to sponsor a trade fair in Teheran? Why do the Government indulge in such actions when it is clear that the signals give comfort to the regime in Iran and condone its behaviour? Is it not clear that, rather than being tough on terrorism, the Government are prepared to trade with anybody?

Mr. Rifkind: I was waiting for the hon. Gentleman to say whether any future Labour Government would break economic links with Iran and cease to trade with it. I explained to the House a few moments ago that we do not believe in economic sanctions. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman nevertheless felt that he had to continue with his supplementary. There may be a difference of view between the Government and the Opposition: we believe that economic links with Iran are sensible and should not be discontinued. If the hon. Gentleman disagrees, he should have said so and not used weasel words.

Lady Olga Maitland: What steps is my right hon. and learned Friend taking to monitor the serious build-up of weapons in Iran, far in excess of its national needs? Is he aware that the build-up is causing great concern in the Gulf states, which feel that their security is being threatened?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, I very much agree with my hon. Friend. This morning, I met the Defence Minister of Saudi Arabia, and I know that many of the moderate countries

in the region are extremely concerned about the expansion of the Iranian military capability. Iran recently purchased Russian submarines, and there is concern that it may be seeking to advance a nuclear capability, so it is necessary to monitor those matters carefully and to do all that is in our power to dissuade Iran from such a course of action.

Intelligence Services

9. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the work of the United Kingdom intelligence services overseas referred to in the Intelligence and Security Committee's annual report 1996. [18304]

Mr. Rifkind: It is the policy of Her Majesty's Government not to comment on matters connected to the intelligence services.

Mr. Cohen: Was the Committee correct in criticising the intelligence services? Who provides the services' direction and objectives? Are they still obsessed with Russian spies and facilitating arms deals, when they should be tackling the flood of drugs entering the country and helping those resisting tyrants such as Saddam Hussein? Who seriously checks whether they give value for money?

Mr. Rifkind: The intelligence services operate in respect of any action that could be a threat to the security of the country and do not confine themselves to one foreign state. They act under guidelines laid down by the Government. We supported the creation of a Committee of the House to provide some supervision for the first time; the hon. Gentleman might have acknowledged that fact.

Kashmir

10. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received since 1 January from British citizens supporting the case for a free and independent state of Kashmir. [18305]

Dr. Liam Fox: We continue to receive occasional letters supporting the case for a free and independent state of Kashmir. We have received seven such representations so far this year.

Mr. Davies: Does the Minister accept that many of us will welcome the sentiment expressed by the Prime Minister in Pakistan in January, that the solution to the problems in Kashmir lies with the Governments of India and of Pakistan and the Kashmiri people? Will he help to give some practical effect to those excellent sentiments by urging Britain's permanent representative at the United Nations to take the lead in incorporating those principles into a future resolution of the General Assembly?

Dr. Fox: We have always made it clear that we advocate a genuine political process in Kashmir in which the aspirations of the population can be accommodated. The Prime Minister was reiterating that in the remarks in Lahore to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We have made our position very clear: it is a matter for India and Pakistan to sort out. What our position lacks in novelty it makes up for in commendable consistency. We have supported that policy in the past, we support it now, and we shall support it in our fifth term.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend put all the pressure he can on all concerned with the Kashmir problem, because it is a great tragedy for the people of the area? Will he press the Governments of India and Pakistan to meet until the problem is finally resolved and, of course, involve the people of Kashmir in the process?

Dr. Fox: My hon. Friend is right; we should use our excellent links with India and Pakistan to encourage dialogue. I am not sure that I would use the word "pressure". We should encourage our friends in the region to talk. I welcome the high-level talks that are to take place later this month. Unlocking the difficulties in Kashmir would create an opportunity for the wider development of SAARC, the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation. The political and economic development of the region can only benefit all the people of the region, including Kashmir.

Mr. Corbett: Was the Minister given assurances when he visited Pakistan that the regime would respect the integrity of an independent Kashmir? In welcoming, as we all do, the coming talks between the Indian and Pakistan Governments, will he make it clear that the good offices of the British Government are available before they are requested?

Dr. Fox: This is becoming an advertisement session for the good offices of the United Kingdom. They are, as I have said three times, available for those who wish to use them, but both parties in a dispute have to ask us to become involved. India and Pakistan are opening up a dialogue; we welcome and encourage that. I was reassured by my talks with Ministers in the new Pakistan Government that they are committed to moving the dialogue forward. I think that the House can look forward with more optimism than for some time to dialogue and reconciliation being started properly.

Libya

11. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken in respect of sanctions against Libya in the last 10 days. [18306]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): As part of a continuing process, we have in the past 10 days reaffirmed to five Governments that sanctions must remain in place until the Lockerbie accused are brought to trial in Scotland or the United States.

Mr. Dalyell: Is it not to be marvelled at that, five long minutes ago, the Foreign Secretary said that we must have sanctions against Libya, but not against Iran? The contrast is extraordinary. This was a crime that the Iranians may well have committed and which the Libyans almost certainly did not. Have any of the five Ministers sitting on the Front Bench seen with their own eyes—a Scottish QC might have been curious about this—what evidence the Crown Office adduces in the case against Libya?

On the Americans, having drawn the attention of Ministers to *Paris Match*, *The Scotsman* and the case of James Thurman, who is accused of forging forensic evidence, has any Minister found out whether Britain has any evidence against Libya that does not depend on dubious, dodgy American sources?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The hon. Gentleman has managed to fit four questions into one but, with your indulgence, Madam Speaker, I shall answer all four. On Iran, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said that the problem is that the United Nations Security Council would be most unlikely to consent to sanctions. In the case of Libya, we are dealing with United Nations Security Council sanctions. On the evidence against the Libyan accused, I am satisfied that we have evidence—

Mr. Dalyell: Has the Minister seen it?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I shall come to that.

I am satisfied that we have evidence that justifies taking the case forward. I say that not because I have seen the evidence but because three successive Lords Advocate have examined it. They are all leading lawyers and they are all satisfied that there is evidence that justifies us in pursuing the case. The hon. Gentleman has no reason to criticise that approach.

On his fourth question, it is true that Mr. Thurman has been transferred—not suspended—but the case against the Libyans does not depend on any evidence that he might give. Forensic analysis was also done at the Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment. Professor Caddy made it clear that the evidence in that case and others was a true measure of the presence of the explosive RDX.

Arms Exports (Belarus, Ukraine and Russia)

12. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the republics of Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation on arms and armament exports. [18307]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We last held bilateral discussions on these issues with Belarus in April 1996, Ukraine in December 1995 and the Russian Federation in February 1997.

Mr. Cousins: The Minister will be aware that the spread of Russian military technology means that this country is contemplating the purchase of a staggeringly expensive anti-missile defence system. He will also realise that the countries of the former Soviet Union have on the arms markets of the world long-range sea-skimming missiles and cruise missiles, and are contemplating the sale of long-range anti-aircraft missiles to Cyprus. Can the Minister assure the House that we have actively under consideration as a high priority a mutual ban on missile technology—whether it is skim, cruise or ballistic, and whether the targets are naval, aircraft or on the surface? That is essential to the defence of this country.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman means by a "mutual ban", but we have no plans for a bilateral treaty of that type between ourselves and Russia. We are looking towards the possibility of a widely agreed rundown of arms of all types, particularly weapons of mass destruction. We last had discussions with Russia on arms sales in February, and we have specifically expressed our concern to that country about the missile sales to Cyprus and Iran. We keep a close watch on everything going on in this matter.

Mr. Viggers: Has my hon. Friend been briefed on the fact that some 234 out of the 450 members of the Russian Duma have joined a new anti-NATO group in the Duma? Does he think that this reflects a feeling of uncertainty and instability resulting from the present expansion of NATO? As NATO expands, will my hon. Friend undertake to keep very much in mind the fact that Partnership for Peace offers a good forum in which all issues, including arms control, can be discussed, and that it can help to assuage the concerns of Russia?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The Government are well aware of the concerns in the Duma and elsewhere in Russia regarding the expansion of NATO. We feel that it is important for security in central Europe, the west and the world generally that NATO expands, but we are conscious also of the legitimate concerns of Russia. We are hoping to take forward a Russian-NATO charter at the same time as the Madrid summit, and I hope that that will be put in place. I agree with my hon. Friend that the strengthening of Partnership for Peace and other security associations is a necessary part of the continuing trend towards a safer world.

Israel

13. **Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about monitoring arrangements for the EU-Israel association agreement. [18308]

Mr. Hanley: We, our EU partners and the Commission will monitor closely all aspects of the EU-Israel association agreement when it enters into force, as we do all such agreements.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: As the Israeli Government's plans to proceed with the Har Homa settlement have been almost universally denounced—including by the British Government—will my right hon. Friend undertake at the imminent meeting of the political committee of the EU to press for the EU to express its profound opposition to those plans and for the introduction of extensive monitoring arrangements of the EU-Israel association agreement in all its aspects?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend raised the latter subject when we discussed this matter in Committee. I gave an assurance then that we would look at this matter during the current discussions with our EU partners to ensure that human rights monitoring is carried out as frequently as possible. I hope that progress can be made tomorrow, but that remains to be seen.

As far as Har Homa is concerned, it bears repeating that—as the British ambassador to the UN made clear only last week to the Security Council—we regard all settlement building in occupied territory as illegal and as an obstacle to peace. Har Homa is a particularly sensitive case, because building a settlement there would pre-empt the final status talks concerning the future of Jerusalem.

Mr. Janner: In view of the Government's unparalleled recent experience of the matter, will the Minister proffer to Prime Minister Netanyahu some advice on how to control an unruly Cabinet without making unreasonable concessions to members of that Cabinet?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. and learned Gentleman should learn a lesson from the Israeli Cabinet—that coalitions, if ever considered, do not work very well.

Mr. Sumberg: When people take the easy route of criticising the state of Israel in these matters, while enjoying the peace and security of living in London or Canterbury, will my right hon. Friend remind them that Israel is a democracy, that it has a responsibility to its electorate and that in human rights it has a record that its neighbours would do well to emulate?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. We should never forget that Israel is a genuine democracy and that democracies sometimes throw up rather strange results—happily, for the past 18 years, our democracy has produced the right result. Democracy in Israel is extremely important and I hope that democracy will spread in the Palestinian Authority and that the rights of Palestinians and their legislation will develop accordingly. Human rights are not, after all, subject only to the whims of an electorate, but are of international concern. Both sides in that region should recognise that we take human rights very seriously and that human rights breaches—whether by Israelis or by Palestinians—will be treated equally.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Will the Minister tell us what has been the response of Her Majesty's Government to the rather disturbing development over the weekend, when the United States used its veto in the Security Council to prevent discussion of Israeli policy towards settlements? Is not that a particularly disturbing development, given that Israel's determination to press ahead with Har Homa is not only putting the entire peace process at risk, but—as King Hussein's rather anxious intervention in the past 24 hours demonstrates—undermining the stability of the whole of the middle east?

Mr. Hanley: I understand the hon. and learned Gentleman's point, but the position of the United Kingdom and the United States are not that far apart. We agree that settlements are an obstacle to peace and that Israeli plans undermine the establishment of the trust that is absolutely vital to the successful negotiation of final status talks. The Americans have made their position clear. I believe that there is not so much a difference of view as a difference of tactics—the difference is one of tactics, not of policy. We both hope that we can persuade Israel to continue with the interim agreement, which is an international treaty, and that peace and prosperity will come to the region.

Mr. Batiste: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that about 70,000 Palestinians currently have permits to work in Israel? Is not the Europe-Israel association agreement designed to create greater prosperity and more jobs, both in Europe and in the middle east, for Palestinians and Israelis? Is not the creation of prosperity the basic building block of peace?

Mr. Hanley: I could not agree more: peace breeds prosperity and prosperity breeds peace. There is no doubt that the EU-Israel association agreement is an important part of helping to spread prosperity between Europe and Israel and I hope that progress on the EU-Palestine agreement will follow. We are pleased that we have agreed with our European partners an initiative, which I believe my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State originated, for the EU special representative in that area to carry out a proper study of the economy of the Palestinian people, because there is little doubt that, unless it improves, frustration will grow, which might result in danger.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister paid tribute to the presence of the EU representative. Will he acknowledge that there is a need for democracy on the Palestinian side? Will he welcome the move for Hamas to become more a political rather than a terrorist group? Will he also recognise, in the light of a concomitant democracy, that proportional representation knocks democracy off its hinges completely, as it places the emphasis on minority groups rather than on the centre?

Mr. Hanley: I shall not, in answer to the hon. Gentleman's last point, comment on electoral systems, which are the choice of the countries concerned. I say only that the hon. Gentleman is right; we need to make progress in all aspects of the peace process. I believe that Mr. Moratinos, the EU special representative, is doing an excellent job. He was here less than two weeks ago, when he met my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and me, and I believe that we have full confidence in what he is doing.

Royal Family (Overseas Visits Costs)

15. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent by his Department on providing clothes for members of the royal family travelling overseas on official visits in the current financial year. [18311]

Mr. Rifkind: This Department has spent £15,259 so far in the current financial year on clothing costs for members of royal parties undertaking official overseas visits at the request of the Government.

Mr. Banks: I like a bit of decent gear myself, but that seems rather a lot of money to spend on royal clothes. I understand that, the year before, £47,000 was spent. Several members of the royal family, especially the Kents and Gloucesters, seem to visit countries with broadly similar climates but never seem to want to wear the same suit or dress twice. Why? Would it not save money for the taxpayer if there were a royal central pool of clothes—*[Interruption.]* It is a very serious

point. Members of the royal family could then recirculate them, which would be of use to them and to the hard-pressed taxpayer.

Mr. Rifkind: Regarding the hon. Gentleman's initial comments, I think the rest of his question illustrates why he is unlikely to be called on to represent Her Majesty's Government on overseas visits.

Mr. Banks: I did not need the Foreign Secretary to tell me that.

Mr. Rifkind: I think that is the only point we agree on.

The hon. Gentleman should reflect on the fact that, when members of the royal family go abroad, their entitlement, and that of those who accompany them, to some assistance with clothing applies only when they undertake visits at the express request of Her Majesty's Government. I also emphasise that only members of the royal family who are not in receipt of the civil list receive such assistance.

Sir David Steel: Has the Secretary of State reflected, in answer to the would-be mayor of Greater London, that he must have seen with his own eyes that, when our royal family travel abroad, their travel arrangements and entourages are conspicuously more modest than those of presidents or vice-presidents of republics throughout the world?

Mr. Rifkind: The right hon. Gentleman is entirely correct. I believe that this country benefits enormously from the ability of members of the royal family to travel abroad, and I pay special tribute to the remarkable achievement of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales in his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, which I believe made a very substantial contribution to this country's relationship, not only with that country, but with all the countries of the region.

Middle East Peace Process

17. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new initiatives he is planning to assist the middle east peace process. [18313]

Mr. Hanley: We will continue to support the middle east peace process through our close contacts with all the parties involved. The UK played a leading role in the United Nations Security Council debate on 6 March, and on 10 March my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed with the United States Secretary of State how the international community could lend support most effectively to the peace process. With our full backing, the EU special envoy, Miguel Moratinos, has built up a constructive dialogue with both parties.

Mr. Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whereas Israel is a secure and mature democracy, alongside it, Lebanon is a country with a democratic tradition and a strong desire for a democratic future which is frustrated at the moment by the fact that, unlike Israel, which is secure militarily within its own borders, it has not one, but two, occupying armies in different parts of the country? What further steps does my right hon. Friend believe he, with others, can take to try to unscramble the impossibly complicated situation that exists in the Lebanon, building on the Wye plantation discussions?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend makes the important point that many countries in the region need a better future—and, indeed, a better present. Young Israelis are losing their lives in southern Lebanon nearly every day—certainly every week. I know that Israel wants a comprehensive peace in the region as much as anyone. Lebanon wants it as well. Prime Minister Hariri told me when I was last in Beirut that, while there is a great desire for peace in Lebanon, they want peace at the same time as the Syrian track is concluded. I hope that there will be an early resumption of talks on the Syrian track, building—as my hon. Friend said—on the progress that was achieved at the Wye plantation.

Mr. Ernie Ross: The Minister will recall that, while we were discussing the EU-Israel association agreement in the Delegated Legislation Committee, the Israeli Cabinet was meeting to decide to go ahead with the Har Homa settlement. Many of us said at the time that the agreement should include a monitoring capacity or it would lead to nothing. Has the Minister read reports that the Israelis raided the offices of the National Democratic Institute in East Jerusalem, which is affiliated with the Democratic party in the United States of America? That shows that the Israelis cannot tell friend from foe, and emphasises the need for a monitoring capacity. Will he also confirm that our excellent consul general in Jerusalem will attend the discussions in Gaza this weekend called by Yasser Arafat in order to build on the peace process?

Mr. Hanley: I think that I can take hon. Members on this side of the House with me in paying tribute to the work of the hon. Gentleman and others on the Palestinian cause and the cause of peace generally in that region.

I have talked about Har Homa in forthright terms, but we must make more progress on redeployment in the interim agreement. I believe that we should see more progress on the airport and the port in Gaza, safe passage between Gaza and the west bank, more extensive redeployment in the second and third phases than we have seen so far, and a lifting of barriers to the Palestinians generally. That would improve the economy, which would help Israeli security. As I have said before, I think that Har Homa is a serious problem that must be addressed. It is a danger to peace.

EU Political Co-operation

18. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are his main objectives in respect of political co-operation for the forthcoming European Council meeting in Amsterdam. [18314]

Mr. David Davis: We will want to reach agreement in Amsterdam on a range of practical measures in the intergovernmental conference, which are designed to improve the effectiveness of political co-operation.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does my hon. Friend agree that the horrifying levels of unemployment afflicting Germany

and France are proof of the total failure of the European social model? Will he continue to reject that model? Will he confirm that the Government are determined to retain full control of our economic and employment policies?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The tragedies in the German employment market and recent events in Belgium and France are cause for great regret. That is a lesson for all of us, which is not lost on Toyota—which Labour Members like to quote—Nissan, or the German head of Jaguar. They all recognise the dangers of the social chapter, the problems that it would cause our economic and employment policies, and the consequences of relinquishing policy in an area where one has succeeded to people who have failed.

Mr. Robin Cook: Has the Minister seen the letter, which appeared in yesterday's *Financial Times*, from more than 20 leading industrialists expressing their dismay at an arm's-length policy towards Europe? Is he aware that today's *Financial Times* carries two letters: one from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, saying that the industrialists were entirely right; another from the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), saying that it was all empty rhetoric and bogus fears? With which of those Conservative views does he agree—or will he pretend that he agrees with both of them?

Mr. Davis: If the right hon. Gentleman had listened to the radio yesterday, he would have heard my view about the letter. It is very straightforward. No one challenges the fact that the single market—which, after all, this Government virtually invented and pushed through the European Union—is of value to Britain, and of more value to Britain than any other country because Conservative policies have produced our economic success and given us the ability to exploit that market.

However, a number of people, including, I am sure, the right hon. Gentleman, tried to represent that concern about leaving Europe as a challenge to deal with the political threat that Europe makes to the sovereignty of Britain. We can deal with that threat through our robust negotiating stance without jeopardising the major advantage that we get from Europe and the economic opportunities that come from it.

Mr. Legg: Will my hon. Friend confirm that any delay to the timetable for monetary union that involved monetary union taking place later than 1 January 1999 would require a treaty amendment?

Mr. Tony Banks: The answer is no.

Mr. Davis: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman is correct. Our view is that we must, first and foremost, ensure that any monetary union that goes forward works. If there is any fudging on it, we should not go forward.

Nigeria

19. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Nigeria. [18315]

Dr. Liam Fox: We remain extremely concerned about the human rights situation in Nigeria.

Mr. Burden: I welcome the Government's expression of concern, which so many of us feel about the human rights situation in Nigeria, and ask the Minister to do two things: first, call clearly for Chief Abiola and the other people who are in prison on the basis of their political beliefs to be released quickly; secondly, if the regime in Nigeria has evidence against detainees, call for them to be brought to trial, rather than left in prison without trial.

It is important that there is consistency on the part of the British Government. Will the Minister make representations to the Home Office? It sits ill with his statement that the Home Office is appealing against the decision of an adjudicator to grant political asylum to a torture victim from Nigeria. The fact that he was tortured was established by independent medical evidence. The Home Office should not attempt to deport someone who was the victim of torture by that regime.

Dr. Fox: You, Madam Speaker, would not, I am sure, allow me to trespass on Home Office territory. On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, we fully support the Commonwealth ministerial action group position and regularly reinforce that message to Nigeria. It calls for the immediate release of all political prisoners, including Chief Abiola; the restoration of a democracy in which all can participate; the early resolution of the case of the Ogoni 19; and a review of prison conditions.

We want those steps to be taken as soon as possible. The Government are deeply disappointed that the two United Nations Commission for Human Rights thematic rapporteurs have not been able to visit Nigeria and fulfil their mandate. That causes us concern. We will consider with our EU, Commonwealth and other partners the scope for further action at the UN Commission for Human Rights in the light of the report, when we have it.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Opposition welcome the Minister's remarks about political prisoners. I invite him once again to address the legitimate question raised by hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden). If the Foreign Office view is that the situation in Nigeria is bad and deteriorating, it is incomprehensible that the Home Office—part of the same Government—is not prepared to take the same view in respect of those fleeing political pressures in Nigeria.

Dr. Fox: The job of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in this case is to make it clear to Nigeria what we think about the current situation there. We are extremely concerned about the human rights situation. I have laid out the position that we pushed through CMAG, and we intend to continue to push that position. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman raises his question with the Home Office and the Ministers who have responsibility for that matter.

Israel

23. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations between Britain and Israel. [18319]

Mr. Rifkind: They are excellent, as demonstrated by the recent state visit of President Weizman.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for welcoming the recent visit by the Israeli President, during which the President offered a reciprocal invitation to Her Majesty the Queen. Many hope that that invitation will be accepted in the near future.

Mr. Rifkind: We are delighted that the President's state visit was so successful. Reciprocal state visits are considered with great care and sensitivity. I note my hon. Friend's remarks.

Mr. Faulds: May I preface my question with an apology for turning up so late for foreign affairs questions? As you will recall, Madam Speaker, I have been an assiduous attender for many years. I have the best excuse in the world: I was entertaining to luncheon one of the most distinguished cultural figures in Britain, to whom the nation should be deeply grateful. I do not wish to publicise my name along with his. I am a mite in the cultural world; this chap is a magnifico.

May I now take up the point made in the question? The last thing we need now is good relations between Britain and Israel. The Israeli Government have behaved disgracefully in trying to pay no attention whatever to the Oslo agreements. Is it not time that the British Government made strong representations to President Clinton to the effect that there is no hope whatever of peace in the middle east for as long as the American Zionist lobby runs American foreign policy?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman can best be described as a magnificent mite. I think that that covers all the qualities that he has displayed for many years.

Let me deal with the hon. Gentleman's substantive question. Of course we are conscious of the great concern about the current state of the peace process, but I think that the hon. Gentleman was unfair in reaching his conclusion. There have been important and beneficial developments—the Hebron agreement, the release of female Palestinian prisoners and a number of other developments. Nevertheless, we share the fear, especially in the light of the recent Har Homa announcement, that that could involve a serious setback for the process. We hope that the Israelis will consider carefully before implementing the decision that was announced recently.

Electronic Devices (Madam Speaker's Statement)

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: I undertook yesterday to make a statement about the use of electronic devices by Members in the Chamber. I have previously ruled that Members who carry such devices which make a noise should make certain that they turn off the audio function of the instrument before coming into the Chamber. I can have no objection to instruments that merely vibrate so as to attract the attention of the bearer. Clearly, many Members carry such instruments, and they can serve a useful and unobtrusive purpose.

Yesterday, an hon. Member used an electronic device to raise a point of order. He appeared to be receiving information on a small screen—[*Laughter.*] I did not think that hon. Members found it so amusing yesterday. He appeared to be receiving information on a small screen, relayed to him from outside the Chamber. I strongly deprecate such practices. For any Member to be prompted in that way by an outside group is totally unacceptable.

I am aware that various kinds of such instruments exist, and that, carried in handbag or wallet or even on the wrist, they can provide the owner with useful information. Provided that they are silent, I can have no objection to such devices—and, even if I had an objection, I do not see how I could prevent Members from bringing them into the Chamber. I am not, however, prepared to accept the use of such instruments as an aide memoire by a Member who is addressing the House. Similar considerations apply to earpieces that are used to receive messages. In future, I shall order a Member who is seen to be indulging in such a practice to resume his or her seat immediately. That rule will be applied in Committees of the House as well as in the Chamber.

For the avoidance of doubt, I should make it clear that nothing that I have said is intended to affect Members with a declared disability who may require technical support to carry out their duties. Their requirements will be individually determined in the light of their particular circumstances.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On a point of order, Madam Speaker—on that point.

Madam Speaker: Points of order are taken after statements.

Social Services

3.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the Government's White Paper on the future of social services in England and Wales.

Local authority social service departments were created in roughly their present form in 1971. They are responsible for social care services for a wide variety of people, among them elderly people, those with physical or learning disabilities and mentally ill people, as well as children who would otherwise be at risk of neglect or abuse. The many local authority members, directors and staff who over that long period have built those services deserve credit for what has been achieved.

The Government believe that the growing size and importance of social service departments make necessary a major reassessment of their role and structure. Today's White Paper sets out a package of proposals for the reform of social service provision. The Government will implement those proposals in a social services reform Bill that we shall introduce early in the next Parliament.

Social service departments currently combine three responsibilities that sit uneasily together: first, they assess care needs and use public money to commission care; secondly, they provide directly a range of social care services; and, thirdly, they regulate private and voluntary sector providers of social care services. The centrepiece of the Government's social services reform Bill will be the separation of those three functions.

The Bill will provide that social service departments should in future concentrate on their role as assessors of care need and commissioners of care services. It will require each social service authority to publish separate accounts for its assessment and commissioning function, and it will provide for the making of secondary legislation that will set out the quality and value-for-money issues on which social service departments will be required to publish performance indicators. Those indicators will allow council tax payers to examine the performance of their own social service department and to compare its performance with that of other equivalent departments.

The Bill will also amend the power of social service authorities to provide social care services. At present, social service authorities have a general power to provide such social care services as they think fit to meet local needs. The Government propose to amend that power to provide that, in respect of residential and domiciliary services for adults, the power can be used only when an authority can show that direct provision of service by the local authority is necessary to meet a need that cannot be met locally by the non-statutory sector.

The legislation will require formal reviews of existing direct provision for adults to be conducted periodically by each authority; those reviews will be transparent and the views of local interested parties will be sought. The law will place a strong and clear onus of proof on authorities wishing to retain existing direct provision or to expand their commitment to directly provided services. The criteria against which the review will have to be carried out will be set out in regulations.

The third element of the social services reform Bill will be a new structure for the regulation of social care and nursing home provision. The Government believe that it

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is important that that function is separated from others currently carried out by social service departments. We also believe that the standards that are required by regulation should be applied to both public and private sector provision, and that separate regulation of care homes by health and social service authorities, which can currently lead to wasteful duplication of effort, should be brought to an end.

The legislation will therefore require local health and social service authorities to create joint statutory bodies in each area, with membership drawn from the participating authorities. Those bodies will regulate both the social care services now regulated by local authorities and the nursing homes currently regulated by health authorities. The scope of regulation will be extended to cover private sector domiciliary and day care services and small children's homes, as well as the public sector social care services that are currently free of regulation. Health authorities will continue to regulate private hospitals and certain other specialist health facilities, as they do now.

The creation of a single regulatory authority for social care raises the question whether it is right to maintain the legal division of adult care homes into residential homes and nursing homes. The Government see the attraction of moving towards a single category, in which each care home would be assessed and licensed according to the needs of the clientele it is intended to serve. That more flexible structure would make it easier for people who become more dependent to move to a different level of care without having to move to a different care home. The details of such a change will need full assessment, and the Government will consult further on those issues.

In addition to those important changes to the structure of social service departments, today's White Paper takes forward some other important aspects of social service provision. Under the Children Act 1989, the child's welfare is the paramount consideration. The Government believe that that is the correct focus. They do not believe, however, that emphasising the wishes of the individual child should be allowed to become an excuse for distorting the proper relationship between children and adults. We should not blindly ascribe to all children the capacity to make mature decisions about their interests, which are the proper responsibility of adults.

The chief inspector of social services in England recently issued revised guidance to the managers of children's homes, which underlined their responsibility to provide a disciplined framework for the lives of children in their care. The Government will continue to monitor the operation of the Children Act 1989, and they will act again if it can be demonstrated that there is a need to reassert the proper balance between the rights of the child and the responsibilities of adults.

The social services reform Bill will also place a new obligation on the local authority collectively, not just on the social service department, to prepare a full children's services plan. Those plans will be required to show how social services, education, health and housing authorities, as well as the juvenile justice system, will co-operate to identify children who are at risk and to take the action necessary to safeguard their interests.

Finally, on children's services, the White Paper sets out the Government's intention to improve the training provided to social workers who work with children. The Government believe that social workers who undertake that most difficult area of work with children should receive specialist training, as do approved social workers who are entrusted with powers under the mental health legislation.

Today's White Paper is the third element in the reform package for key elements of the modern welfare state that the Government have unveiled in the past 10 days. Last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security set out the Government's plans to improve pension provision over a generation. Earlier this week, I set out our plans to assist many of today's generation of pensioners in planning for the costs of dependency in old age. In today's White Paper, the Government show how social service departments need to evolve to provide high-quality, good-value services.

The changes proposed in the White Paper reflect the Government's view that, in a modern society, the principal responsibility for meeting social care need rests on individual citizens, who should plan to meet their own needs and respond to the needs of their families and their neighbours. The role of statutory social service departments is to act as a support to those, including carers, who meet social care needs in those ways. Statutory social services provision is an essential function in a modern society, and today's White Paper shows how the Government intend to ensure that it continues to be delivered to a high standard.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Despite all the hype about radical reform, does not the statement merely amount to the enforced privatisation of those relatively small parts of residential care not already carried out by the private or voluntary sector? Coupled with that was the sabre rattling of the Secretary of State about political correctness on children's services, with precious little action to back it up.

Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that well over three quarters of residential care is provided by the independent sector? Surely the last thing that is needed is ideologically imposed privatisation from Whitehall. Should not those decisions be made locally, taking into account local circumstances? Decisions should be made by the local director of social services, and should not be dictated by the Secretary of State.

Is not the right hon. Gentleman making an automatic assumption that the private sector is always good and the public sector is always bad? Surely such dogma is as outdated as if we on the Opposition Benches tried to argue that the reverse was so. Is not the common-sense approach to secure a mix of accommodation appropriate to the needs of the elderly people concerned?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that his figures about cheaper private sector costs do not compare like with like? Has he not simply taken the total gross expenditure and divided it by the number of residents—taking no account whatever either of the dependency of the resident in each case, where the higher levels of dependency are overwhelmingly concentrated in the local authority-provided sector, or of the standards of accommodation, food and care provided?

Is not that point strongly borne out by the report that has just been produced jointly by the Audit Commission and the social services inspectorate from the Secretary of State's Department, after carrying out an independent evaluation of services provided by Stockport metropolitan borough council? Does not the report say:

"Care for older people was particularly well organised and of good quality"?

Does not that report also specifically commend Stockport metropolitan borough council for having developed

"a mix of providers for older people's services"?

I should like to ask the Secretary of State three further specific questions. First, in paragraph 2.17 of the White Paper, he envisages the development of a voucher scheme for nursing homes. Can he tell us what the cost of administering that scheme will be? Will we not simply get the same shambles as has occurred with nursery vouchers? Secondly, in paragraph 2.30, he says that a local authority can provide its own care only where there is "insufficient independent sector provision". Does that in effect mean that, no matter what the comparable quality of care, if there is space in the private sector, it must be used? Thirdly, is not an inevitable consequence that, as local authorities are forced more and more into the use of private sector spaces, local authorities' own accommodation will become emptier and unviable, and in a relatively short period, elderly residents will have to be forcibly moved out of their homes?

With regard to what the White Paper has to say on children, is not all that we have had from the Secretary of State rhetoric—rhetoric, I suspect, aimed at the right wing of his party? If one searches for action in the White Paper, one finds a Labour policy for better training for social workers and the preparation of children's services plans, and otherwise only paragraph 3.4, which grandly states:

"The Government will continue to monitor the influence of the Children Act on social services departments."

There is not much action there. If the Secretary of State wanted to take arms against political correctness, why on earth has he not brought forward the adoption Bill, which was ready at the time of the Queen's Speech, was supported by Members on both sides of the House and takes a common-sense approach to adoption and parenting issues?

We are all concerned to ensure good value for money in social services, and high standards of care for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. May I therefore welcome the commitment to independent regulation and monitoring of residential care across all sectors—private and public—for which we have long argued? That must be the way forward—but there is no need to privatise in order to achieve it. Why also, however, have the Government not embraced the idea of a self-financing council of social service, to regulate the profession and provide reassurance on safety to the public? We shall legislate for those measures in our social services reform Bill after the election.

In short, does not this whole White Paper represent the triumph of dogma over common sense? Will we not see precisely the same internal market imposed on social services, which has caused so much damage to our health service in the past six years? What we want is a sensible mixture of private, voluntary and public provision, decisions taken locally, not dictated by Whitehall, strong and independent regulation to ensure high standards, and the needs of service users put first, not those of providers, from whatever sector they come. In short, we need a Labour Government.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is clearly in need of a message, electronic or otherwise, from the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). In that tirade, he has just demonstrated how thin the veneer is that covers the true face of the Labour party. Show it any concept that there may be a way forward to improve services through choice, and it runs a mile. It opposed the introduction of choice and the private sector through the 1980s in a wide variety of measures; it now says that it was right. A few weeks ago, it opposed the introduction of the private sector into London Underground. It is now opposing the further development of the private sector in the provision of social care. Old Labour shows through, the moment it is given the remotest opportunity to do so.

The hon. Gentleman prefers to believe that the higher cost of residential care provision in the public sector is related to dependency. The problem for the hon. Gentleman is that the evidence simply does not bear that out. When we consider the average age of people in independent sector homes, we find that it is higher than the average age in the local authority sector, so to argue that dependency is higher in the local authority sector is not borne out by the evidence. He still has to explain why any social service department should prefer to use its own care homes at an average cost of £283 a week, when the average cost of providing the same service in the private sector is £246 a week.

Let us move away from averages to the social service department in the constituency of the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) and the report to which the hon. Gentleman referred. There we do not need to consider averages; we can consider specific facts in that local authority. It is true that it delivers good-quality services to some of its users. So it should: it spends 37 per cent. above standard spending to do so.

Furthermore, I should have hoped that the hon. Member for Stockport would want to know why that authority is placing people in residential care at £330 a week when, as the report shows, in that specific authority, there are private sector places available at £230, a price difference of £100 per week per place. Furthermore, this involves not only residential care, but day care and domiciliary services provision. The rate per hour for domiciliary services in Stockport is £10 for the public sector and £8 for the private sector. Let the Labour party explain why, against those facts, it maintains its blind commitment to the view that the public sector must always be protected.

The hon. Gentleman asked me where there are ideas for the development of vouchers in the planning for these services. The answer, among others, is in Bradford, an authority that I should have thought he might be interested in supporting. Bradford social service department wants to use vouchers to improve the services available to service users in Bradford. He just shot his own supporters in Bradford in the back.

I made it very clear that, after the legislation is changed, the onus of proof will be on social service departments that want to sustain provision of care, to show that the need can best be met through public sector provision. If they can discharge that burden, public sector provision

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will of course remain an alternative. Against the barrage of facts about the real choice between the public and private sectors, however, the hon. Gentleman's blindness is the outstanding feature.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's endorsement of the approach that the Government intend to take in reforming regulation of the sector, and I am grateful for his support of our plans for improving training for social workers working with children.

The hon. Gentleman's final point again reflected his approach. He said that he is in favour of a general social services council—a huge new quango, and an extra cost. Is he really suggesting that we should introduce compulsory registration for every one of the 1 million workers who engage in the delivery of social care? If he is really suggesting that, let him cost his proposal, and let him explain it to those who would have to pay for that huge and unnecessary bureaucracy.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: That first exchange has taken more than 20 minutes. Therefore, I now want hon. Members to ask direct questions of the Minister, and I expect very brisk answers from the Minister.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. Friend will know that I chaired the Social Services Committee in the 1970s and 1980s, when I also chaired a health authority. He will also know that I was a member of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work. Will he say something about the future role of the director of social services, which is a statutory function and particularly important in the care of children in local authority care? I also welcome the initiative to co-ordinate the activities of health and social services, particularly in the regulation of homes.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The key point is that, within the legislation, the focus of the director of social services will increasingly be on assessing and commissioning care that meets the needs of the people in his area. Responsibility for managing services will increasingly pass to others, as will responsibility for regulation. The principal responsibility of the director of social services will be—as I believe that it should be—focused on assessing the need for care in the area covered by the social service authority and on meeting that need in the most cost-effective way open to him.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): I welcome the Government's long-overdue interest in social services. However, after all the recent abuse scandals, why are the Government not doing more to raise standards for those in care who are most vulnerable? Surely the Government should be addressing the issue of what they should be doing themselves. Why are they not doing more to reform community care law? Why do they not appoint regional ombudsmen to investigate cases of child abuse, such as the recent Rikki Neave case? What does this inadequate White Paper do to raise standards for those who are most vulnerable, especially children in need?

Mr. Dorrell: The White Paper focuses social service department management on assessing the need for social care provision for people in the area, and on giving the director of social services and his staff the freedom to secure the services that are judged best to meet those needs. That is what it does. It focuses social service departments on quality and on value for money—which is where the focus of their activities should be.

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Does my right hon. Friend accept, first, that the true picture in Labour-controlled Northamptonshire is totally opposite to that painted by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)? We have a situation in which elderly people have been denied a place in the home of their choice, or that choice has been delayed for many weeks. Some of them have died before they have been admitted to a residential home.

Secondly, does my right hon. Friend accept that, at a minimum, about £2 million could have been saved and released to stop unnecessary cuts in social services? Not the Government but Labour-controlled Northamptonshire county council has been dogmatic and doctrinaire on the issue.

Finally, we should like to know—

Madam Speaker: Order. I asked for brisk questions. As many hon. Members are waiting to ask questions, will they each put one question, rather than three or four?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend's impatience, on behalf of his constituents, with the incompetence of Northamptonshire county council will repeat itself many times around the country, when my hon. Friends consider how local social service departments prefer to put people in expensive local authority accommodation rather than equivalent, but cheaper, private sector accommodation. The only effect of those decisions can be to provide less care to local people and waste the council tax payer's resources as a consequence. My hon. Friend is angry on behalf of his constituents and many of our hon. Friends will share his anger.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): As someone who spent nearly 20 years in personal social services before entering Parliament, I am sorry that the Secretary of State is putting the boot in to some dedicated, decent and hard-working professionals. He is doing so for blatant political purposes relating to his bid for the leadership of the Tory party. I do not think that he believes what he is saying. Where is his evidence that privatisation improves the quality of care? I can give him an example from my constituency, where a woman in a private care home choked to death because not one person on duty that day had basic first-aid training. Yes, it costs more to care for people in local authority homes, because the staff get basic first-aid training and other training, too. That is the difference.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is simply letting his prejudices get the better of him. The public sector, not the private sector, is free of regulation. It is the public sector where costs are higher and standards too often have been found wanting. The Government are determined to be relentless in the pursuit of good-value, high-quality services, and that is what the Bill will provide.

Dame Elaine Kellett–Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. Friend agree that all that he seeks to achieve in

the White Paper is already being achieved by the Abbeyfield Society, which provides extremely good value for money and charges £100 a week less than many other providers? It also moves people seamlessly from one form of care to another, virtually until the end of their days. Those who use its services are extremely happy, and it represents the best value for money that one could possibly get.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend refers to a valuable society that happens to be very active in my constituency. I can certainly vouch for the value of the service that it provides. The Abbeyfield Society and many other voluntary bodies play a key role in the provision of residential and day care facilities and domiciliary support. The Government are taking steps to extend the role of voluntary community support. The options that the Government are seeking to encourage are already being followed up by many local authority social service departments. The difficult question is why some are not. The Government are taking measures to ensure that every social service department applies those lessons, to the benefit of its local community.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Secretary of State accept that value for money does not necessarily mean accepting the lowest price for a service? Does he further accept that private provision came on stream to provide choice? Some people choose to receive care from a public sector-provided home or facility. Will he guarantee, therefore, that no individual who chooses to receive care in a public sector home will be denied that choice?

Mr. Dorrell: What I give is the assurance that, when people provide money to the public sector through taxes, those responsible for managing the resources should have proper regard to securing good value in the services secured with taxpayers' money. I do not believe that the taxpayer will understand if authorities continue to buy places at £283 a week, when the same provision is available at £246 a week.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Given the attempts made this afternoon to misrepresent what my right hon. Friend has said, will he confirm that we are not talking about a reduction in quality? The same quality standards that apply to the public sector apply to the private sector. In many cases, the standards demanded of the private sector are higher. People in Devon can now look forward to real choice, and not having their choice of care in the private sector denied and abrogated by the local authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The White Paper guarantees an increased focus on quality in two respects. First, it ensures that public sector homes will have to meet the same regulatory standards that private sector homes already have to meet. It is a scandal that we should ever have regarded it as reasonable to exempt public sector homes from the standards expected of private sector homes. Secondly, by ensuring that we do not waste money, we shall have more money available to deliver better-quality services to people in need.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that I have heard nothing in recent months so calculated to cause concern among people who work in the public sector and the social services and to make them turn out and vote against the Tory Government? They know what he is up to—he wants to cut services and cut wages to £1.50 or £2 an hour for all those who are getting above the minimum wage. Does he not realise that privatisation is rapidly becoming a dirty word? The Government privatised rain, and now they are proposing to privatise grannies.

Mr. Dorrell: This afternoon we have seen the hon. Gentleman reunited with his Front Bench. He need not worry about the veneer that covers the new Labour party, because the voice of old Labour came from the Opposition Dispatch Box this afternoon.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I thank my right hon. Friend for his tribute to the staff in homes—public, private and voluntary. I advise him not to re-read some of the scandalous involvements in Greenwich over the past 20 years, where the deputy head of a home was also the branch secretary of a public sector union and exercised unhealthily close control over local Labour councillors. In his consultations, will my right hon. Friend pay attention to the stress on some residents and staff who find the prospect of change difficult to cope with?

Mr. Dorrell: I understand that any process of change causes uncertainty. That is why it is important, when contemplating changes such as those that I have anticipated this afternoon, to give people the absolute assurance that there will be increased safeguards of quality and an increased commitment to ensure that the resources available to social services are used to deliver high-quality care to those in need. The people in need suffer when those about whom the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was concerned have their excessive costs met. We have to deliver efficient, cost-effective services, because that is the way to respond to my hon. Friend's concerns, by assuring those who work in the sector and, most important, those who rely on its services that the services will be delivered cost-effectively and to a high quality.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Given that for 18 years the Government have been driven by the dogma of privatisation, and given that in the past fortnight they have told us that they will privatise pensions, if they get the chance, and are now planning to privatise social services and force people into the private sector whether they like it or not, why should we or anyone else in the country be in the slightest doubt that, if the right hon. Gentleman and his friends had half a chance, the next target for their privatisation mania would be the national health service?

Mr. Dorrell: That is an irresponsible scare, because I have said clearly, categorically and repeatedly that that is not our policy. Our policy is to introduce the benefits of more flexible, high-quality provision into social care, as we have done over a wide range of other activities over the past 18 years. Just go and ask the people who use British Telecom services, or those who benefit from the increased efficiency of the electricity and gas industries: they have all benefited from the improved efficiency of those services. The Government seek to bring those

[Mr. Dorrell]

benefits to those who rely on the social care services. The hon. Gentleman is simply wrong about the national health service.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the key to his proposals is the fact that people should have the choice of quality that is affordable? Is not that demonstrated in the private as opposed to the public sector? Does not the Labour response demonstrate that, far from old Labour being in residential care, it is alive and well and receiving care in the community?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right. The most striking aspect of this afternoon's exchanges is the instinctive reaction of almost every Labour Member who has spoken. If there is any prospect of introducing greater choice, greater variety and greater opportunity to improve services, Labour Members' instinctive reaction is that it must be resolved through the public sector. That is the reaction of Dr. Pavlov's dogs. We get it every time from the Labour Benches.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Minister confirm that, if his plans become law, every public sector home will close down? What chance will there be for people to be cared for in the public sector once his proposals are implemented? May I reiterate what my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) said? If the people are unlucky enough to have the Conservative Government re-elected, the next privatisation will be the national health service, because that is at the bottom of this.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady is simply wrong. What we are doing is carrying on the policy that we have been pursuing since we introduced the community care legislation in 1990. We have seen a substantial growth in the provision of residential and nursing care in the public sector. The Government have delivered a huge increase in the range of services available to elderly people who need social care. The White Paper shows how that growth in the quality and range of social care provision for elderly people, and for every other user of social care services, can be extended in the future. The Labour party simply refuses to face any of the fundamental questions that confront those who care about the future of welfare provision in Britain.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My right hon. Friend made a statement with vision; much of what he said is already operating in my county of Cheshire. Does he accept that, if we are to involve the private sector to the extent that he outlined, it is important to gain public confidence in it, and there will have to be proper monitoring and a regulatory system, to ensure that the public have confidence in my right hon. Friend's proposals?

Mr. Dorrell: I agree with my hon. Friend that there must be proper safeguards, which is why we have had in the past the regulatory structure for the provision of residential care. I announced today the extension of that regulatory function to cover domiciliary and day services, because I want to see the provision of those services by the private and voluntary sectors extended.

That is why the regulatory standards must be extended to cover public sector residential care. Many of the homes that have failed to meet the regulatory standards have been in the public sector. Homes that have exploited their freedom from regulatory standards are in the public sector. I announced the uniform regulatory approach contained in the White Paper, to ensure that everyone in residential care enjoys proper protection through regulation, which my hon. Friend says they should have.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Have not the Government proved again today that

"Whom God would destroy He first sends mad"?

Is the Secretary of State really trying to contrive a Canadian-style wipeout in the general election? Does not he realise that the announcement will strike fear into the hearts of everyone who might be in residential care in the future—that is all of us, and almost everyone in the country—because they have seen the reality of what he calls cost-effectiveness: care on the cheap, with restricted diets, shared rooms and poor service from underpaid staff? Has he gone mad?

Mr. Dorrell: What I am doing is pursuing the policy that we have developed over the past 18 years, which has delivered the most radical extension of residential and nursing care for the elderly that has ever been seen in this country. I want the standards that people currently enjoy in the regulated private sector, and the opportunity for access to those services, to be extended more generally.

One of the biggest restraints on access to those services is the fact that too many authorities preserve and protect their own expensive and unregulated homes in preference to using public money to buy high-quality services in a competitive private sector. That sector has grown over the past 18 years and people can see for themselves the standards that are delivered. The evidence shows that the overwhelming majority of those homes have delivered a high standard of care, at a price that the public sector has not been able to match. That is why I want access to those services to be extended.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in East Sussex the cost of care beds in the county council's homes is £152 per person per week more than in comparable available care beds in private sector registered care homes? The extra cost to the council tax payer is £4.7 million a year. Is not that ample reason for the proposals?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend makes his own point in an extremely cogent way. As I have said in answer to one or two other questions from my hon. Friends, that basic analysis is repeated time and again in social service departments the length and breadth of the country. I have introduced the White Paper today precisely to ensure that the questions raised by the figures cited by my hon. Friend are answered. Those figures simply demonstrate that the local authority is more concerned to defend its own institutional interest than to deliver services to people in residential care.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): While there may be helpful proposals in the White Paper, I regret the fact

that the Minister has run away from introducing a social services council. The basis for that was given at least three years ago by people such as Sir William Upping; it would be self-funding and would involve in the end perhaps 1 million people, but in the beginning it should surely involve the key workers in social services. I regret that the opportunity has been missed.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. For the reasons that I gave earlier, I am not in favour of moving in the direction of universal registration of people who work in the social care sector. I am strongly in favour of working with employing authorities in both the public and the private sector, to make certain that there are proper standards, that those standards are enforced, and that there is co-ordination of the standards that are applied around the country. That is the route that we are taking. I issued a consultation document on the subject last autumn and I am certain that a focused approach to problems where they exist is a better way than a general registration system to address the concerns that the hon. Gentleman rightly expresses.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): My right hon. Friend's proposals will be widely welcomed in Lancashire, especially by those of my constituents who are currently resident in inferior-quality, high-cost, badly regulated Lancashire county council care homes for the elderly, who will be given a choice that they did not have before. They will also be widely welcomed by those of my constituents who should have care but are not getting any at all, because of the high-cost policies of the county council.

My right hon. Friend will also be interested to know that, judging from the people whom I saw standing outside No. 4 Millbank earlier this afternoon, the shadow Chancellor is already preparing to rubbish the statement of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith).

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend may have seen Mr. Charlie Whelan doing his rounds. He may not always go into the studio, but we can reliably expect to hear his views about the performance of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and other Labour spokesmen.

My hon. Friend asked about the interests of people who rely on the social care provided by Lancashire county council social service department and other such departments the length and breadth of the country. He is right to say that the issue is one of quality, cost and the use of resources for those who currently do not get care because resources are wasted.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Will the Minister guarantee that the wages paid in the public sector will be transferred to the private sector? Will people get the same wages?

Mr. Dorrell: When an undertaking is transferred from the public to the private sector, the agreement comes under the normal regulations. That is how the system works, as the hon. Gentleman knows. It is interesting that he, the hon. Member for Bolsover and other Labour Members sitting on the Front Bench below the Gangway, are concerned only about the people who provide the services. We have not heard a word from them about the interests of those who need social care. They are concerned only with the producer interest; they are not interested in those who need social care.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Does my right hon. Friend accept that private providers in Leicestershire, which we both represent, will be pleased with today's announcement? Is he aware that over the past few years, representatives of East Midlands C.A.R.E—the private providers consortium, which he and the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), have met—have complained about discrimination by the county council social service department in refusing to recommend private placements? Is it not significant that when the official Opposition are presented with a new idea, they are not capable of dealing with it, and change the subject?

Mr. Dorrell: The official Opposition always deal with the suggestion that we should introduce a more varied and flexible system by relying on the public sector alternative. That is their repeated reaction, whatever the subject. My hon. and learned Friend is right that, for the people of Leicestershire, as for the people of Lancashire, Northamptonshire and every county in England and Wales, this package provides more resources to deliver better-quality care for those who need residential, domiciliary day care services. We are interested in the better use of resources to deliver quality care. That perspective has been barely heard from Labour.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): May I draw the Minister's attention to paragraph 2.30 of the White Paper, which says that for authorities to continue to provide homes directly, they will have to prove that

"there will be insufficient independent sector provision (either currently in existence or which could be developed in time)"

to meet planned need? Does not that imply that a private sector provider could say that it intended to provide something, with no guarantee that such provision would ever come into existence and no way of judging quality or cost, because it would not yet exist? However, that would be enough to force local authorities to shut directly provided provision and close places that were being run successfully. People living in such places would be flung out.

Mr. Dorrell: The terms of that paragraph are clear. The local authority retains a power to provide residential or domiciliary services, if it is necessary to meet a need that will not be met by the non-statutory sector. That underlines the Government's view that the function of a social service department is to act as a safety net, to provide a floor, and to make certain that provision will be there, but not to interpose itself if the normal system can provide care to meet the need. That is the Government's view of the proper role of social service departments, and that is why we have introduced the policy in this way.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in Essex, the policy of the Labour-Liberal Democrat-controlled county council of using its homes rather than independent sector homes will this year cost £10 million? Does he agree that

[Mr. John Whittingdale]

that is £10 million that could be used to provide extra care? Is not the policy of counties such as Essex an example of the triumph of dogma over common sense?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is precisely right, and the figures that he quotes demonstrate the scale of resources currently being wasted by authorities that will not look for better-value solutions to their problems and which prefer always to fill their own homes.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Does the Secretary of State really believe that including old people in his closing-down sale will enhance their conditions? Does he think that the breweries that own many of the care homes in my constituency are better than local authorities at providing homes?

Mr. Dorrell: We are giving an assurance to elderly people, and others who rely on social service departments for social care, that we shall provide the resources and management disciplines to deliver proper high-quality services. The Labour party, driven by dogma, prefers to meet producer interests, rather than the needs of the people who rely on social service departments.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We now move to the second statement.

Meat Hygiene Service

4.25 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): With permission, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement about the standards of hygiene in Great Britain's abattoirs. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told this House yesterday, this is an issue that the Government take very seriously indeed, and I therefore welcome the opportunity to set out the facts.

Before going into any detail, I wish to emphasise that, before any red meat carcase goes into the food chain, it has to be individually stamped by Meat Hygiene Service inspectors as fit for human consumption. This is a critical safeguard, the existence of which is being ignored in the welter of comment appearing over the last few days.

Until 1995, standards and rules in abattoirs were enforced, with varying rigour, by over 300 local authorities. This was not a satisfactory state of affairs. For this reason, we set up the Meat Hygiene Service—a major reform that was strongly opposed by the Labour party and others. The MHS has been in operation for two years. In the first year, the MHS was required to carry out a review of all slaughterhouses in Great Britain to record standards, to establish a baseline for measuring future progress and to decide how to allocate resources for enforcement. This is the exercise to which I referred in my statement last week.

In order to raise standards within abattoirs, the MHS was set formal targets. In the first year, the MHS was set a target of increasing by 10 points the scores of those plants which were below 65 on a scale of 0 to 100. This target was met in full. For 1996–97, it was required to ensure that at least two thirds of the plants exceeded 65. It seems likely that this target will be met. Although these scores are a useful mechanism for driving up standards, I should again emphasise that all red meat must be passed fit for human consumption.

In addition, the MHS has taken a number of further steps. Thus, we have drawn up an operations manual which for the first time sets out a national standard on hygiene and, in the hands of MHS inspectors, is a vital tool for raising such standards. It specifically covers the steps to be taken so as to exclude "dirty livestock"—a policy which, as I said last week, we will shortly be reinforcing in graphic form.

Also, since concern has been expressed that supervision in some plants may be inadequate, the MHS has carried out a major review of supervision levels. As a result, the contracts now being placed with official veterinary surgeons will ensure that sufficient time is put in at each plant in 1997-98. Furthermore, the State Veterinary Service, which oversees the MHS, has carried out an audit of the MHS's methods in its application of both the operation manual and the scoring system. I will shortly be discussing with those responsible for the audit how best to carry forward their recommendations.

I should also mention the steps we have taken over the past year to strengthen the capacity of the Meat Hygiene Service. More than 450 additional staff have been assigned to the agency, and although these extra staff were appointed to apply BSE-related rules, they will of course reinforce inspection overall in abattoirs. Enforcement of the BSE rules themselves was tightened up sharply and,

as the House has been informed on past occasions, compliance with the rules in that specific area is now satisfactory.

What I have described is action already taken: I will now deal with action in hand. We have been working with the MHS on a joint action plan to drive standards upwards, targeting both the most serious problems and the plants with particular difficulties. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), put the main specific action points to a meeting of leading meat industry representatives on 18 February.

First, the MHS will accelerate its work on defining standards for clean livestock—standards already defined in the MHS operations manual will be set out in the graphic document to which I have already referred. Secondly, it must be clearly understood that no carcase showing any signs of faecal contamination should be submitted for approval as fit for human consumption. Thirdly, we shall shortly start the publication of the findings of enforcement activity on a regular basis. Fourthly, principal official veterinary surgeons, who are the most experienced veterinary surgeons, will be given a larger role in managing OVSs and meat inspectors.

Fifthly, MHS staff will be given extra training in hygiene standards. Sixthly, OVS attendance will be stepped up at plants with poor hygiene scores. Seventhly, a new industry-Government working group will be set up to concert the drive to higher standards. Eighthly, the State Veterinary Service will intensify its audit activity, which will provide the basis for yet further action. I have told the chief executive that in appropriate cases infringement of the rules should result in prosecution: also, where appropriate, consideration will be given to the revocation of licences.

The knowledge which the MHS has now of meat hygiene is clearly relevant to Professor Pennington's inquiry into E. coli. It is important that the Pennington group should have access to this knowledge. Professor Pennington has been offered a statement, to be drawn up by the chief executive of the MHS.

I am well aware that public concern over meat hygiene has been heightened by the reports of the past few days. In my view those reports are misleading and do not take account of the important progress made over the past 18 months. I do not pretend that there is not scope for further improvement, but I can assure the House that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the other Agriculture Departments and the MHS have been and remain determined to drive up standards, and we are succeeding.

I turn now to the pieces of paper produced by the Opposition in recent days from various quarters and of various dates. They may yet produce more such documents—knowing them, I suppose that they will. I will not speculate as to the motives behind their production, but the proximity of a general election is probably one. However, those documents must be seen in the context of our policy to improve standards. Set in that context, they do not detract at all from the facts which are as I have just stated them to be.

The Meat Hygiene Service will apply the rules ever more strictly, and this requirement will be reflected in the Meat Hygiene Service targets for 1997–98. Each plant now knows where its weak points are. Plants that are found repeatedly to have low standards will face progressively stricter attention from the meat inspectors and, as I have said, in appropriate cases prosecutions and licence revocations will ensue. Our purpose is to bring up our abattoir practice to the very best possible standards.

There is much public interest in this matter. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House yesterday that he was taking a personal interest in our efforts to drive up standards. I therefore intend to place a fuller version of this statement, containing additional detail about the measures to which I have referred, as an information paper in the Library of the House of Commons. I hope to do so by the end of the week. That will provide the basis for a more informed discussion than that which has taken place during the past few days.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): These are serious matters. The House and the country are well aware of the importance of ensuring that health and hygiene controls in our slaughterhouses are maintained. We know that BSE is the most likely cause of new variant CJD, which is why it is so important to keep all the offal out of our food—the offal which can contain the BSE agent. We know that faecal contamination is a source of E. coli, which tragically resulted in more than 20 deaths in this country.

I advise the Minister that the House wants to know today what he knew about bad practices in our abattoirs, when he knew about them and what he did about them. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The Minister referred in his statement to the Meat Hygiene Service review. As the Minister said, that was the report which the House addressed last week, but he seems to have forgotten the appalling breaches of hygiene highlighted in that report. Spinal cords were not removed, bovine specified material bins were unmarked and there was a major problem with faecal contamination.

Does the Minister remember that that report was not publicised? Indeed, it was not passed to Professor Pennington's inquiry on E. coli. The Minister seemed to say today on the radio that it was Professor Pennington's fault. Indeed, the Minister, who we assumed had left no stone unturned to drive up standards in our slaughterhouses, said that he himself had not seen the report. It was a comprehensive and devastating report, but it was summarised, it was sanitised and it was made available to only a few people in the industry.

Last Thursday, however, the Minister said, not to worry: he had made sure that everything was all right in our abattoirs and, although he had not seen the recommendations of the hygiene advisory team, he was confident that standards—I use his words—were "constantly improving".

But this week we find that, for the past nine months, the Association of Meat Inspectors has been warning Ministers and others that there are serious problems in our abattoirs and that in some respects in some places they have even been getting worse. Is the Minister aware that, on 11 February 1997, in a letter to the Parliamentary Secretary, the general secretary of the Association of Meat Inspectors warned that

"there has been no improvement in standards of hygiene, and sadly faecal contamination appears to"

be

"becoming an acceptable infringement of the regulations"?

[Dr. Gavin Strang]

Does that point, and the other points in the letter, not worry the Minister? Surely he takes those criticisms seriously. It is no use his seeking to dismiss the general secretary's letters; if he does, I suggest that he has a look at the "Frontline Scotland" programme that was shown in Scotland last night, which again focused attention on some of these major and appalling breaches.

The Minister referred in his statement to the State Veterinary Service; rightly so. The State Veterinary Service has a crucial role in all these matters, especially in ensuring that we have the highest standards in our slaughterhouses. I hope that hon. Members know that we had just under 600 state vets when the Conservatives came to power. Now we have fewer than 300. In a written answer to me last week, the Minister confirmed that we have 289 state vets in 1997. Last year, we had 301, and there were 394 in 1995. Against a background of apparent concern about tackling the issue, we see the number of state vets continuing to plummet.

For the Minister, BSE means "blame someone else". He blamed the Opposition, he blamed Europe and he blamed the public for BSE. He blamed Mr. Swann, the editor of the hygiene advice team report, and today he and his colleagues have tried to blame the general secretary of the Association of Meat Inspectors. Does the Minister recognise that his "blame someone else" approach will not work? Every time Ministers come to the House and tell us that they have a grip on food safety, it quickly becomes clear that they do not.

Surely the Minister understands that food safety standards and hygiene in our slaughterhouses have been matters of concern not for months, but for years. It is almost a year since the Minister came to the House of Commons and made the statement that triggered the beef crisis. Yet there is a widespread public belief that those issues are still not being addressed. Is it not clear that we must establish an open and independent food standards agency? There is no place for secrecy in food safety.

Is the Minister aware that his statement this afternoon utterly fails to address adequately the issues raised by the Opposition? He is not tackling those problems effectively. There is no confidence in him or in his Government as far as food safety issues are concerned. We need a general election, and a fresh start with a new Government.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) used an awful lot of words to say remarkably little. In so far as he said anything of substance, let me deal with it.

First, of course this is a matter of very great importance: food safety is our paramount consideration. That is why we set up the Meat Hygiene Service. It is extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman should make the comments he did, when his party and the Liberal Democrats voted against the establishment of the Meat Hygiene Service. That was not a very responsible course of action.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman went on at great length about standards not being improved in the past two years. That is simply untrue. One way—and it is only one—of measuring standards is by examining the hygiene assessment system scoring. In 1995, 111 abattoirs scored less than 50, and 374 scored less than 65. By 1997, 16 scored less than 50, and 116 scored less than 65. In other words, there has been a huge improvement. It is true that the number of abattoirs has fallen during that period. Nonetheless, the crude figures show a very substantial increase in standards.

The hon. Gentleman referred to Mr. Comrie. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman read the comments of the vice-president of the AMI that were reported in today's edition of *The Times*. Mr. Johnston said a number of things. Of Mr. Comrie's allegations, he said:

"His letters are written on AMI headed notepaper, but as far as I know, they are his views, not those of the committee."

We have other anecdotal evidence of the rejection of Mr. Comrie's views. For example, I have a fax that was sent by Mr. Dennis Eyre to Johnston McNeill, chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service. It states:

"Dear Mr. McNeill,

I wish to notify you that, as a member of the Association of Meat Inspectors, I totally disagree with the content of the letter sent by the general secretary to yourself and Angela Browning. I can also refer to many plants where standards have improved vastly since the MHS took over. I cannot, though, name one plant that standards have dropped. I have consulted with the meat inspectors that work with me to enforce standards in meat plants for the Meat Hygiene Service and, so far, none can name a plant that is worse than under local authority control. We fully support you and the Meat Hygiene Service, and acknowledge the success with enforcing SBM control and hygiene."

It just happens that two days ago across my desk came another letter from a senior member of the Farmers Union of Wales addressed to Mr. Johnston McNeill. The letter, from Mr. Dolan, states:

"Based on a number of visits to meat premises at irregular intervals, there is self-evident and continuing improvement in hygiene practice, quality of product, organisation of staff to the benefit of producers, consumers and operators."

The plain truth is that we knew that there were problems in the abattoirs. That is why we set up the Meat Hygiene Service. Since that time, we have pursued a consistent and continuing policy based on targets, which are being enforced, and on extensive discussions with the industry, conducted principally by my hon. Friend, which are designed to drive up standards, and which are having that clear effect.

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is outrageous for members of the Opposition to prey on people's fears over the matter, pretending that they have a monopoly of concern for public health? It is blatant political opportunism. No one has an interest in trying to cover up the truth.

Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm again that there have been substantial improvements in the slaughterhouses in this country since the Meat Hygiene Service was set up, and will he remind the general public that Labour and the Liberal Democrats voted against the introduction of that service? If they had had a shred of care about the matter, they would have supported in the House the setting up of that agency.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is wholly right. The plain truth is that we are approaching a general election, and the Opposition parties are less scrupulous than they ought to be in the way in which they are currently conducting themselves with regard to food safety. The farming

community, for example, will deeply resent what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) said in these exchanges; so will those responsible for enforcing high standards in the abattoirs. In a professional and determined way, standards in the abattoirs have been forced up, and those efforts have been denigrated and disparaged by the hon. Gentleman, who ought to know better.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the Minister recall agreeing with me on 30 January that the public no longer believe his assurances? He said:

"it would be idle and foolish for me not to accept that the public do not have the degree of confidence that I would like them to have and which I believe would be justified, when Ministers and officials associated with Departments talk about food safety."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. 526.]

Will the Minister now acknowledge that, since that statement, his Ministry has been further discredited, and that the assurances have become increasingly incredible?

Does he further accept that the view of Professor Pennington, whom his Government appointed to look into the E. coli outbreak, is that the culture of secrecy in his Ministry and in Whitehall has severely damaged the credibility of the entire exercise? Does he accept the view of Professor Pennington that, had he seen the original Swann report on the failures of the hygiene standards of abattoirs—during the regime of the MHS, not relating to the previous regime—it would have been extremely useful to the professor's inquiry?

In view of the remarks that the Minister has just made about the general election, does he accept that the public will have no confidence in an internal Government inquiry into their own inadequacy in the context of a general election campaign? Will he now accept that the only solution to regain public confidence and restore confidence in the beef industry is to institute a full public inquiry?

Mr. Hogg: In view of what the hon. Gentleman has said, I look forward very much to his supporting the Government's proposals for a food safety council and a food safety adviser. I do, of course, recall what I said in the House before, and I accept—while very much regretting—that, over a long period, people have become sceptical about assurances that they have received from Ministers and others.

That scepticism is not justified, but it is a fact, and it needs to be recognised and acknowledged. I recognise and acknowledge it. That is why I decided that it would be sensible to introduce a food safety council and a food safety adviser to provide a stream of independent, authoritative advice that could be made public and, if that was necessary and justified, could be contrary to the position adopted by Ministers.

If the hon. Gentleman really wants to be constructive—which I doubt—I advise him to support us.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Is it not the case that, whether or not there was a report that my right hon. and learned Friend saw, if the Government had not set up the Meat Hygiene Service in the first place—against the wishes of the Opposition—we should not have had the report at all? Should not all parties now start working together to improve standards in slaughterhouses, and stop playing party politics with people's fears about food?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The problem that existed before April 1995, when the Meat Hygiene Service was set up, was that the implementation and enforcement of all the rules and practices was in the hands of local authorities—some 300 of them. Because of that, it was not possible to gain an overall view of what was happening in abattoirs, let alone enforce a proper national standard. The creation of the Meat Hygiene Service has enabled us, for the first time, to get a grip on standards and drive them up. It is lamentable that the Opposition parties did not support us, and it is lamentable that they are now disparaging the efforts of those who are engaged in that task.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Does the Minister not realise that it is a valid criticism of the way in which he set up the Meat Hygiene Service that he must come to the House today with a further eight-point plan to improve abattoir and food safety, and that he has announced to the House that up to a third of abattoirs do not reach 65 out of 100 on his scale of proper standards? Is it not a disgrace that the public must put up with so many abattoirs not meeting the standards that they should have met? No wonder there has been criticism of the Minister's running of the Meat Hygiene Service.

Mr. Hogg: I think that I am being charitable, but the hon. Gentleman is simply missing the point. Others might suggest that he is deliberately evading it, but I will be kind and say that he is deliberately missing it.

We are engaged in a continuing process. Before 1995, there was no effective scoring, and no possible overview of what was going on. We have created a system that enables us to improve standards, which the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats voted against. In the first two years, we set targets for the improvement of standards, and those standards were met. We are setting yet tighter targets in the coming, third year. As I have said, it is a continuing process—that is why my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has had some 22 meetings relevant to the issue over 14 months—and we are driving up standards incrementally. That is how it is done.

I really think that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) should try to grasp the basic point. Every red meat carcase must be certified fit for human consumption by the meat hygiene inspector.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of letters that I have written to the Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), about abattoirs in my constituency that have almost gone out of business because of the stringent controls exercised by his Department? Indeed, is he aware that there are abattoirs in the west midlands that have gone out of business because of those controls? Given the electioneering of the Labour party, who are playing on the natural fears of people outside this place, what impact does he think that the news generated by the Labour party over the past few days will have on lifting the European ban on the export of British beef?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes at least two important points, the first of which is that a number of

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abattoirs have gone out of business as a result of the ever-increasing standards demanded of them. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has received a number of representations from hon. Members to safeguard particular abattoirs. That is a sign of how volatile the House sometimes is. The duty of my Department is to drive up standards, and that we will do.

On the second point, my hon. Friend makes a very sound observation. He is effectively saying that the irresponsible scaremongering will damage not only the meat industry in Britain but our standing in Europe. He is quite right. The fact that it is hysterical, irresponsible and ill-informed will not be understood in Europe: they will simply take it at face value. Those of us who know the quality of the observations from the Opposition Benches know that it is irresponsible, ill-informed and ill-intentioned, but unfortunately not everybody else will.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): If the Minister wants to drive up standards, I suggest that he starts on the Treasury Bench. I put it to him that his responsibility is not just to react to crises, but to try to ensure that such fundamental problems do not start in the first place. Will he take it from me, not only as a Member of Parliament but as a member of the National Farmers Union for Scotland, that he has become a very serious liability to the industry and to consumer confidence in food produced in Britain? In view of those circumstances, will he do the honourable thing and resign—or will we have to wait until he is pushed?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman clearly was not listening to what I said, or if he was, he steadfastly ignored it. The plain truth spelled out by the facts that I have given the House and the scoring to which I have referred is that there has been a substantial improvement in the past two years. Those are the facts. I do not particularly take credit for that—*[Interruption.]* No; I accept that that is a matter for the Meat Hygiene Service, the State Veterinary Service and the operators of the plants, but to say that I am to be criticised for presiding over a period when we have driven up standards is patently absurd.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): This afternoon's performance from the Labour party will have done nothing whatever to increase its stock among the farming community in my constituency.

Can my right hon. and learned Friend tell me how our present meat hygiene regime compares with that currently in force in the rest of the European Union and elsewhere on mainland Europe?

Mr. Hogg: We have just had a very interesting report from the European Commission about BSE and related matters in European countries other than Portugal and the United Kingdom. My hon. and learned Friend would find it deeply worrying.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): The people who died in Scotland were not scared to death: they were poisoned. In his statement, the Minister mentioned excluding dirty animals. It is almost impossible to exclude faecal contamination from slaughterhouses, because the animals are standing in queues waiting to die. They can smell death, and when that happens, they urinate and defecate. If he was standing in a line waiting to die, he would fill his underpants as well, and probably has.

The Minister must realise that meat eating is bad for people's health. The people of this country should turn to vegetarianism before they turn as mad as the Minister.

Mr. Hogg: The House will have heard the hon. Gentleman's observation with some distaste.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. and learned Friend has set out a catalogue of great achievement in the past two years. Does he agree that standards of meat hygiene in United Kingdom abattoirs are higher now than they have ever been? Will he reinforce the point he made earlier, that meat hygiene standards in the United Kingdom are the highest in the whole of the European Union? Is it possible that those who have been busy leaking misinformation to the Labour party have an agenda wholly removed from that of public health and hygiene?

Mr. Hogg: As my hon. Friend knows, I do not always agree with him, so it is nice to be able to do so now. He is certainly right on the three points he made. First, standards in the United Kingdom are much higher than they were two years ago. Secondly, I venture to say that no country in the European Union has higher standards or enforces them more effectively. Lastly, we are approaching the general election, and many people, most notably Opposition Members, are behaving disreputably on this issue. This is a serious matter, but Opposition Members are not treating it as such.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Is the Minister aware that the number of notified cases of food poisoning in Scotland rose from fewer than 1,000 in the late 1970s to more than 10,000 last year, with a similar increase in England? Did that not give him a hint that he should do something, such as abandon his dangerous dogma of deregulation?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has clearly—I rather like him, as a matter of fact—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] That will damn his chances, but no matter. He and I will live with that: he will, most certainly.

The hon Gentleman has clearly not paid the slightest attention to what I have been saying in the past 20 minutes. Standards are improving owing to the policy initiatives taken by the Government and consistently opposed by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats. It was because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland was so concerned about E. coli and related matters that he set up the inquiry under Professor Pennington to address the general issues that are the subject, at least in part, of this discussion.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that our first consideration should be the British consumer, the British meat producer and the British farmer? Does he accept that imports of foreign beef are coming into this country from places that have no proper inspection system? Their inspections are nothing like as good as those provided by the Meat Hygiene Service, even if it has had some teething

problems. Furthermore, does he agree that that is unfair to the British farmer and could be dangerous to the British consumer? It is essential that we place proper restrictions on the import of beef from other countries, some of which may have BSE and other diseases, before it causes a disaster here.

Mr. Hogg: It is a great pleasure to be able to associate myself with much of what my hon. Friend has said. He is entirely right about where our paramount duty lies. Our paramount duty is to the consumer—the consumer in the United Kingdom, obviously, but to the consumer.

My hon. Friend implicitly drew attention to the fact that there is almost certainly a higher rate of BSE in Europe than has yet been declared, and that controls such as we have in the United Kingdom are not in place in those countries. It is a serious problem, and it is being addressed by the European Commission. For example, it proposed an offal regime at the December Council, which we supported. That did not go through, but we will support the Commission when it again brings its proposal forward, because it is an important safeguard that is not yet in place.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Did the Minister say that he was asking the chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service to prepare a written statement that the Scottish Office would pass on to Professor Pennington? The Minister said that the knowledge of the Meat Hygiene Service was clearly relevant to Professor Pennington's inquiry. If that is so, why were not the Swann report and the final report into slaughterhouse hygiene clearly relevant to Professor Pennington's inquiry, and passed on to Hugh Pennington?

On Thursday, the Minister implied that the matter was a Scottish Office responsibility. There was an immediate counter-briefing by the Secretary of State to say that it was the Minister's fault. Does not the Minister think that, against the background of 21 fatalities from E. coli in Scotland, people in Scotland will conclude that it was both Departments' and both Ministers' responsibility, and that the climate of secrecy that they have encouraged is responsible for some of the things that have been debated today?

Before he goes down the road of his junior Minister, the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), and blames Hugh Pennington for not requesting the report, will the Minister reflect on the fact that there is much more confidence in Hugh Pennington than in any Minister on the Treasury Bench?

Mr. Hogg: It is for Professor Pennington, as the person presiding over the inquiry, to determine his lines of inquiry and the kind of information that he judges necessary. It has always been made plain to him that, if he needed specialist advice on meat hygiene, it was available to him. It is for him to ask for it. *[Interruption.]* No, no: it is for him to ask for it. It has always been made plain that Departments stand ready to assist him.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, if there were to be a public inquiry, it would inevitably delay decisions on this important subject? Is he aware that I am certain that my constituents would wish to see the Government getting on with the business of government and him taking vigorous and determined action to improve standards of food hygiene—which is exactly what he is doing?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is quite right. If there were a public inquiry, what would be decided is something like this—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I have the advantage of knowing facts. I am therefore able to say what the outcome is going to be, and it would be something like this: the decision to set up the Meat Hygiene Service was a very sound one; the decision by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrat party to oppose it was a very foolish one; during the past two years, there has been a substantial improvement in standards; there is more to be done, and the Government are gripping it. That is, broadly speaking, what an inquiry would say.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the Minister or the Secretary of State for Scotland blame Mr. Ian Anderson, whose name has figured prominently in the press, for not having acted properly as a civil servant?

Mr. Hogg: I do not think that I have blamed anybody for anything in this connection.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that anybody who visited any slaughterhouse when environmental health officers had a responsibility in that area will be aware of the very serious variations in performance and standards? It is almost incredible that anybody who has any knowledge of slaughterhouses could have opposed the setting up of the Meat Hygiene Service, and the need for an urgent improvement.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the reality is that, given the threat and dangers we face—possibly from new strains of bacteria as well—and the natural problems of slaughtering cattle to which the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) referred, the matter will continue to be a serious challenge for the Government, whoever they are?

It does no service whatever to approach the matter on the basis of a letter from one individual in Somerset who was an environmental health officer and subsequently became involved privately with the meat inspection service. Although he may be the general secretary of the AMI, the letter appears to have been written in an individual capacity. That is not the right way in which to approach such a serious issue, which is slowly being turned into a political stunt. The matter is very serious, and will need continuing attention.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend has made a number of important points, of which I shall highlight two. My right hon. Friend, whose experience goes back very many years, is wholly right when drawing on his personal knowledge of abattoirs and practices before the setting up of the Meat Hygiene Service to say that nobody in 1995 who understood abattoirs and slaughterhouses would for one moment have opposed the creation of the Meat Hygiene Service. It follows that the Labour party did not have a clue then and does not have a clue now—which takes me to the second point.

The Labour party is mounting a serious campaign against the interests of food safety, confidence in British food and the British farmer on the say-so of Mr. Comrie,

[Mr. Hogg]

who has the background that my right hon. Friend has indicated and whose letters—I repeat what his vice-president said—

"are written on AMI headed notepaper, but as far as I know, they are his views, not those of the committee."

It is a slender basis for the hysteria that right hon. and hon. Members have sought to generate for political reasons.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): When he was opening his remarks today, the Minister said that he was talking about GB abattoirs. During answers to questions, he gave us all the impression that he was talking about UK abattoirs. If it was GB abattoirs, how do the abattoirs in Northern Ireland compare with the average in Great Britain, given that they all meet EU standards, and where are they on the scale? Given that a serious problem is now evident in abattoirs, is it the Minister's intention that the 450 staff kept on will be kept in work?

Mr. Hogg: In a matter of this sensitivity, I thought that it was prudent to confine myself to talking about those matters that relate to GB. My hon. Friends with responsibility for Northern Ireland would respond more directly to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South–West): The Minister sets great store by the Meat Hygiene Service, but will he confirm that no fewer than 45 inspectors have been subject to disciplinary proceedings for not enforcing the specified bovine offal regulations? Who inspects his inspectors?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman does not understand the importance of what he has just said. He has just said that, yes, standards are being driven up and that those meat hygiene inspectors who are not enforcing the regulations are disciplined. It is part of the process of driving up standards.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Will the Minister consider this? Eighteen months ago, I wrote to his Department to point out serious problems which arose because contaminated poultry industry meat was not stained as red meat is; 12 months ago in the House I raised the matter and the Minister offered the most complacent reply, suggesting that there was not a problem; and, six months ago, he suddenly seemed to realise that there was a problem. There still is a problem. When will the Government do something about it?

Mr. Hogg: As I have been saying for the past 45 minutes, the Government have done a great deal to enforce and to bring about higher standards in abattoirs. We will continue that policy.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Does the Minister accept that he does himself and the Government no credit by seeking to play down the level of genuine public concern about the standards in abattoirs and to deflect the criticism day after day about those standards? Given that fact and that the public will not have confidence in an internal inquiry by the Department, and as he has already turned down a public inquiry, does he not accept at least that some form of arm's-length inquiry is crucial in this case?

Mr. Hogg: I began my statement by accepting that there is room for improvement. We have not tried to play down the existence of the problem. We have tried to set it in proper perspective. There was a problem way back in 1995, which we sought to tackle by the creation of the MHS. There remains a problem, albeit of a much lesser kind. We are embarking on a policy, we have persisted in a policy, we will continue with a policy of driving up standards and we are succeeding. Those are the facts. I remind the hon. Gentleman that every red meat carcase has to be certified as fit for human consumption by a meat hygiene inspector.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I am interested in the Minister's league table mentality towards abattoir hygiene. In that system, at what point or at what score does meat hygiene become unacceptable? Does he think that someone who contracts E. coli would be pleased or mollified by being told that the meat had come from an abattoir at the bottom of the league table? How does the Minister reconcile the idea of league tables with commercial confidentiality, which his hon. Friend clearly could not do yesterday?

Mr. Hogg: I take the hon. Gentleman back to the critical point, which is that, in respect of every individual red meat carcase, there has to be certification by the meat hygiene inspector who inspects the carcase that it is fit for human consumption. That is a specific individual inspection and certification. Hygiene assessment scoring is a mechanism for trying to improve overall hygiene standards and is extremely valuable. That is why we place weight on it, but there is not a direct overlap between hygiene assessment scoring and the fitness for human consumption. That is a certification by an individual meat hygiene inspector based on a specific inspection of a specific carcase.

Mr. D. N. Campbell–Savours (Workington): Why is the Minister seeking to distort the words of Mr. Comrie? I have his letter here and it says:

"It now appears, from reports I am receiving from members"—

so they are not his words, but the words of other people in his association—

"that MHIs are being actively encouraged to ignore breaches of regulations and in some cases threatened if they try to take action".

That is a major allegation. Why does the Minister think that that responsible man, who has a significant position in the industry, would want to make such a statement—unless it were true?

Mr. Hogg: That question could be usefully asked to the vice-president of the association, who informed *The Times*:

"His"—

that refers to Mr. Comrie—

"letters are written on AMI headed notepaper, but as far as I know, they are his views, not those of the committee."

Hon. Members will recall that I gave other anecdotal evidence of the dissatisfaction felt by members of the Association of Meat Inspectors at what had happened.

In particular, I quoted at length from a fax from Dennis Eyre to Johnston McNeill supporting the Meat Hygiene Service in every major particular.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Does the Minister recall writing to all hon. Members on 16 December to say that the controls in the abattoirs were being rigorously enforced? How does he reconcile that statement with what he told the House this afternoon—that there are lapses and the Minister is striving to improve standards? May I take the Minister back to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) raised? What on earth is the point of having elaborate benchmarking, where abattoirs are supposed to strive to get beyond the figure 65, if no one knows at what point abattoirs are not doing the job properly? What is the point of benchmarking as explained to the House by the Minister?

Mr. Hogg: As to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, the letter that I wrote would have been directed at SBM—specified bovine material. It is now, I think, universally recognised, especially by the European Commission, that our controls are extremely effective and, it is plain, much more effective than any of those elsewhere in Europe, at least for the most part. I also recommend to the hon. Gentleman that he spends just a little time reading the regular monthly bulletin that we publish on the enforcement of SBM controls because he will find the contents extremely reassuring. He might care just to remind the House of them from time to time.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. I am bringing this to a close now.

Points of Order

5.18 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I gave you notice of this point of order yesterday, and I have also given notice to the relevant Minister. It concerns events of last Thursday, 6 March, several hours before a planted parliamentary question was answered, and eventually printed in last Thursday's *Hansard*, at column 727.

Several hours before that answer was given, at about 2.15 pm, the press officer of the Conservative party in Wales was ringing up health correspondents of the media in Wales, telling them that she knew the contents of that parliamentary answer and how it would bale out the Dyfed Powys health authority, and offering the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), for interviews.

Those events appear to indicate some collusion between the Conservative party in Wales and the Welsh Office—collusion which betrays the rights of the House. I should be grateful for your guidance on that matter, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. I have made inquiries myself, which indicate that the information contained in the answer to which he refers was indeed disclosed to the press a short time before it was available in the House. How that happened is a matter for Welsh Office Ministers to determine, but it should not have happened, and there must be no recurrence.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I did not attempt to catch your eye during the statement by the Secretary of State for Health. May I raise a point of order that is not on a personal matter but concerns the traditions of the House, which many hon. Members imbibed when we were elected?

The tradition is that Ministers of the Crown, and indeed other hon. Members, should not launch specific attacks on local authorities and on their committees without supporting in detail the entire case. Does it do Parliament much good if we are seen on television to attack local authorities in some detail, without allowing them to put what in most cases amounts to a second side to the story? Usually there is another side to the coin.

Madam Speaker: I know of no tradition or convention preventing Ministers from criticising local authorities. Even if such a tradition or convention existed, it is not a rule of the House, and could not be enforced by the Chair.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I heard your announcement in response to the points of order on the use of electronic devices, and I very much welcomed it. However, there seems to be one issue which I think is important, although it is only a detail and may seem to be a small matter. You have said that it would not be practical to monitor the use of electronic devices that may be in a pocket or handbag or on a wrist. However, I think that it would be helpful if you were to tell the House, as an extension of your statement, that you would not be immediately minded to

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

call an hon. Member to ask a question or make a statement if you were to see him or her referring to an electronic device.

Madam Speaker: I should hope that I have sufficient common sense. I take on board the hon. Gentleman's point, but I hope that he might leave that matter to me.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am only too well aware of the pressures of business in the House and of the very difficult job that you have in allocating time to speak to hon. Members. However, you will understand that, 18 lives having been lost from E. coli in the Lanarkshire area, people will be wondering why Lanarkshire MPs did not have an opportunity today to question the Minister—particularly after his arrogant and indifferent display and apparent accusation of hysteria against many of the families who are still grieving.

Is it in order to ask you whether you are aware of any plans for further debate on this very serious issue, so that those of us from Lanarkshire who have lost not only constituents but friends can challenge the Minister over what can only be described as his incompetent, negligent and guilt-laden presiding at the Ministry of Agriculture—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sure that constituents in Lanarkshire will understand that it is not always possible to call every hon. Member. I know that, because of his position, the hon. Gentleman has been called many times after such statements. I regret that I was not able to call all hon. Members on today's statement, but I think that we had a very good questioning of it.

Rights at Work and in Retirement

5.23 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for rights at work, training opportunities and dignity in retirement.

I am proud to have the opportunity to move this Bill, which predicates some of the measures that will be introduced, very soon indeed, by the next Labour Government. The ideas that I shall express today are fully within the footprint of Labour's policy and programme, and the measures that my Bill would introduce would tackle the growing inequality in pay and career opportunities, the widespread injustice suffered by people—who are often diligent employees—in their place of work, and the increasing poverty of many retired people.

My Bill would also reaffirm the Government's moral obligation to tackle the great failures of the employment market. An unregulated employment market results in so many of our fellow citizens being denied the right to work, and so many of them who are in work, being denied dignity while they are there.

I make no apology for asserting that the issue is a moral one. Too many of our citizens are denied the opportunity to provide adequately for themselves and their loved ones and dependants. Too many people are not receiving a fair return on their labour, and cannot sell their ideas or their work at a fair price. Many people do not have an opportunity to maximise their skills and talents to benefit themselves and the common good. Unhappily, so many people in work have little or no job satisfaction or job security.

One of the features of the decline in trade union membership among the work force has been increasing numbers of accidents and hazards at work. Decades from now, students of history will look back in bewilderment and amazement at the past 18 years, in which a Conservative Government was indifferent to, and presided over, the shedding of our country's manufacturing base, a growing skills shortage, growing poverty and increasing burdens in social security payments. They will also note that, on 30 occasions, the Government attempted to launder and doctor unemployment figures. My Bill will ensure that unemployment figures are based on fact, not fantasy, and that they cannot be doctored to suit the party political purposes of an embarrassed Employment Minister.

My Bill would charge the Government with a duty to create jobs and to meet the skills shortage. It would require the introduction of training opportunities for all age groups, but particularly, and immediately, for the young unemployed. I am pleased that my hon. Friends, who will form the next Government, are committed to take immediate action to take 250,000 young people off benefits and to put them into work.

My Bill predicates the introduction of a national minimum wage, accepting the European working time directive, and, most importantly, providing people with a right to paid holidays. Although I recognise the need for a flexible labour market, I believe that the market must also match the demand for jobs with skills. Such matching is a matter in which the Government have a duty to intervene.

I want an end to discrimination based on age or disability in employment. Legislation providing inalienable rights against discrimination in employment based on disability or age is long overdue. My Bill would also ensure that there is a right to join a trade union, to organise a trade union and for trade unions to be recognised by employers.

The consequences of passing my Bill would be a war on unfair and arbitrary dismissal; there would be consultation instead of diktats in the workplace; and the callous disregard of workers, treated as if they were chattels, will be halted. One often recurring example of such disregard is people learning from news bulletins that their plant will be closed and their jobs transferred to another part of the UK or to another country. It has to stop. My proposals would place greater emphasis on conflict resolution by giving more power to advisory and conciliation services. Retired people, many of whom are on income support, would benefit from the new "pension entitlement" that is a hallmark of Labour's programme and policy.

The Bill is necessary to address the gross injustices affecting people on the margins of the job market. I represent one of the largest retail sectors in the United Kingdom. Numerous people have temporary or part-time jobs in West Thurrock retail park. All too often, they are on poverty wages. The Bill requires the Government to intervene in order to protect the most vulnerable from pernicious practices such as zero hours contracts, splitting jobs into bite sizes to ensure that workers' earnings are below the national insurance threshold, and the cynical dismissal of workers just before they qualify for employment rights. Something must be done.

Part-time work has increased by 30 per cent. since the last general election. Half the men in temporary employment are in temporary employment because they cannot find permanent work, and 50 per cent. of part-time employees earn less than £4 per hour. Some 800,000 of our fellow citizens earn less than £2.50 an hour and 2.5 million employees have no entitlement to paid holidays, so millions of children are denied the opportunity to enjoy a basic holiday once a year.

Many people—2.5 million women and 1 million men—are paid below the national insurance lower earnings limit, and rely on means-tested benefits. They and their families are vulnerable to long-term social exclusion.

It is time for Labour, but not just in the party political sense. Soon my hon. Friends will occupy the Treasury Bench, but when I say that it is time for labour, I also refer to the millions of people who make up the work force. In my view, the dice has been loaded against them for far too long. It is time for Parliament to take measures to ensure that people have dignity at work, a fair return for their labour, initiative and ideas, and dignity when they retire. Therefore, I seek leave to bring in the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe, Mr. Kevin McNamara, Mr. Terry Lewis, Mr. Neil Gerrard, Mr. Paul Flynn, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Mike Gapes, Mr. Ian Davidson, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Gordon Prentice and Mr. Ronnie Campbell.

RIGHTS AT WORK AND IN RETIREMENT

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay accordingly presented a Bill to provide for rights at work, training opportunities and dignity in retirement: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Thursday 1 May, and to be printed [Bill 134].

Representation of the People

5.34 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I beg to move,

That the draft Representation of the People (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

Madam Speaker: I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the draft Representation of the People (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Local Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft European Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft European Parliamentary Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

Miss Widdecombe: In so far as anything relating to voting can be judged uncontroversial at the moment, I believe that the six sets of regulations before the House are uncontroversial. They seek to introduce three improvements into arrangements relating to absent voting at local government, parliamentary and European parliamentary elections.

One set of regulations introduces the changes for local government and parliamentary elections in England and Wales, and a second set extends the arrangements to European parliamentary elections in those countries and Scotland; three separate regulations apply the changes to elections in Northern Ireland and one set deals with parliamentary and local government elections in Scotland.

The most important measure relaxes the deadline by which electors must apply if they wish to vote in elections by post or by proxy. Under the Representation of the People Regulations 1986, the deadline is noon on the 13th working day before polling. That is a very tight timetable for electors to meet, and every election produces complaints from electors who have missed the deadline and so cannot get a postal or proxy vote.

The draft regulations relax the deadline from noon on the 13th working day before polling to 5 pm on the 11th working day, giving electors an extra two and a half days to get their applications in. It is a proposal on which the main political parties were consulted at official level some time ago, and it was welcomed by them.

The relaxation is drafted to come into force seven days after the regulations are made. That means that they will be in force for the general election and I believe the additional flexibility for electors to secure an absent vote where they need one will be widely welcomed by electors and candidates.

The draft regulations also introduce two further changes relating to the attestation of certain applications for an absent vote. First, they increase the number of nurses who can attest applications for an absent vote made on grounds of physical incapacity. At present, any elector wishing to have an absent vote on a continuing basis on grounds of a physical incapacity that prevents his attending the polling station must have his application attested. That also applies to applications made after the normal closing date on grounds of unforeseen health problems. The Representation of the People Regulations 1986 permit doctors, nurses and Christian Science practitioners to make such attestations, but only first-level nurses are currently empowered to attest applications.

We have been advised by the Royal College of Nursing, the NHS executive and the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting that the arrangements are now too restrictive. Their unanimous view is that any registered nurse should be able to make such an attestation; registered nurses are professionally competent to do so and accountable for their actions.

The regulations therefore provide for any registered nurse to make the attestation that some electors require. That will make it easier for electors to get their applications attested, and thereby to secure their absent vote with no loss of professional reliability.

Finally, the regulations give effect to another proposal that the main political parties have welcomed at official level. Very occasionally, alleged abuses have come to light of the procedures for obtaining the attestations to which I have just referred. Some applications for absent votes must, as I have said, be attested by doctors, nurses or Christian Science practitioners. One or two cases have been reported of batches of applications for a number of constituents being attested by the same person, who seems to have little or no knowledge of the applicants.

While the Government are keen to ensure that everyone who needs an absent vote should get one with the minimum inconvenience, we must also guard against the potential for abuse which inevitably creeps into any absent voting arrangements. The regulations therefore tighten up the procedures by requiring any doctor, nurse or Christian Science practitioner who attests an application for an absent vote to confirm on the application form that he or she is treating or giving care to the applicant for the incapacity which forms the basis of the application. That change is not reflected in the relevant Northern Ireland draft regulations, as the procedure I have described is already in force there and is considered to work well *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that I am boring the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), or perhaps he is just a little tired.

These two measures on attestation are drafted to come into force in Great Britain three months after the regulations are made. That will allow time for a period of notice of the changes to be registered with electoral administrators and for amended forms to be printed centrally and ordered by electoral registration officers who obtain their stocks from the Stationery Office.

In Northern Ireland, where the statement of treatment already applies, the sole change of practice in attestation will come into force after seven days. The three-month delay in implementation in Great Britain will not affect any elector's ability to obtain an absent vote at the general election. Anyone needing one should be able to get one on a one-off basis, and, as I have said, they will have longer to do so than at present.

I have mentioned one small difference between the provisions before the House relating to Northern Ireland and those for the rest of the United Kingdom—the existing provision in Northern Ireland for certain attestors to indicate that they are treating or giving care to the applicant. That is now being applied to the rest of the United Kingdom.

There is another small difference. The Northern Ireland provisions update existing electoral law to take account of changes in the definitions of residential care and nursing homes in Northern Ireland. The current definitions in Northern Ireland electoral law were repealed by the Registered Homes (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 and consequently the electoral law of Northern Ireland needs to be updated. That is done by the regulations and the order affecting Northern Ireland. That technical updating does not apply to the rest of the United Kingdom.

The two sets of European parliamentary regulations before the House merely apply to European parliamentary elections the provisions that I have just described for local government and parliamentary elections. One set of the European parliamentary regulations extends the provisions to England, Wales and Scotland, and the second set extends them to Northern Ireland.

The regulations are uncontroversial. They increase the freedom of electors to obtain a postal or proxy vote in time for the general election. That should increase the total number of electors able to vote, which must be welcome in a democracy. The regulations introduce two sensible and targeted changes in arrangements for continuing absent vote applications to be attested. The first further extends flexibility for electors and the second closes off a possible avenue of abuse. I therefore commend the measures to the House.

5.40 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): The right hon. Lady thought that we were bored by her speech. In no way were we bored; we were stunned by her relaxed composure, replacing the fighting harangue that we normally have to deal with. It is most unusual for the right hon. Lady and me to deal with an uncontroversial issue.

I endorse the proposals. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) may wish to say a few words about Northern Ireland when winding up.

We support regulation 4(3) that applies to England and Wales and to Scotland. Following the representations of the medical profession, it is welcome that any registered nurse should be allowed to attest to someone's physical incapacity. We also support regulations 4(4) and 4(5), which require a medical practitioner, a nurse or others who attest, to say that they are treating the patient. Is it the right hon. Lady's intention that, provided one practitioner in a group practice had dealt with the person on a medical basis, any similarly qualified member of that practice would be able to attest? I am happy to give way now, or the right hon. Lady may wish to reflect on that question and deal with it at the end.

Miss Widdecombe *indicated assent.*

Mr. Henderson: I am getting an indication that the answer is yes.

I support the aim of regulation 5, to extend our democracy by allowing a greater period for people who are going to be absent to qualify for a postal vote.

The regulations were based on a Home Office working group report on absent voting. It is unfortunate that there has not been time in this Parliament to deal with some of the other issues covered in the report. All hon. Members are concerned about the fact that so many people are disqualified from voting in a general election. The Library has estimated from the 1991 census that about 2 million voters will move during the 23½ weeks between the qualifying date for the electoral register—10 October—and the beginning of May. Many of them will move a short distance, and it will be relatively easy for them to make their way to a polling station, but the Library estimates that around 900,000 of those voters will move to a different local authority district. Very few of them will end up voting in a general election. That is a substantial proportion of our population disfranchised. We need to consider that further in the next Parliament.

There are some worries that a rolling register could be abused if it was not possible to check addresses on it. In the next Session, Parliament should consider whether a rolling register could be added to regularly so that people would not be disqualified. Other checks may also have to be included, in addition to the normal checks to prevent abuse. We would do our democracy a just service by introducing new regulations on that in the next Parliament.

5.44 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I should like to raise an amendment that should be made to the regulations but which, I regret, is not being made. I have raised the issue with Home Office Ministers three times during the past five years.

The names Ian Gow, Airey Neave and Robert Bradford will be well known to hon. Members. They have all been murdered by the IRA since 1979. The devices that murdered the first two were planted at their homes. It is unwise of the House to demand that candidates in parliamentary and other elections should give their normal home address on nomination papers and ballot papers. It is said that that furthers democracy, but I do not understand how the death of an hon. Member furthers democracy.

A party other than the Conservatives may be in government at some stage, although I would regret that. That party would then discover the problems. I understand that Lord Mason still has protection against the IRA. I recall Lord Fitt having to hold off a gang of people with a revolver at the top of his stairs. In all those cases, terrorist organisations have attacked hon. Members. Ulster Unionist Members will be only too well aware of the threats that they live with every day.

We should not make a gift to terrorist organisations—the IRA or others. There are other terrorist organisations that might want to kill hon. Members. It is foolish for us to have to give our home addresses. That is a gift to a terrorist who wants to find out where an hon. Member lives. A terrorist will baulk at the idea of having to ferret around for the information. Of course, anybody can find where any of us lives if they try hard enough, but if we make it more difficult, attacks are less likely. I regret that it is likely that there will be further attacks.

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

Before the last general election, the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) tried to introduce regulations on this subject. The Liberal Democrats—notable on this occasion, as often, for their absence—said that that was unacceptable and would undermine democracy. I say again that I do not understand how the death of any hon. Member from whatever party improves democracy. I very much hope that, in future, we will amend the regulations so that candidates do not have to give their home addresses.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I think that the hon. Gentleman has sat down. I was about to make to him a point that I shall make to the House. His comments went beyond the regulations before us. Although I do not mind passing references that go beyond the regulations, the House would be ill advised to dwell on them.

5.47 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): This is the second tranche of these little orders to come before us in the past 10 days. The first few relating to Northern Ireland were considered last week, and dealt with the sums that candidates may spend. I noticed that, in that debate, everybody seemed to miss the fact that, in a proportional representation election in Northern Ireland, a party that puts up five or six candidates has five or six lots of expenses to play around with. Those on the two Front Benches should keep that in mind when they complain about the sums that are sometimes available.

I have also noticed, from last week's regulations and from today's fistful, that we seem to be getting into a complex area, with constant reviews and updatings of electoral law. From what the Minister has said, some of the measures that we are passing will not take effect in time for the general election. I therefore suggest that serious attention should be given in the next Parliament to the consolidation of electoral law in one easily obtained book, which is updated, so that we do not have to plough through one little regulation after another for years back.

In last year's election, it was impossible to obtain certain elements of electoral law, and some people standing in the election did not know what the law was. I see that the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), is on the Government Front Bench. I hope that the Government will take on board the need to consolidate and reprint the regulations quickly after the general election.

The Minister said that the change of time scale for postal vote applications was necessary because the time was tight for electors. We all appreciate that—in view of the number of complaints that every political party must deal with. I do not know whether the general election will be on 1 May, but I understand that there is to be a local election on that day. The local election in Northern Ireland, however, is three weeks later, so we shall have to start electioneering at the beginning of April and be at it for nearly two months. We shall all be rather weary of it by the time it ends. One thing is certain: all those who miss the postal vote the first time round will want to vote at the local election, so we at least have two bites of the cherry. I am therefore grateful for the extra two days.

I hope that the Minister has reflected on the fact that, although we shall make matters easier for electors, we shall make them more difficult for staff of the returning officers. Rather than saving money, the tighter time scale means that we shall have to employ more people in electoral offices.

I listened with interest to what the Minister said about the changes in the attestation. The application forms will clearly be different and the changes with regard to nurses' qualifications will have an effect. One sometimes wonders whether all the changes are beneficial. I hope, therefore, that nurses' names, addresses and qualifications will be put down and be checkable.

On the Local Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order, will the Minister clarify who will be registered? When we are dealing with nursing and residential homes, will the manager of a home where electors are resident have to register, or will the manager of the group of homes—certain firms now run a large number of homes—be considered to be in charge of the home? To whom does the legislation apply? We urgently need that information, which applies throughout the United Kingdom.

The Minister pointed out that one of the changes to the British legislation simply brought this side of the Irish sea into line with legislation in Northern Ireland. Is it not time that electoral law for general elections was exactly the same throughout the kingdom? Could not consolidation of the legislation be done with that in mind? We are sometimes weary of the little differences that appear. We see no good reason for them, and I therefore hope that the Government, or their successors, will take on board what I am saying and do what is necessary to bring legislation in Northern Ireland and Great Britain into line.

The Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations are clearly different from the regulations that apply to England, Wales and Scotland. I wondered why, but the Minister clarified that matter in her opening remarks. Will she confirm that, despite the different wording in the regulations that apply to Northern Ireland, they have exactly the same effect when it comes to the practicalities of elections?

I confess that I read the Great Britain regulations 2(2) and simply could not understand. It seemed to say that there was a delay of three months. Does that allow regulation 4(4) to come into effect immediately? The first part of the paragraphs seemed to say one thing but the second part seemed to say something different. Will the Minister clarify that?

I very much regret that the regulations do not oblige the chief electoral officer of Northern Ireland to keep a record of persons refused a ballot paper because they do not have proper identification. That bone of contention with the electors and political parties in Northern Ireland has run for years. Every time we raise it after an election at which a large number of people have complained, we are told, "Oh, those people might go away and come back." Our experience is that if people are refused a ballot, paper because they do not have the correct piece of paper in their hand, they do not come back. We must therefore look once more at having a single piece of identification—an identity card—that could be used across the board.

May I say to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), who spoke on behalf of the Labour party, that, although a rolling register is an

attractive idea at first sight, if he lived in Northern Ireland he might take a distinctly different view because of the activities of Sinn Fein-IRA. I assure him that if one opens the door to frauds that could be perpetrated in one part of the kingdom, the door does not close; it opens right across the kingdom.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): One of the advantages of the electoral registration system in Northern Ireland is that there is a full canvass for checking that the correct people are on the register. If that were extended to England, Wales and Scotland, the registration figures there would increase considerably. That means that a rolling register would not have the serious implications for Northern Ireland that the hon. Gentleman fears.

Mr. Ross: I agree with the first part of the hon. Gentleman's comments, but not the second. We examined those matters at the meetings some parties attended in the Home Office. I was a representative of my party. The Minister is well aware of those meetings, at which a number of serious objections were thrown up. She might like to expand on them so that the hon. Gentleman is better informed.

I agree with the hon. Member; the registration process in Northern Ireland is much better than that in the rest of the UK. It is carefully done and people are followed up. The electoral officer claims that his register is 98 per cent. accurate. While that is impossible to prove, it is much better now than when he started doing it.

The political parties in Northern Ireland, albeit in a smaller society, seem to be much more effective at getting their people on the register than political parties in Great Britain have ever been, so perhaps we have a lesson or two to teach this side of the water yet.

5.57 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I want to speak on similar lines to other hon. Members in welcoming what are basically sound but small, modest reforms. I, too, am disappointed, especially from the Northern Ireland point of view, that the Government have issued no general papers on developments within the electoral process to let us know how they see the electoral system developing. The Labour party believes that the need to safeguard against abuse is considerable.

The regulations do not address the central issue that concerns people—electoral abuse. The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) recently accused Sinn Fein of stealing votes. He was following what the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) has been saying for a long time: that personation in Northern Ireland is a serious problem. It is important to follow that through and give maximum backing to the chief electoral officer, Mr. Bradley, in his constant battle to make the system fairer.

Mr. Bradley hopes that computerisation, linked with the appropriate software, will improve these regulations and others, because the ways of abusing the system in Northern Ireland and elsewhere are numerous. We shall write to each of the parties in Northern Ireland asking for their suggestions on how to safeguard the system. The Government should have been more active on that matter.

As the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said, there will be a tension between the desire to ensure that the procedure is the same as in the rest of the United Kingdom and the recognition of the particular tensions in Northern Ireland. He mentioned carrying identification at the polling booth. There is no doubt that the health card is the weak link.

Mr. William Ross: I must disabuse the hon. Gentleman of that idea: the weak link is any document that does not have a photograph on it, which is most of them.

Mr. Worthington: It so happens that the health card does not have a photograph on it, and I am talking about that weakness and the rumours about the capacity of various organisations to churn out health cards that the polling agents cannot identify as false. The effectiveness of the card would be immensely strengthened even with the addition of a signature. There are complications, however, and any change would cost money.

It is not only a matter of personation. There are weak links at each stage in the system. For example, there are huge disparities in the number of postal votes in different constituencies. At the last general election, one constituency had nearly 4,000 postal votes, or 8.2 per cent. of the votes cast; another had only 335, or 0.8 per cent. of the votes cast. That may reflect geography or levels of political organisation, but in approving the orders we ought to be able to be confident that there are benign explanations of the huge differences. It is extremely important to know that only those who are entitled to vote do so—and only once—especially when results are close.

We welcome the proposals. They seem to be safe and important changes, but they are extremely modest in relation to what is needed to appraise whether the system in Northern Ireland is satisfactory. There has been plenty of practice with elections in Northern Ireland, so we should have had papers before us stating whether the system is working fairly.

6.1 pm

Miss Widdecombe: This has been a short but interesting debate, and there has been a large measure of agreement across the parties. Almost all the points raised were more to do with what was not in the orders than with what was. I shall ensure that all the points are drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, and I am sure that we shall consider whether any further action needs to be taken.

I shall answer one or two of the points that were made. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) spoke about 2 million voters moving between certain dates, and said that many would lose their vote as a result. That is not necessarily so; they can still vote by post or by proxy at their old address. The extension of time will help with that.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said that the extension of time might be good for electors, but would be very difficult for electoral registration officers and those who had to implement the system. We took detailed advice before deciding on the two-and-a-half-day extension; we were advised that that was the maximum extension that it was safe and practicable to make. We believe that we have found a balance between looking after the electors and looking after those who have to put the requirements of the election into effect.

[Miss Widdecombe]

A rolling register would be much more expensive and more bureaucratic, and we have decided that further work on it would not be the highest priority when considering further reforms that might have to be made.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry mentioned consolidation. That took place in 1983, and further detailed regulations have to be made simply to keep pace with and clarify developments since that time. He also asked, quite fairly, whether the Northern Ireland regulations were the same as those for the rest of the United Kingdom. The answer, as I said in my introduction, is yes, except where Northern Ireland already has a slightly different arrangement that cannot easily be accommodated or equalled.

It was suggested that the Northern Ireland method of a complete canvass should be extended to Great Britain to get more people on the register. In fact, many electoral registration officers in Great Britain conduct a canvass of household doors, and it is down to those officers to decide the best method for themselves, so the concept of a complete household canvass is not unique to Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry also spoke about the Northern Ireland electoral offices not keeping a record of people turned away from polling stations because they did not have the right identification. In fact, a leaflet is delivered to every one of Northern Ireland's 600,000 households before an election, detailing the documents that are legally required to be presented in order to obtain a ballot paper. We have no reason to believe that a significant number turn up without the correct documentation.

Mr. William Ross: The right hon. Lady is saying what the electoral officers tell her, but will she not listen to what the political parties say? We have evidence that many people are turned away and do not come back.

Miss Widdecombe: That is a serious point, and if the hon. Gentleman believes that there is substantial evidence for it, he should let us know. We have to go on the evidence before us, which suggests that that is not the case. It is not that it does not happen, but that the number is not substantial.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) asked about addresses on ballot papers. I understand his point of view, and I have some sympathy with it. I shall ensure that it is drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend, but it is not a matter than I can immediately encompass in the regulations with which we are dealing today.

I hope that I have dealt with the main points that were raised in the debate. I shall of course read *Hansard* carefully and answer any further points of detail in writing.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Representation of the People (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Representation of the People (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Local Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft European Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft European Parliamentary Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

Orders of the Day

National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

DUTY OF REGISTERED OPTICIANS TO REFER CERTAIN PERSONS TO REGISTERED MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS

'.—(1) Section 31 of the Opticians Act 1989 (matters with respect to which the General Optical Council may make rules) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (5) (power to make rules requiring registered optician to refer persons to registered medical practitioners except in certain circumstances), for the words from "except" to "take the prescribed steps" substitute "except—

(a) in an emergency,

(b) where that person is consulting him for the purpose of being given treatment in accordance with rules under subsection (1)(d) above, or

(c) in such other cases as may be prescribed,

take the prescribed steps".

(3) After subsection (5), insert—

"(5A) Rules made by virtue of subsection (5)(c) may impose conditions which must be satisfied if the exception for which those rules provide is to apply." '.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

6.8 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following:

New clause 9—*Provision of special ophthalmic services under a pilot scheme—*

'.—(1) This section applies to any pilot scheme under which special ophthalmic services are provided.

(2) An agreement which constitutes, or is one of the agreements which together constitute, a pilot scheme may be made by an authority only with one or more of the following—

(a) an NHS trust;

(b) a person on an ophthalmic list;

(c) an NHS employee or a pilot scheme employee;

(d) a qualifying body;

(e) an individual who is providing special ophthalmic services under that or another pilot scheme.

(3) In this section—

"NHS employee" means an individual who, in connection with the provision of services in the health service, is employed by—

(a) an NHS trust;

(b) a medical practitioner whose name is included in a medical list; or

(c) a medical practitioner who is providing personal medical services in accordance with a pilot scheme;

"ophthalmic list" has the same meaning as in section 4A(3) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 or section 17AA(3) of the 1978 Act;

"pilot scheme employee" means an individual who, in connection with the provision of special ophthalmic in accordance with a pilot scheme is employed by an individual providing those services;

"qualifying body" means a company which is limited by shares all of which are legally and beneficially owned by persons falling within paragraph (a), (b), (c) or (e) of subsection (2).'.

New clause 10—*Charges for special ophthalmic services—*

'.—(1) In the 1977 Act, after section 78A (as inserted by section 26 above), insert—

"Charges for special ophthalmic services under section 28C

78B. No charge may be made for special ophthalmic services provided under section 28C arrangements."

(2) In the 1978 Act, after section 70A (as inserted by section 26 above), insert—

"Charges for special ophthalmic services under section 17C

70B. No charge may be made for special ophthalmic services provided under section 17C arrangements."'.

Amendment No. 77, in clause 1, page 1, line 14, after 'authority)', insert ', or

(c) special ophthalmic services are provided (otherwise than by the authority)'.

Amendment No. 78, in page 1, line 16, after 'services', insert 'or special ophthalmic services'.

Amendment No. 79, in page 2, line 34, after 'Act', insert '; and

"special ophthalmic services" means sight testing and related services provided to persons over the age of 60; and "sight testing" has the same meaning as in section 36(2) of the Opticians Act 1989'.

Amendment No. 80, in clause 21, page 12, line 21, after 'Authority)', insert', or

(c) special ophthalmic services are provided (otherwise than by the Authority)'.

Amendment No. 81, in page 12, line 24, after 'services', insert 'or special ophthalmic services'.

Amendment No. 82, in page 13, line 25, at end insert

'; and "special ophthalmic services" means sight testing and related services to persons over the age of 60; and "sight testing" has the same meaning as in section 36(2) of the Opticians Act 1989;'.

Amendment No. 83, in page 13, line 40, at end insert—

'(ca) in the case of an agreement under which special ophthalmic services are provided—

(i) a person on an ophthalmic list;

(ii) an individual who is providing special ophthalmic services in accordance with section 28C arrangements or section 17C arrangements;'.

Amendment No. 84, in page 14, line 27, at end insert—

'"ophthalmic list" has the same meaning as in section 4A(3) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 or section 17AA(3) of the 1978 Act;'.

Amendment No. 85, in page 15, line 10, after 'services', insert'; and

"special ophthalmic services" means sight testing and related services provided to persons over the age of 60; and "sight testing" has the same meaning as in section 36(2) of the Opticians Act 1989'.

Amendment No. 86, in page 15, line 19, after 'Board)', insert ', or

(c) special ophthalmic services are provided (otherwise than by the Board)'.

Amendment No. 87, in page 15, line 22, after 'services', insert 'or special ophthalmic services'.

[Dame Janet Fookes]

Amendment No. 88, in page 16, line 18, at end insert

'; and

"special ophthalmic services" means sight testing and related services provided to persons over the age of 60; and "sight testing" has the same meaning as in section 36(2) of the Opticians Act 1989'.

Amendment No. 89, in page 16, line 33, at end insert—

'(ca) in the case of an agreement under which special ophthalmic services are provided—

(i) a person on an ophthalmic list;

(ii) an individual who is providing special ophthalmic services in accordance with section 28C arrangements or section 17C arrangements;'.

Amendment No. 90, in page 17, line 18, at end insert—

"'ophthalmic list" has the same meaning as in section 4A(3) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 or section 17AA(3) of the 1978 Act;'.

Amendment No. 91, in page 17, line 49, after 'services', insert '; and

"special ophthalmic services" means sight testing and related services to persons over the age of 60; and "sight testing" has the same meaning as in section 36(2) of the Opticians Act 1989'.

Amendment No. 92, in clause 22, page 18, line 16, after 'services,', insert 'special ophthalmic services,'.

Amendment No. 93, in page 20, line 18, after 'services,', insert 'special ophthalmic services,'.

Mr. Malone: I shall first deal briefly with new clause 1, on which there is consensus in the House. In Committee, I noted that we were in broad sympathy with a new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) aimed at regularising the practice that optometrists follow when they find that a patient has an injury or disease of the eye. I am pleased that I think that I can honour my undertaking to the Committee.

New clause 1 replaces section 31 of the Opticians Act 1989 and would enable the General Optical Council to submit a new rule on referrals for consideration by the Privy Council. It would cover all optometrists in whatever context they worked, and give the General Optical Council virtually full discretion in prescribing, through the new rules, when an optometrist should refer a patient with a disease or injury of the eye to a registered medical practitioner. The only constraints would be that it would have to provide exemptions for emergencies or for a patient referred to the optometrist for orthoptic treatment—that is, a patient already under the care of a registered medical practitioner.

The doctors are most affected by the changes are general practitioners and ophthalmologists. Their representatives on the General Optical Council are ready to contribute to the drafting of a new rule. We would also take the views of the medical profession into account in any advice that we gave to the Privy Council on a new rule.

The amendments of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) are all linked to the objective of providing free NHS sight tests to everyone aged over 60, so I shall take them together. We did not exclude ophthalmic services from the pilot schemes because we judged that optometrists were different or inferior to doctors and dentists, but because powers already exist for us to conduct trials of nearly all the permutations by which a health authority might wish to provide ophthalmic services. There are no restrictions on admission to the ophthalmic lists kept by health authorities, and by health boards in Scotland, except that applicants should be appropriately qualified.

There are many examples, as hon. Members know, of shared eye schemes whereby optometrists contribute to monitoring the eye health of patients with sight-threatening diseases such as diabetes and glaucoma. We intend to give powers to health authorities to regularise such arrangements through the NHS contract provisions in clause 30. Many of the hon. Gentleman's objectives are already met by the Bill.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The Minister is right to say that the amendments are linked. Ophthalmic services are not given parity with personal medical and dental services in clause 1. The rest of the drafting of the amendments replicates that of the Bill. Parity of treatment is the purpose of the amendments, and I do not think that that is covered by the current arrangements.

Mr. Malone: That does not need to be enshrined in primary legislation, because there is already a power to bring it about. If the hon. Gentleman wants an undertaking that we view the role of optometrists as important and ophthalmic services as essential to the provision of a range of primary care services, I am happy to give such an assurance. We intend to give powers to health authorities to regularise existing arrangements such as shared eye schemes through the provisions on NHS contracts in clause 30. The matter is not explicitly covered in the Bill because we do not need to write in such a power.

I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that I suspect he seeks—that we view the matter as being of great importance. We want to regularise the excellent schemes that are already growing up in the service, such as shared eye schemes. I think that I mentioned that to the hon. Gentleman in Committee.

I do not believe that giving health authorities and health boards powers to extend the criteria for eligibility for free NHS sight tests would be an appropriate use of development funds. We believe that people who can afford it should pay for their sight tests. I have often put that argument to the House. I am glad that it seems to be catching somewhat, at least with Labour Front-Bench spokesmen, if not with the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey.

Any help that is available, especially from development funds, should be concentrated on vulnerable members of the community. When dealing with problems such as this, targeting is important. About 40 per cent. of the population are eligible for NHS sight tests, including people on low incomes and those at special risk of eye disease. The policies are framed precisely to target available resources on those at greater risk.

We estimate that removing all restrictions on eligibility for NHS sight tests would cost about £140 million a year, while making everyone over 60 eligible would cost £32 million a year. As so often with health care, we are talking about proper targeting to bring about the best possible results. That £32 million could pay for about 4,000 cataract operations. Cataract surgery is one of the most effective eye care interventions and leads to

improved visual acuity for more than 80 per cent. of patients treated. That such targeting is effective is shown by the fact that between 1984 and 1995 the number of eye lens operations, which are mainly for cataracts, increased by 174 per cent.

As I said, we are no longer alone in our judgment of priorities. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) was quoted in last week's press as saying that the Opposition had no commitment to restoring universal free sight tests. In that light, I have every confidence that they will join me in rejecting the amendments. I commend new clause 1 to the House.

6.15 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this group of amendments. I do not take exception to new clause 1, but I would like to speak on the amendments grouped with it. The Minister's evaluation of my reason for tabling new clause 9 and our other new clauses and amendments was right. It is to ensure that we can go back to having, under the NHS, both piloted ophthalmic services and the ability to return to free dental and eye checks.

I understand the debate about targeting and generalising. There is an honest intellectual debate about that—I do not pretend otherwise—and I doubt whether I can persuade the Minister. If I am wrong, I would achieve a significant but slightly unexpected change of Government policy. However, I want to give the serious argument on the other side of the debate to that which the Government espouse and to cite the helpful evidence from answers from the Minister's Department supporting it.

The change in policy in relation to eye and dental checks was controversial. If we could include, as new clause 9 does, pilot schemes under which special ophthalmic services are provided and also, as clarified by amendment No. 79, pilot schemes for sight testing for the over-60s, we would achieve good primary health care. That is what the debate is about.

I would like to go further than the amendments. I do not want someone to say later, "You only included sight testing for the over-60s—what about the rest?" Our policy is to do everyone. However, for the purposes of conciliation and compromise with other parties, I am only putting forward, in amendments Nos. 77 and 79, sight testing for the over-60s. I want to speak specifically about amendment No. 79.

The Department, in timely fashion, gave me yesterday a parliamentary answer with figures for the increase in cataract problems. The crude figure shows that there has been a 57 per cent. rise in treatment for cataracts and a 44 per cent. rise in treatment for glaucoma in the past four years. The figures, which come from the Department of Health, are not disputed.

I shall not speak at length on the figures, which are available in *Hansard*. However, they are—at least—worrying and, I would say, frightening. Some 58,289 more people received cataract treatment in 1995 than in 1991, and 7,651 more people received treatment for glaucoma. Figures from the Library show that an average cataract removal operation costs £1,800, which means that the total bill to the NHS for cataracts alone is £105 million—a significant sum. Just so that people do not accuse me of being nationalistic or partisan, the Welsh figures for cataract treatment are up by 64 per cent. and the Scottish figures are up by 48 per cent.

There is broad support for the case made to Ministers by the Royal National Institute for the Blind, whose representatives came to me and said that they were off to meet the Secretary of State for Health immediately afterwards. The RNIB produced a report some weeks ago and, in support of that report, there are 100 signatures on an early-day motion on the matter—eight Conservative Members, 71 Labour Members and the remainder from my party. The early-day motion argues for a return to free eye tests for this limited category.

The Minister said that we must target the most vulnerable, and in this context no one will be surprised to learn that those most vulnerable are the elderly. Therefore, this proposal is targeted at reintroducing free eye tests for the over-60s. The Minister has given figures from parliamentary answers which suggest that reinstating free eye tests for everybody would cost £100 million, but that reinstating free eye tests for the over-60s would cost only £32 million.

I believe that there would be huge public support for a return to free dental and eye checks, and the Government and the Labour party are making a mistake in not supporting this. I am disappointed, to say the least, that the Labour party—as confirmed a couple of weeks ago—is not supporting the proposal. If it cannot find £32 million to restore free eye tests for the over-60s, its welfare policies must be even thinner than people imagine.

Early diagnosis is essential in preventing the eventual development of serious eye conditions, and the evidence from the RNIB is clear. I was privileged to open the new lecture theatre at the Institute for Optometry at the Elephant and Castle in my constituency. That profession wants to be able to do additional work, and there are huge amounts of work for qualified optometrists. We need more of them, and this debate should be a plea for more people to come forward to qualify to work in this part of the health and medical services.

I shall not detain the House much longer. The figures make the case and, historically, Members from all parties have made the case. We could do some practical work by passing new clause 10. If the new clause were to be passed, I imagine that the Minister would concede that the other amendments could go through on the nod. We should reinstate as a primary care pilot scheme the ability to give free eye tests to the over-60s. I ask the House to support the new clause enthusiastically.

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): We welcome the Minister's support for new clause 1, and we congratulate him on fulfilling his commitment in Committee by moving the clause today. The new clause is welcomed by the Association of Optometrists, and it allows proper professional discretion for optometrists. It is consistent with the spirit of innovation that we supported throughout the Committee. We would argue that those who look most at eyes, and at eyes most of the time, are competent to make judgments about whether patients need a referral for further medical advice.

I shall refer briefly to the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and his hon. Friends. We do not think that this is the place to raise these issues again. When the Government imposed charges for eye tests, we opposed them and fought hard against the abolition of free tests. But we are sick and tired

[Ms Tessa Jowell]

of the hon. Gentleman, his hon. Friends and candidates from his party going on public platforms up and down the country making promises that they know they have not the slightest likelihood of ever having to take responsibility for implementing. It is rank hypocrisy, and I shall be perfectly prepared to give way to the hon. Gentleman after I have asked him to confirm whether he joined the Opposition in the last Parliament when this matter was put to the vote.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I can deal with both matters. We are committed to the Budget figure, and to finding the money. On the question of the votes on this issue, I have been here for all such votes, except one, in the past 14 years.

Ms Jowell: I see. When we had a chance in the last Parliament to defeat the Government on the imposition of charges for eye tests, the hon. Gentleman was absent. That makes my case and suggests how his amendments should be dealt with. We are glad to support new clause 1.

Mr. Malone: The hon. Lady had better tread with care, as I understand that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey has said in print that in the event of a hung Parliament—which I think is unlikely, in view of our impending victory—he intends to be Minister for Health in a coalition Government. She had better have a care when insulting someone who may be a future colleague.

Ms Jowell: There are two words which deal with that ambition: "Dream on".

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I rise to support the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and his colleagues, as it is important to stress that other parties would like to see the reintroduction of free eye tests generally and, in the context of this debate, for the over-60s. I have not had the benefit of listening to all the debates in Committee, but I have read some of the Minister's comments. One of the issues highlighted is whether the Government have properly assessed the risk of sight loss involved.

The Minister said in Committee on 27 February:

"we believe that it is important to develop policies to ensure, where possible, that resources are targeted to where they are needed—to those sections of the population especially at risk."

However, the RNIB report "Losing Sight of Blindness" clearly shows that despite age being the most significant risk factor in terms of developing eye conditions, older people are not eligible for free eye tests on the ground of age alone. Those at the highest risk ought to be those who get free eye tests.

The Minister went on:

"It is important to meet any proven possibility of providing better care. When we are talking about a limited resource, it is better to look at the principle of targeting care than to re-establish something general that is less easy to prove has a definable result."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 27 February 1997; c. 198–99.]

Again, the RNIB makes it clear that people aged 60 and over are the group most at risk of developing eye disease because of their age. It is consequently believed that there is a proven need to target that group as the most high-risk group.

We all agree that not only is early diagnosis and treatment vital to prevent avoidable sight loss, but it is cheaper when compared with the full health and social care costs for an individual with advanced eye disease. Poor vision and blindness lead to greater reliance on social services, limited mobility and expensive medical interventions. Sight disability imposes additional expenses on the individual that are not adequately compensated for in the benefits system. Poor eyesight is a significant contributory factor to accidents among older people. Although there is an estimated cash saving of £32 million from not providing free eye tests for people aged 60 and over, that will be more than offset by those other costs, especially the costs of looking after elderly people who have lost their sight or whose sight is deteriorating.

6.30 pm

It is important to note that there is a clear and genuine dispute about the Government's figures on the number of people going for eye tests. Research carried out in 1994–95 showed that the number of people going for eye tests was 12.7 million, but the Government's change in the methodology resulted in the figures for that year being 14.6 million—clearly the Government wanted to show an increase. While there is considerable dispute about the figures, there is clearly a disincentive for the elderly in particular to go for tests when they have to pay for them.

It is vital that the quality of the eye tests is ensured. By law, an eye test must include a comprehensive eye examination to check for any disease, injury or abnormality that may be present. I am sure that the Government will want to ensure that the those tests are carried out to the proper standard. In addition, there is widespread misunderstanding about who qualifies for exemption under the current rules. Many people are not aware of the exemptions, which should be more widely promoted.

We know that older people have a far higher level of eye disease than other age groups: 90 per cent. of blind and partially sighted people are aged 60 and over. At just over 1 million people in the United Kingdom, that is a significant number. Given the high incidence of visual impairment among the over-60s, it is of great concern that that high-risk group is not exempt from charges on the ground of age alone. In 1995–96, it was estimated that almost 4.5 million eye tests were carried out on people aged 60 and over, of which only 43 per cent. were done on the national health service; therefore, 57 per cent. paid for the tests. It is clear that the single most significant factor in developing eye disease is age. There is a proven, clear and discrete need and I want the Government to recognise that in the context of the debate on free eye tests.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 8

EMPLOYMENT OF PRE-REGISTRATION HOUSE OFFICERS IN MEDICAL PRACTICES

'.—(1) The Medical Act 1983 is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2) of section 10 (experience required for full registration as a medical practitioner), for "approved hospitals or approved institutions," substitute "—

(a) approved hospitals,

(b) approved institutions, or

(c) approved medical practices,".

(3) In subsection (3) of section 11 (construction of section 10, etc), after the first "where" insert "—

(a) in the case of an approved hospital or an approved institution,",

and at the end insert "; or

(b) in the case of an approved medical practice, the person employed satisfies such conditions as to residence as may be prescribed".

(4) In subsection (4) of section 11—

(a) insert in the appropriate place—

"medical practice" means a prescribed description of practice in which one or more medical practitioners—

(i) provide general medical services under Part II of the National Health Service Act 1977, Part II of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 or Part VI of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972; or

(ii) perform personal medical services in accordance with arrangements made under section 28C of the 1977 Act, section 17C of the 1978 Act or the corresponding provisions of the law in force in Northern Ireland;";

(b) in the definition of "prescribed", after "means" insert "—

(a) in subsection (3)(b) and in the definition of "medical practice", prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State; and

(b) in the other provisions of this Part,".

(5) After subsection (4) of section 11 insert—

"(4A) The Education Committee may by regulations provide that the period of employment in a medical practice which may be reckoned towards the completion of any of the periods mentioned in section 10(3)(a) above shall not exceed such period as may be specified in the regulations.

(6) In subsection (5) of section 11, after "under subsection (2) of section 10 above" insert "or under subsection (4A) of this section".

(7) After subsection (6) of section 11 insert—

"(7) Regulations made by the Secretary of State under this section must be made by statutory instrument; and such a statutory instrument shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament." '.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Malone: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: amendment (a) to the proposed clause, in line 40, at end add—

'(8) Section 12 is omitted.'.

Government amendments Nos. 59, 60, 62, 63, 65, 67 to 72, 74 and 75.

Mr. Malone: During the Second Reading debate I gave an undertaking to meet the concerns of several hon. Members about the limitations in the Medical Act 1983 that prevented pre-registration house officers from taking placements in general practice except in health centres. In Committee, I explained that that was clearly an anomaly that we were happy to address. I am therefore pleased to move new clause 8 and to discuss amendment No. 75, which deliver on my undertaking to the Committee. With those, I want also to speak to the related amendments to clauses 11 and 22 and schedule 2.

New clause 8 and amendment No. 75 are designed to enable more young doctors in their final year of basic training—the pre-registration house officer year—to undertake part of that training in general practices. The case for the change has been made for many years and it is now quite timely, given that the Bill provides opportunities for more flexible ways of working and providing services. Much of a primary care-led national health service has to do with the training provided in the context of primary care.

It is important that I should set out a number of practical issues that will have to be carefully considered before those placements in general practice are fully introduced. I want there to be no misunderstanding among hon. Members: the measure before the House is an enabling measure and there is considerably more work to be done. We are considering encouraging carefully evaluated pilot schemes in health centres, which will enable us to assess whether any constraints should be placed on the activities of pre-registration house officers in general practice. For example, concerns were raised in Committee about the prescribing of medicines and unaccompanied visits to very young children or, indeed, to any patient.

Those are important issues and we must balance young doctors' training needs with the protection of patients' interests and safety. The education committee of the General Medical Council will need some time for the careful development of regulations and guidance to cover those issues and will need to consult widely. Regulations made by the education committee will be approved in the normal way by the Privy Council. We therefore do not expect the new arrangements in general practices to be in place for some time.

I now turn to amendment (a) to new clause 8. There must have been some misunderstanding that has led to the amendment being tabled, because it removes entirely section 12 of the Medical Act which provides that a health centre cannot be an approved institution for the purpose of pre-registration house officer training, unless it is an NHS centre provided under the National Health Service Act 1977 or the Scotland or Northern Ireland equivalents. Where it is so and if other conditions are satisfied, PRHO training can take place in health centres. In other words, if that part of the Medical Act were removed, it would cast doubt on whether PRHO placements—including some that are now in operation—could take place in health centres. I am sure that that was not what was intended.

I turn finally to the amendments to clauses 11 and 22 and schedule 2. In brief, those replicate provisions that currently exist in general medical services and give the Secretary of State powers to replicate those that operate in the general dental services. They will enable us to ensure that training can take place in the different environments and service settings for which the Bill provides. I assure hon. Members that all the controls that currently underpin training within general medical and dental services will equally be applied to personal medical and dental services, so that training activities can be undertaken with no effect on the quality of the services provided. I commend the amendments to the House.

Ms Jowell: The new clause has been introduced with cross-party support and is also, as the Minister made clear, supported by the General Medical Council, which is

[Ms Jowell]

responsible for overseeing the pre-registration year for medical graduates. As part of that pre-registration year, medical graduates can spend up to four months in general practice.

The need for the new clause is created by section 12 of the Medical Act 1983, which restricts the experience of general practice that may be counted towards the 12 months of general clinical training needed for full registration to that obtained in practices based in publicly owned premises. However, general practitioners are increasingly practising in buildings that are not publicly owned and that fact prevents medical schools from incorporating a training period in the pre-registration year.

Currently, of 3,800 new doctor graduates each year, only three spend part of their pre-registration time in general practice. The new clause, therefore, would amend the 1983 Act to broaden the scope for employment of pre-registration house officers to an approved hospital or approved institution.

Opposition Members believe that to be a practical way of starting to tackle the crippling shortages of GPs in many of our inner cities and of coping with the long-term recruitment crisis confronting general practice. We believe that, if medical students in training have more exposure to general practice and more opportunity to train in general practice, general practice and the opportunities offered by general practice as part of primary care will become more appealing. We cannot envisage the proper and well-grounded development of the health service with the shift from secondary to primary care without the ability to tackle the acute shortage of general practitioners.

We regard the measure as a way of improving standards in the long run and ensuring a better gender balance in the availability of general practitioners, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) on Second Reading.

Mr. Simon Hughes: As I said on Second Reading, this measure is welcome. There was lobbying from both sides of the House, and the Minister undertook to consider the matter. I am grateful for that. This welcome measure will allow further development of general practitioner opportunities. I am grateful to colleagues—one of whom I believe is about to seek to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker—for the fact that they, on behalf of the General Medical Council, have ensured that we are aware of the strong view held by the General Medical Council on this subject.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I have great pleasure in welcoming what the Minister has said, and I am delighted to discover that this anomaly in the Medical Act 1983 will now be put right. Madam Deputy Speaker, as a lay member of the General Medical Council, I was pleased to catch your eye on Second Reading, and I was pleased that the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims), who also sits as a lay member of the General Medical Council, made a valuable contribution to that debate.

Although I shall not press the new clause to a vote, I have one concern: I do not quite follow the logic of the new clause that the Government have tabled, because it does not seek to remove section 12 from the 1983 Act. Although the amendment contains three lines referring to an order or regulation to be made by the Secretary of State to accomplish the objective that is sought, I do not understand why section 12 of the 1983 Act will remain on the statute book, given that it appears to be in conflict with the section that is sought to be amended.

Mr. Malone: It might be helpful if I spell it out for the hon. Gentleman. Such regulations will not be in place for some time and several people are already undertaking training in such health centres. If we simply removed that section of the legislation, their future placements, some of which start in August 1997, might be in doubt. Section 12 remains merely to ensure certitude.

The GMC was seeking to enable future training arrangements to take place in a wider context, and that is what the new clause enables them to do. It would be ironic if, while opening up the prospects for training in primary care in general, allowing scope for substantial discussion about how that is introduced, we were to agree a provision that prevented the training that is already taking place under what, once the Bill is through the House, we could probably safely describe as "the old arrangements."

Mr. Wardell: I am grateful to the Minister for that explanation. I now understand his rationale for seeking to proceed in this way; otherwise it would be a great disservice to the, albeit few, people who are currently in training.

Once again, I thank the Minister for the fact that he listened carefully to this point on Second Reading. I am very grateful to him, to Labour Front Bench Members and to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) for the fact that we have been able, on this occasion, through an all-party system, to agree on something that will benefit the national health service so much.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Amendment (a) not to be moved?

Mr. Wardell: No, not to be moved.

Clause added to the Bill.

New clause 2

PROVISION OF PERSONAL MEDICAL OR PERSONAL OR DENTAL SERVICES UNDER A PILOT SCHEME (DISQUALIFIED BODIES)

'.—(1) Notwithstanding anything in sections 2 or 3 above, an agreement which constitutes, or is one of the agreements which together constitute, a pilot scheme may not be made by an authority with a disqualified body.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a body is a disqualified body if—

(a) it is a public limited company; or

(b) it is a person or body which provides medical or dental services other than within the National Health Service and does not fall within paragraphs (a) to (c) and (e) of section 2(2) or 3(2) above; or

(c) it enters into arrangements involving any special obligation or limit on clinical independence or choice, whether by virtue of a purchase, lease, discount or inducement, with any body concerned with the provision of medical, nursing or pharmaceutical services, or with

the provision of medicines or medical or related appliances, other than a person falling within paragraphs (a) to (c) and (e) of section 2(2) or 3(2) above.

(3) For the purposes of determining whether a body is a disqualified body, it shall be sufficient proof that a body is not disqualified if the Secretary of State has issued a certificate that a body is not a disqualified body for the purposes of a pilot scheme specified in that certificate.

(4) A certificate issued under subsection (3) may be withdrawn or cancelled by the Secretary of State, and he shall inform the relevant authority of any such a withdrawal or cancellation.'.—*[Ms Jowell.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

6.45 pm

Ms Jowell: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 3—*Provision of personal medical or dental services (disqualified bodies)*—

'.—(1) In the 1977 Act, after section 28D (as inserted by section 21(1) above) insert—

"Persons with whom agreements may not be made

28DD.—(1) Notwithstanding anything in sections 28C or 28D above, an agreement which constitutes, or is one of the agreements which together constitute, a pilot scheme, may not be made by an Authority with a disqualified body.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a body is a disqualified body if—

(a) it is a public limited company, or

(b) it is a person or body which provides medical or dental services other than within the National Health Service and does not fall within paragraphs (a) to (d) of section 28D(1) above; or

(c) it enters into arrangements involving any special obligation or limit on clinical independence or choice, whether by virtue of a purchase, lease, discount or inducement, with any body concerned with the provision of medical, nursing or pharmaceutical services, or with the provision of medicines or medical or related appliances, other than a person falling within paragraphs (a) to (d) of section 28D(1) above.

(3) For the purposes of determining whether a body is a disqualified body, it shall be sufficient proof that a body is not disqualified if the Secretary of State has issued a certificate that a body is not a disqualified body for the purposes of the agreement specified in that certificate.

(4) A certificate issued under subsection (3) may be withdrawn or cancelled by the Secretary of State, and he shall inform the relevant Authority of any such withdrawal or cancellation."

(2) In the 1978 Act, after section 17D (as inserted by section 21(2) above) insert—

"Persons with whom agreements may not be made."

17DD.—(1) Notwithstanding anything in sections 17C or 17D above, an agreement which constitutes, or is one of the agreements which together constitute, a pilot scheme may not be made by a Board with a disqualified body.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a body is a disqualified body if—

(a) it is a public limited company, or

(b) it is a person or body which provides medical or dental services other than within the National Health Service and does not fall within paragraphs (a) to (d) of section 17D(1) above; or

(c) it enters into arrangements involving any special obligation or limit on clinical independence or choice, whether by virtue of a purchase, lease, discount or inducement, with any body concerned with the provisions of medical, nursing or pharmaceutical services, or with the provision of medicines or medical or related appliances, other than a person falling within paragraphs (a) to (d) of section 17D(1) above.

(3) for the purposes of determining whether a body is a disqualified body, it shall be sufficient proof that a body is not disqualified if the Secretary of State has issued a certificate that a body is not a disqualified body for the purposes of the agreement specified in that certificate.

(4) A certificate issued under subsection (3) may be withdrawn or cancelled by the Secretary of State, and he shall inform the relevant Board of any such withdrawal or cancellation.".'.

Government amendment No. 11.

Amendment No. 57, in clause 8, page 6, line 28, at end insert—

'(5) If the Secretary of State is satisfied that a party to an agreement which constitutes, or is one of the agreements with together constitute, a pilot scheme is, or has become, a disqualified body (within the meaning of section (*Provision of personal medical or personal dental services under a pilot scheme (disqualified bodies)*), he must give directions to the authority concerned requiring them to bring the scheme to an end within twelve months in accordance with the directions.'.

Ms Jowell: The purpose of new clauses 2 and 3 is to close the door completely on the possibility of commercial involvements in pilot, schemes and we believe that they go substantially beyond the Government's amendments in providing safeguards against that.

The threat of the privatisation of primary care created by the Bill's provisions has been at the heart of our dispute with the Government over the Bill since its introduction. We remain convinced that this is what the Government actually want and what they actually intended, and we believe that it must be made impossible with all the drafting skill available.

Let me remind the House of the history of the climb-down that led the Government to table new clauses in Committee and to table further new clauses tonight, on Report.

The British Medical Association was strongly opposed to the Government's plans to allow what they describe as a third party in the doctor's consulting room. The BMA had no doubts that the Bill represented the commercialisation of the family doctor service, and it said in its press release of 24 January 1997:

"It will undoubtedly make the privatisation of services that much easier. GPs must remain the patient's advocate, and any move that threatens to curtail GPs' freedom in the surgery is bad for patients."

The campaign against privatisation as created by the Bill has been led by the Labour party and the British Medical Association. However, only after the BMA threatened a hostile campaign in the run-up to the general election did the Government's resolve start to crack. After meetings with the BMA, they agreed to limit the employment of GPs to what they called the "NHS family".

Despite Government promises to ensure that the Bill does not pave the way for commercialisation of general practice, a range of companies insist that the Bill, as amended, does not alter their plans to become involved in

[Ms Jowell]

NHS primary care. All who want to follow events will no doubt eagerly read the current edition of *Pulse*, which has provided excellent coverage of this saga.

Let me give you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for example, the words of Sinclair Montrose Healthcare, the owner of a private GP clinic at London's Victoria station, which intends to make several pilot proposals for salaried GPs to work alongside privately employed GPs in its clinics.

"We can still run NHS services from our centres."

UniChem, which has also expressed interest in submitting a bid for a pilot, believes that the Bill, as amended, does not rule it out of the NHS as a primary care service provider. The company said:

"The door was reasonably wide open but it is now only open a couple of inches. We are waiting to see what the totality of the Bill is before we start drawing up a strategy."

Boots says that its plans to strike up a partnership arrangement with groups of GPs are not affected. BUPA is still "very interested" in developing its involvement in primary care, and the company said:

"We hope the door is not shut."

PPP Healthcare is the only company to have drafted a pilot proposal. Its plan to locate GP services at its private London hospitals—with all secondary referrals to the PPP hospital—is still "on the table".

That is why we have tabled new clauses that would keep the door to privatisation not two inches open but completely shut. Since the climbdown on commercialisation, the Secretary of State has tried to claim that concerns about commercialisation were misplaced. He is entirely disingenuous, but a series of statements by Ministers shows that privatisation was absolutely on the Government's agenda. It is also clear evidence that, if the Government were re-elected for a fifth term, they would push ahead with the full-scale privatisation of primary care. During the debate on the White Paper, in refusing to rule out companies employing GPs, the Secretary of State said:

"I am interested in a proper reward for those who deliver an efficient, high-quality service for the patient. Provided that I am satisfied that those tests are passed, I am willing to consider proposals made with the support of the professional staff concerned."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. 595.]

In an interview with *Pulse* magazine, he went on to confirm that the Government intended to open up NHS primary care to the primary sector. He said:

"If it is a difficult area and if a service cannot be provided using other routes, commercial enterprise may offer a solution. The main issue is whether it is an easily recognisable NHS service and it is better than the previous one provided."

That is what Ministers said about the private finance initiative.

The noble Baroness Cumberlege stated specifically in Committee in another place that companies would be able to bring forward proposals for pilot schemes. She said:

"We are serious about tackling these difficulties and do not want to rule out any sensible opportunities, including a GP being employed by a commercial organisation . . . schemes put forward by commercial organisations will have to be endorsed by health authorities and then approved by the Secretary of State."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 December 1996; Vol. 576, c. 1403-4.]

It is absolutely clear that in the world outside this place there is a very clear and established view that privatisation of primary care is still possible, despite the Government amendments to the Bill. Kingsley Manning of Newchurch Consultancy was reported in *Pulse* as saying:

"I don't think it will remove the private sector. All it will do is to make the arrangements more complicated and more difficult".

We ask the House to support our new clauses this evening to make privatisation of primary care in the national health service not more difficult and more complicated, but absolutely impossible.

Mr. Simon Hughes: My colleagues and I expressed concern about this matter on Second Reading. We acknowledged then that the Secretary of State had confirmed to the House that he intended to close the loophole, so we did not support the reasoned amendment tabled by the Labour party at that time.

I understand that the Government have some reservations about the new clauses. I am unhappy that they think that it is not worth trying to bolt down as tightly as possible the chance of private sector intervention. I am troubled also by the fact that, as far as I know, the Government have not yet given an undertaking to establish a register of general practitioners' interests and a register of the interests of all those in the health service, which, like the Register of Members' Interests, would be publicly available. We would then know absolutely whether any GP was acting as a front for someone else—such as the companies to which hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) referred a moment ago—who was funding an operation for private commercial profit.

If we are limiting those who can approach the "NHS family" to conduct pilot schemes—as my colleagues and I believe absolutely and firmly that we should—it seems to me that the Government should accept the elaboration of that point in new clause 2.

The British Medical Association is much happier with the position as it now stands in light of amendment No. 11, which the Government undertook to bring forward. However, it remains concerned about one matter. It is worried that, under the new arrangements, there might be some risk to the partnerships that have been created already by GPs, especially for out-of-hours work.

When the Minister responds to new clause 2—which my colleagues and I will support—I ask him to address specifically how the changes in the Bill will impact on current arrangements, and particularly upon those who are working in commissioning or in other forms of partnerships for weekend, evening and night work. The BMA's concern should be addressed, and I would be grateful if the Minister could deal with it.

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this very early opportunity to address the House. I would like to begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, Barry Porter, whose sad and untimely death led to the Wirral, South by-election. He was a native Wirralian, and a popular and hard-working constituency Member of Parliament. As the Member for Bebington and Ellesmere Port and then for Wirral, South, he served the people of the Wirral for nearly 20 years. As I go around the constituency, I meet many of his friends and constituents who remember him with the greatest

warmth. He was obviously held in the highest regard, and—if I may put it in these terms, Madam Deputy Speaker—he will be a very hard act to follow.

I also take this opportunity to thank the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), who so ably helped to handle constituency affairs while Wirral, South was without a Member of Parliament. Similar thanks are due to my hon. Friends the Members for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) and for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for all their efforts during that period. Wirral Members of Parliament have traditionally worked together as a team when called upon to do so in order to serve the interests of the Wirral as a whole. That was evidenced this morning in the Adjournment debate, and it is evidenced by the presence of Wirral Members tonight. I intend to join that team, and to play a full part in it. Thanks are also due to my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) for the considerable support that he has given me.

I am as proud as I am sure Barry Porter was to serve the people of Wirral, South. That is where I chose to live when I returned to the north-west of England following my time in the embassy in China because of the warm welcome that I received there. It is now my home. Because of its population mix, it is, in many respects, a microcosm of Britain. My constituency stretches from the romantic wilderness of the Dee estuary, through the old village of Heswall, where I live, to a coastal plain and then to present-day Heswall and Gayton.

Travelling across the constituency from east to west, one traverses rolling countryside and farmland in Clatterbridge and Bebington, with villages such as Thornton Hough and Storeton. As one approaches the east of the constituency, one enters the pleasant residential areas of Bromborough, which has a thriving leisure, retail and industrial park, and Eastham. As one gets higher or closer, one begins to get a characteristic, impressive view of the Mersey. Again, in this part of the constituency as in the rural part, villages are a characteristic, but are now sometimes surrounded by urban development.

7 pm

Despite its residential nature, the constituency has a long industrial history, of manufacturing in particular. There is a long-standing theme of the relationship of industry to the welfare of the people that surround it in Wirral, South and more widely. Much of the constituency bears the mark and carries the legacy of the first Lord Leverhulme, notably the attractive industrial village of Port Sunlight.

That is appropriate, as, among the world-class firms in the industrial belt of the constituency, Unilever in its various forms is still the biggest employer. There are many other companies of world class, of which Candy and, in a smaller sense, McTay Marine, are but two. Vauxhall, not in the constituency but on the borders, is of course also a world-class company. All those firms provide wealth to the Wirral as a whole because of the residential spread of their employees.

It may be a statement of the obvious, but without such a competitive and successful wealth-creating sector, we cannot prosper as a nation and provide the quality of services that we would like, be it in relation to the education of our children, the care of the elderly, the provision of local services or health services, including primary health care. That is why I want to say a few words about the industry of Wirral, South in a debate about health.

Labour is committed in government to a partnership between industry and Government at national level. Such a partnership is just as necessary at local level. We must understand our businesses and be in dialogue with them in order to avoid, for example, the situation in which Ford announced, apparently out of the blue, the moving of the production of the Escort from Halewood and the consequent potential job losses. The situation was alleviated only by the subsequent intervention of Labour Members of Parliament.

I intend to develop a dialogue with local industry and commerce, a role where I hope that my previous experience at the Department of Trade and Industry and as a commercial diplomat will bring extra added value.

Issues relating to the health service and to law and order dominated the Wirral, South campaign. People there have long ceased to trust the Government in health matters. They do not believe that the health service is safe in Tory hands. They are fed up with the sort of creeping privatisation that we have just heard about. They want a change.

The hospitals that serve my constituency, Clatterbridge and Arrow Park, have excellent staff, but are beset by the problems that beset hospitals throughout the health service—the problems of long waiting lists, long waits for appointments, regular crises in accident and emergency departments, poor staff morale, lack of finances, staff shortages and so on. Typically, someone seeking an orthopaedic appointment in my constituency could wait 156 weeks for the appointment, let alone the treatment. In Wirral one in four patients wait at least six months for treatment, and there are 6,000 people on waiting lists. On occasions, patients assessed for medical admission as emergencies cannot be allocated a bed, resulting in unacceptable trolley waits.

People are fed up to the back teeth with the bureaucracy of the internal market. Health services for people in Wirral, South are creaking under the weight of bureaucracy. Patients charter standards for waiting list admissions and cancelled operations are regularly breached. Since the Government introduced the internal market, the north-west has lost almost 4,500 nurses and gained more than 2,500 bureaucrats. An extra £284,000 a day is spent on bureaucracy—enough for almost 300 extra patients to be treated every day.

That is why the people of Wirral, South welcome new Labour's proposals for a reduction of 100,000 in hospital waiting lists by cutting red tape in the health service and switching funds to patient care. They welcome the prospect of putting pride back into the health service—a service that was created by a Labour Government.

Health, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was the most significant concern of the voters of Wirral, South, which is why I sought to catch your eye in the debate today. The constituency has shown that it is also concerned about law and order, particularly youth crime, job insecurity, unemployment and declining standards in education. I intend to focus on all those and other issues, such as the provision of facilities for our youth, as the Member for Wirral, South in this Parliament and the next. I intend to be a strong voice for Wirral, South on all those matters.

[Mr. Ben Chapman]

When I took my seat, the Prime Minister advised me not to unpack my bags. Well, the bags are unpacked, the suits are in the wardrobe and the socks are in the drawer. I intend to be around for some years, sustaining a Labour Government who are, after my election in Wirral, South, surely coming in a few weeks.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): It is a tradition in the House that we welcome new Members, and I do that unreservedly and with considerable pleasure. I could not help reflecting as I heard my new hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) make his contribution, that had I managed to make my maiden speech with such style and with resolve, my parliamentary career might have taken a different turn from the way in which it has developed.

I rise not only to congratulate my new hon. Friend—I hope that I will have many opportunities in the Parliament ahead to take pleasure in his contribution—but because it seemed appropriate today, as this was the last occasion on which I could put on the record the sense of loss and grief that I feel at the death of Barry Porter. He was my friend, and one of the many great pleasures of representing Birkenhead in the House was the fact that I was his Member. I did my very best to represent his interests.

If Barry were here now, he would be making some pretty tough comments from the Bench below the Gangway, saying that there was always a danger of my making a meal when no meal should be made, but I am grateful to have had this chance to record my sense of loss at the death of Barry Porter.

Mr. Malone: I immediately add my warm congratulations to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on making his maiden speech. Whatever has been said about how temporary or permanent his stay may be was said by the Prime Minister, so I do not intend to add to that.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his words. I also thank the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for what the House has come to recognise as a typically generous gesture—his remarks about the late Barry Porter. All Conservative Members who knew him well recognised that he was a first-class constituency Member of Parliament and a valued colleague. I am sure that all those who were close to Barry Porter will read what has been said in the debate and will be most grateful for the warm remarks.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Wirral, South on his comments about his constituency. Although he has only recently come to the House, he has clearly absorbed some of its traditions very quickly. He made a first-class maiden speech, on which I congratulate him.

I slightly envy the hon. Gentleman his task in making a maiden speech. When I was elected to the House in 1983, there was no opportunity to make a maiden speech on Report. I was persuaded by my Whips to make a speech on Second Reading of what I was told was an important and interesting piece of legislation called the Telecommunications Bill. After I had sat down, having made my speech, it was vouchsafed to me that the convention of the House, which had not until then been disclosed to me, was that having spoken on Second Reading, one was expected to serve on the Committee. Many sleepless nights followed for me, so I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on being able to make his maiden speech on Report and Third Reading. I wish that I had been accorded such an opportunity.

During the Bill's passage, we have been through the argument about commercialisation many times. I must tell the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) that, in my opinion, that argument died during the Second Reading debate. The hon. Lady exhumed the corpse on several occasions in Committee, but her attempts to give it artificial respiration failed. Here we have yet another attempt to breathe life into an argument that has long been dead.

In our debates, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have said—frequently, in my case—that we regard primary care as a jewel in the NHS crown. We said from the outset—in all the debates on the introductory White Papers, as well as debates on the Bill—that the whole purpose of the Bill is to enable primary care to be delivered to an even higher standard, across the country, as part of the national health service. From the start, we have taken very seriously any suggestion that the Bill might undermine the key characteristics of our primary care system. We listened to the arguments put to us by, among others, the health care professions and the British Medical Association, and we tabled a series of important amendments—including amendment No. 11—to ensure that we met those arguments.

I think that I can safely say something to the House—if not to the hon. Member for Dulwich, who I know will not accept any undertakings that I may give: she sees plots where there is none and future agendas where there is none. As I think I pointed out to her in Committee, when the argument is finally lost, she is obliged to invent a hidden agenda. Let me repeat, however, that our amendments have dealt thoroughly with the argument.

The amendments attempt to tighten further the rules governing bodies that may provide piloted services and services in permanent arrangements; but, with the exception—for historic reasons of which the hon. Lady will be well aware—of the handful of dental corporate bodies, public limited companies are already explicitly excluded from providing such services by clauses 2, 3 and 21 of the Bill. Those provisions make it crystal clear that the only companies that qualify as members of the NHS family—with the exception of dental corporate bodies—must have all their shares owned by individuals who are members of that NHS family.

In Committee, it was made clear that that was a watertight provision. I cannot see how it could possibly allow public limited companies to provide personal medical services, for example, and I therefore consider the new clause unnecessary. If the hon. Lady is taking her text merely from what she reads in *Pulse*, she should refer more to the *Official Report* of the Committee stage, in which she will find more accurate descriptions of the effect of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) mentioned qualifying bodies. We drafted our new clauses carefully, to ensure that all who are properly members of the NHS family could provide services under the Bill. The hon. Gentleman spoke of what might happen with GPs, whether they worked

singly, in partnerships or—this was his specific point—as members of a co-operative. He particularly mentioned out-of-hours arrangements. The principle that would apply to such arrangements is no different from the system that would govern any other arrangements.

In drafting the Bill, we have always taken steps to ensure that any grouping involving anyone who is not a member of the NHS family is explicitly ruled out. If an organisation that was currently providing out-of-hours services did not qualify, it would not be able to bid for a pilot or enter into a permanent arrangement, unless it changed its structure to meet the terms of the Bill, and got rid of any of the elements that disqualified it in the legislation as we have amended it.

7.15 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: What the Minister has said is helpful. I am not trying to trap him into giving an answer that he does not want to give, but may I take it that, according to the advice that he has been given and his understanding, the Bill in its current form protects all existing arrangements involving whatever work NHS general practitioners do? May I take it that none of those GPs will be prejudiced?

Mr. Malone: The Bill will not prejudice GPs who provide the services that they currently provide with the arrangements that they choose. If they are providing out-of-hours services, they can continue to do so in the way that they choose, but if they wish to enter into a contract for the new part I arrangements, and if they wish to use the vehicle that currently provides an element of what they do and it is not a qualifying body, they cannot. They would have to change the position if they wanted to bid for a pilot and enter into part I arrangements.

There may well be examples, although I cannot think of one, in which the vehicle that GPs use now to provide out-of-hours arrangements would not qualify, but it might be easy for them to reform the system if their principal intention was to provide contracted arrangements under part I. I emphasise that simply to prove beyond peradventure that, under the Bill, there is no loophole that would automatically allow GPs, simply because they are currently providing a service connected with primary care, to enter into part I arrangements if the vehicle that they were using did not qualify under the legislation. It is a belt-and-braces approach, which I hope the hon. Gentleman understands. Otherwise, if GPs wished to participate in part I arrangements, it would be simple for them to act on their overwhelming desire to do so.

The new clauses go even further than what was suggested in Committee. They would impose new and, in our view, unreasonable restrictions on qualifying bodies. Under the hon. Lady's proposals, doctors who form themselves into a company to provide personal medical services and who also wish to do a few hours' work as police surgeons, to carry out insurance medicals or to provide some medical services for local authorities—that is quite common nowadays among GPs who are providing primary health care—will immediately become ineligible to provide personal medical services.

I am not sure whether it is intentional, but those restrictions are far tighter than the restrictions that currently exist. I think that they are unreasonable, and I certainly do not believe that they would command any support in the medical profession once their impact was realised. I am at a loss to understand what possible purpose they could serve.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): In Committee, the touchstone phrase that was used to describe what was acceptable or unacceptable was "part of the NHS family". The Minister is now saying that a private company whose directors happened to be doctors, and which provided private medical services for the police and the private sector, would be allowed to bid.

Mr. Malone: No.

Mr. Bayley: The Minister says, "No," but that is the only sort of company that he has been able to suggest that would fall foul of the amendment.

Mr. Malone: Unusually, the hon. Gentleman has not entirely understood the purpose of the new clauses tabled by his own party. He is distorting the point, which is that, to qualify either to bid for a pilot or to enter into permanent part I arrangements, the individuals concerned must be members of the NHS family, or form an agglomeration—either a partnership or, as we discussed in Committee, a corporate body. The hon. Gentleman also missed out the other half of the provision: they could not be directors of that corporate body. The total shareholding of the body would have to be owned by members of the NHS family, legally and beneficially. As I said in Committee, that provision was specifically intended to get rid of any suggestion that those people might be put up as front men for a commercial organisation, which would stand behind the practice that was contracting in respect of part I arrangements.

The new clauses would prevent such an agglomeration of doctors—be they arranging themselves as part of a qualifying corporate company or, indeed, a partnership—from providing, as they do now under part II arrangements, a range of private services on their own account. That would be quite exceptional. It would be absurd to extend into part I arrangements a restriction that goes beyond that placed on doctors under part II arrangements. I am not entirely sure whether the Opposition have considered that it would strike at much of what doctors do now. If that was the case and the medical profession understood that that was so, the Opposition would find—as I did on occasions during the passage of the Bill—that the BMA might beat a path to their door pretty quickly. I cannot see that any of the representative bodies would want to put such a restriction on their members.

Mr. Bayley: My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) listed a number of private health care organisations that felt that they would still be able to bid. My question is simple. Does the Minister regard BUPA and the doctors employed by it as part of the NHS family? Does he regard Sinclair Montrose Healthcare and Unichem as part of the NHS family?

Mr. Malone: It is not a question of whether I believe. Frankly, the stories that we still see rerun in *Pulse* are grossly overdone. Whenever I have spoken to anybody with any remote connection with those organisations, the last thing that they have done is express an interest in

[Mr. Malone]

taking on part I arrangements in primary care. It a question not of my belief, but of examining the Bill and seeing what the shareholding of any company brought together by members of the NHS family would be. The answer is that, as at present constructed, no public limited company with quoted shares, for example, could ever qualify, because the shares would not be held legally and beneficially by members of the NHS family.

I do not know quite how long it will take me to set those fears at rest. Perhaps I have spent long enough in Committee and on Report trying to do so. I cannot make it clearer than that. I certainly do not intend to go through a list of speculative stories that have appeared in *Pulse*, with no knowledge of the structure of the organisations involved, and rule them out one by one.

I return to the point that I made in Committee. These are clear and firm arrangements, which we shall put in place to ensure that primary care is delivered by members of the NHS family.

Mr. Simon Hughes: What is the result of the Minister's consideration of the idea of a register of GPs' interests? I put that point to him on Second Reading and he said that he would think about it.

Mr. Malone: I am not entirely certain that a specific register would be helpful. Conflicts of interest are regulated by other professional bodies, including the General Medical Council. On reflection, those arrangements have served well over time. If the hon. Gentleman had brought me some evidence to show that they would not serve well in respect of part II arrangements, I might have considered the matter further. They have served well for existing arrangements. I see no reason why they should not serve well under the new arrangements.

Amendment No. 11, in the name of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, delivers on the undertaking that we gave during earlier stages of the Bill's consideration and makes it clear that proposals for pilot schemes may be prepared only by health authorities and boards and put to the Secretary of State if they originate from a member of the NHS family as defined in clauses 2 and 3. I commend it to the House.

Perhaps, at long last—I do not live in too much hope of this—I have demonstrated to the hon. Member for Dulwich that the Opposition's new clauses are unnecessary. In fact, they would be downright unhelpful to doctors. I hope that the House will not support the Opposition's new clauses.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Minister explain a little further a reply given in the House two days ago to my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who asked the Secretary of State for Scotland to rule out the privatisation of clinical services in the NHS? The Secretary of State said:

"We would not rule out any proposal from clinicians themselves."

When pressed further, he added:

"if clinicians brought forward a proposal, we would consider it, and would not rule it out in principle."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1997; Vol. 292, c. 35.]

He rather sidestepped the question that was put to him about privatisation of clinical services in the NHS and made it clear that, as far as he was concerned, he had not quite abandoned the idea of a different provision. It is very clear to us all that the Department of Health has been preoccupied with the privatisation of services recently. This afternoon's statement by the Secretary of State for Health illustrated that only too well.

It is also clear that, despite the Minister's words, we have not quite expunged the idea of the privatisation of GP services. When the Secretary of State for Health spoke after the Queen's Speech, he was extremely clear that he was looking to privatise GP services. We have not expunged that from the minds of those who seek to provide those services. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) quoted them today. Recently I saw a statement in *Pulse* from the chief executive, who said:

"An amendment will not make any difference to our plans. We will still provide NHS services and have GPs working from our premises and using our facilities around the country."

People are quite clearly seeking a way round it, whatever amendments the Minister tables.

My hon. Friend's new clauses make it absolutely clear that we would completely rule out any privatisation, and the wording that we use is absolutely clear in that regard.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on his maiden speech and on reminding us that a key issue in the campaign was the national health service. People do not believe that the Conservatives have entirely abandoned the idea of privatising the service. It is clear that they have abandoned the privatisation of very little in this country. There is no reason to believe that the Secretary of State's real view, which he put to us at the end of last year, has fundamentally changed.

Consultations that the Minister has had made him table amendments that are quite different. We know that the committee that discussed the Bill and its wording was the committee of the BMA, not a Standing Committee in the House. We had to wait until the BMA's committee had completed its negotiations before we could begin to discuss the Bill. The Minister has tabled amendments that appear to satisfy members of the BMA, but there are many outside the BMA who will seek to erode and work at the edges of what he said.

People are still concerned about the future of their health services. It is significant that health services and people's fears about them were a significant factor in bringing my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South here to make his maiden speech today.

The comments made by the Secretary of State for Scotland show that he is still hedging his bets. Such statements make us realise that, whatever is said, Conservative Members cannot wait to privatise GP services. Given a fifth term in office, I am sure that they would do just that. We are still right to warn the public that that is a possibility if the Conservatives are re-elected.

Mr. Bayley: I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on an extremely good maiden speech, which highlighted the importance that he attaches to improving health care in the Wirral. I am sure that that will happen under a Labour Government. I am sure that he will be an active Member for his constituency under a Labour Government, and will continue that campaign.

Every time the Minister is kind enough to let me intervene in his speeches, whether on the Floor of the House or in Committee, he makes the Government's intentions clearer: to leave the door open to allow the commercialisation of primary health care. If that was not the case, the Minister would have accepted the new clause of my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell), or if he could not bring himself to accept an Opposition proposal to protect NHS primary health care services from commercialisation, he could have tabled his own amendment. He claimed that the amendment that he tabled in Committee would achieve that, and that the bidding for pilot schemes to provide primary health care services would be limited to members of the NHS family. But it has now become clear that the Minister's NHS family is an extremely extended family: it includes suitably experienced medical practitioners, whether they work for the NHS or not.

The Opposition object to that, because, as the Bill is currently drafted, a team of doctors—they would doubtless be good doctors, suitably experienced and qualified to provide primary health care services—who worked in the private sector as private practitioners outside the NHS could bid to provide NHS services paid for by the NHS. Such people do not strike me as being part of the NHS family.

7.30 pm

The Minister said that under the amendment that he tabled in Committee—which is now clause 2—those who will be able to bid for primary health care services will include suitably experienced medical practitioners, whether or not they work for the NHS. We debated in Committee the possibility of their being medical practitioners employed by a pharmaceutical company, who could propose a pilot scheme to improve immunisation levels in parts of the country where immunisation levels were low. As individual practitioners, or as individual members of a private company that counted as a qualifying body and could bid, they would not be able to pass profits made from the work that they undertook on contract to the NHS back to their main employer, the pharmaceutical company.

Those people would work on contract to the NHS in an individual capacity or as part of a qualifying body—a private company—limited by guarantee, but they could do what my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich suggested and, as practitioners operating a pilot scheme, they could commit NHS resources to purchasing secondary health services from their parent company. The legislation does not rule that out, although it should, and it would be ruled out if the Minister accepted our new clause.

In the interests of brevity, I shall put a final point to the Minister. Would it be possible for medical practitioners from abroad who qualified under clause 2 as "suitably experienced medical practitioners" to bid to run pilot schemes? Does the Bill permit that? Would an American health maintenance organisation be able to put in a bid to run a pilot scheme?

Ms Jowell: This has been a crucial debate. It has focused on the part of the Bill on which the Government and the Opposition are divided. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) made clear in his excellent speech, one of the main reasons why the people of Wirral, South elected him and came over to new Labour in their thousands was to see off the threat of privatisation and to enable the restoration of the NHS service as a public service. It was a tremendous vote of confidence in new Labour and in my hon. Friend, who we know will provide excellent representation for his constituents for many years to come.

We should like to associate ourselves with the kind tribute that was paid by my hon. Friends the Members for Wirral, South and for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) to Barry Porter, who was a much loved local Member of Parliament. He was greatly admired for the courage with which he faced the cancer from which he died.

It is not my intention to elaborate on the Minister's analogy of corpses, funerals and life-support machines, all of which are more fitting to the Government than to our determination to see privatisation written out of the Bill. We shall withdraw the motion, because we hope that within a few weeks another means will be available to us to safeguard the national health service from the threat of privatisation, and that will be the election of a Labour Government.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 4

EVALUATION OF PILOT SCHEMES

'.—(1) Each pilot scheme must be evaluated and reported upon by the Secretary of State at least once.

(2) Each pilot scheme must be reported upon under this section before the end of the period of three years beginning with the date on which the agreement with the authority is made.

(3) When evaluating each pilot scheme, the Secretary of State must consult—

(a) the authority concerned,

(b) any person providing services under the scheme,

(c) the relevant local representative or local consultative committee (as appropriate),

(d) the relevant community health councils or local health councils (as appropriate),

(e) patients and organisations representative of patients,

(f) the Medical Practices Committee or the Scottish Medical Practices Committee (as appropriate), and

(g) such other persons or bodies as he considers appropriate.

(4) The Secretary of State shall include in this report of the evaluation of each pilot scheme details of the consultations he conducted under subsection (3) above and a statement of what account he took of the views expressed in reaching his conclusions.

(5) The Secretary of State shall make a report on the criteria which he proposes to use in his evaluations of pilot schemes under this section, and before making such a report he shall publish a draft report and give an opportunity to such organisations as he sees fit to comment on his proposed criteria.

(6) Each report made under this section shall be laid before Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Chisholm.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 7—*Local representative and consultative committees—*

[Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse]

'.—(1) Section 44 (local representative committees) of the 1977 Act shall be amended, in subsection (1), by inserting—

(a) in paragraph (a), after the word "services" where it occurs for the second time, the words "or services provided under section 28C arrangements"; and

(b) in paragraph (b), after the word "services", the words "or services provided under section 28C arrangements".

(2) Section 9 (local consultative committees) of the 1978 Act shall be amended, in subsection (1), by inserting—

(a) in paragraph (a), after the word "practitioners", the words ", including those providing services under the section 17C arrangements,"; and

(b) in paragraph (b), after the word "practitioners", the words ", including those providing services under section 17C arrangements,".'.

Amendment No. 58, in clause 7, page 6, leave out lines 2 to 13.

Amendment No. 9, in page 6, line 12, at end insert—

'(5) Before 31st March in each year, the Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament a summary report of the reviews of pilot schemes conducted in the previous calendar year in—

(a) England,

(b) Scotland, and

(c) Wales,

including an overall summary of the effect, or anticipated effect, of the pilot schemes reviewed (together with other pilot schemes in operation) on the distribution of general practitioners and dental practitioners.'.

Mr. Chisholm: New clause 4 is a substitute for clause 7, which we regard as inadequate. The problem with clause 7 is that it contains nothing about the criteria to be used in evaluating pilot schemes prior to their being adopted as more permanent arrangements. The clause contains nothing about consultation or about a report to Parliament. It could be said that it contains nothing much about evaluation, as it refers to the weaker and more problematic concept of a review.

In Committee, we discussed this matter at great length, and the Minister was resistant to the concept of evaluation. He seemed to wilfully misrepresent or misunderstand our proposal. *[Interruption.]* I should make it clear that he misunderstood our proposal. On 25 February, the Minister said:

"If one particular matter, for example, evaluation, were included in the Bill, it would be raised to unmerited importance in comparison with a range of other matters that would not be included."

He went on to say:

"Including evaluation in the restrictive imperative way set out in the amendments would not be helpful."

Our amendments proposed that criteria should be laid down for assessing the value of any particular pilot scheme. We were merely repeating the suggestion in "Choice and Opportunity" that pilots should be evaluated against the criteria established at the start. The Minister said:

"there are many other factors, such as the impact of the scheme on other NHS services and other providers. We need thoroughly to consider all possible evaluation criteria before making the rules, instead of picking and choosing issues for inclusion in the Bill."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 25 February 1997; c. 88-90.]

That is where the misunderstanding comes in. We were not suggesting that the criteria should be detailed in the Bill. The new clause provides precisely the mechanism by which there can be thorough consideration of the evaluation criteria, to which the Minister referred. I hope that he will therefore welcome our new clause.

Once the criteria are established, we propose that there should be an evaluation of each pilot scheme, with the widest possible consultation. New clause 4(2) says that, after that, a report using the criteria should be made within three years, including details of consultation and what account was taken of it, which should also go out to wide consultation. Proper evaluation is at the heart of making a success of the Bill and the innovation in it.

The new clause was drafted a long time before this week, when I received a briefing from the British Dental Association. Since I shall refer mainly to medical rather than dental matters, it might be interesting to quote the BDA's comments, which seem by coincidence to take up exactly the same concerns as those expressed in the new clause. The briefing, which I am sure other hon. Members have received, says:

"the Secretary of State must consult both nationally and locally with representatives of the profession and consumers on pilot scheme evaluation and account must be taken of their views. The nature of the pilot reviews should be more clearly spelt out: they should be independent, with prior agreement on criteria for quality and service outcomes.

there must be opportunity for Parliamentary debate prior to regulations being made for permanent arrangements which may fundamentally change the provision of NHS dental services."

The importance of evaluation is very clear when we consider the dogmatic approach to the health reforms that were introduced by the Government at the beginning of the decade. In primary care, the dogmatic approach to GP fundholding is probably what we remember in particular, although my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley) referred in Committee to the way in which the new GP contract was also not properly evaluated. He referred to a report from the Centre for Health Economics at York university, which pointed out how the GP contract had not been evaluated. It said:

"Without such evaluation, the 'next' reform of the GP contract may be based on hope rather than knowledge. No hopes, however sincere and well meant, can substitute for knowledge in the formulation of health care reforms aimed at using scarce NHS resources more efficiently."

My hon. Friend did not say whether he had written the report himself, but it was certainly of high quality.

Mr. Bayley: I can tell my hon. Friend that I had nothing whatever to do with the report, and had absolutely no interest—commercial or otherwise—in it. It was not a matter of free advertising. I was referring to an independent study, which I felt members of the Committee should bear in mind.

Mr. Chisholm: I thank my hon. Friend. I found the reference useful, because it illustrated, in the GP contract, a lesser-known example of the Government's failure to pilot and properly evaluate primary care reforms.

The better-known example of such failure is GP fundholding, which was driven through in a dogmatic way, and has still not been properly evaluated. In fact, the evaluation by the Audit Commission was resisted all the way by the Government, which is, of course, not

surprising, since the report's conclusions were not favourable. We all know how it pointed out that the costs of GP fundholding far outweighed any benefits.

We are glad that the Government have, at least to some extent, seen the error of their ways in proposing pilot schemes, but we are not satisfied that they have totally seen the error of their ways, because they have not given the required attention to the evaluation. That is why we want it in the Bill. We hear much about evidence-based medicine; what we also want is evidence-based policy making. The Minister can hardly object in principle to setting out criteria in the Bill, because he said in Committee that the criteria for evaluation will be set out by the national consultative group.

We feel that a non-statutory ad hoc committee is not enough. It may well have a role to play in making proposals, but evaluation cannot just be left at that, not least because there is no requirement that the views of that ad hoc committee—I should say committees, since there is one for England and one for Scotland—should be heeded.

The words of the Minister are important, because they show that he accepts that criteria for evaluation can be set out. The new clause is asking that the criteria be set out in a report, and that the report be open to public consultation and debate in the House. I cannot see how the Minister could possibly object to that aspect of the new clause.

7.45 pm

Our main concern about the Bill, as we expressed frequently in Committee, is that deregulation could result in further fragmentation of primary care services, with wider variations and possible loss of service. We believe that evaluation is critical to ensure that that does not happen. It does not need to happen; we do not expect it or want it to happen, but it could happen without proper evaluation.

The key issue in evaluation is quality, which is why Opposition Members have started to talk about an effectiveness index for the health service, rather than an efficiency index that measures the quantity of care. At the heart of our health policy is a desire and an intention to lever up quality in primary and secondary care.

Wide discussion of criteria that are adopted to assess any pilot scheme and reach decisions on it must include questions on quality. Has there been an improved quality of care? Is that recognised by patients? Have the outcomes that were set out been achieved? What effect has there been on other providers—not only other doctors but other services and patients? Cost-effectiveness is, of course, part of evaluation.

A further aspect must be evaluation against existing practice. That was perhaps the problem with the absence of evaluation of GP fundholding. When GP fundholders lobby me, they sometimes talk about changes that have been brought about by GP fundholding. I say to them, "Well, other GPs who are not fundholders have developed in that way because there have been developments in primary care. The changes are not dependent on fundholding." Any primary care service must be compared with other services to see whether the developments are intrinsic to one model, or whether they could occur under some different model.

We believe that criteria should not be determined solely by either the Secretary of State or his committees, which is why we want consultation on them. I should say Secretaries of State, since we are talking about two—in fact, three. Criteria must be developed in consultation with the public and professionals.

The emphasis of the new clause is on the importance of consultation as part of any evaluation. Seven groups are listed in subsection (3). Paragraphs (a) and (b) refer to "the authority concerned" and

"any person providing services under the scheme".

Those two groups are the same as the two referred to in clause 7 in relation to the Government review. Paragraph (c) refers to a

"local representative or local consultative committee".

I shall say a little more about that in relation to new clause 7, but in passing I should point out the importance of either of them as watchdogs.

Paragraph (d) refers to

"the relevant community health councils or local health councils".

I referred to that in Committee, pointing out that I was concerned that there did not appear to be any specific reference to community health councils in the Scottish document outlining plans for the pilots. I emphasised:

"Their input, not to mention their role in conducting consultations and disseminating information, is crucial."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 25 February 1997; c. 88-111.]

I note that, at column 112, the Minister said that he would examine the matter carefully and, if necessary, write to me. Obviously, it was not necessary, but perhaps he can tell us the results of his examination of that.

Paragraph (e) refers to

"patients and organisations representative of patients".

They must also be consulted with reference to any pilot, because evidence-based health care must take account of patients' views of effectiveness. That must be a key criterion when we are considering evaluation.

Paragraph (f) refers to

"the Medical Practices Committee or the Scottish Medical Practices Committee".

I had better not say too much about that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) is going to talk about it in the debate on the next new clause. I was going to talk about it, but the new clauses were not grouped in the way that we had imagined, so I have ended up talking about his new clause 7, and he is going to talking about my new clause 5. However, I will say in passing that that relates crucially to the issue of GP distribution, about which he will say more. Paragraph (g) is for anyone else who does not fit into those categories.

Therefore, at the heart of new clause 4 is the importance of consultation as part of evaluation. That is the way in which we want to open out the health service, so that health decisions are made not just by the Secretary of State, or even by GPs, health authorities or health boards, but, crucially, by the public. It is important that they are involved in decisions about the health service. That is embodied in our new clause. Once that full-scale consultation has been carried out as part of the evaluation, we are saying that a report about a particular pilot must be laid before Parliament, because the evaluation must be open to scrutiny.

New clause 7 refers in particular to local medical committees and their role. As currently worded, the Bill does not provide for those committees to be recognised as representative of GPs involved in pilot schemes, as they

[Mr. Chisholm]

are of GPs working in the existing system. The new clause would ensure that pilot scheme participants are allowed the same representation and involvement in the local organisation and administration of NHS general practice as their part two colleagues—those involved in traditional GP services.

We believe that it is important that local medical committees are able to represent all GPs, if they are to continue to perform their existing statutory functions effectively, and to fulfil the important role envisaged for them in advising on the establishment of pilot schemes, and developing local work force plans with health authorities.

Local medical committees provide a source of advice to health authorities and boards, which is trusted by GPs and by the authorities. The fact that the committees are representative of all GPs within a health authority or board and carry the confidence of the profession means that they are able to comment authoritatively on a wide range of issues. They provide a means by which health authorities or boards can involve GPs in local planning and give doctors a sense of ownership, which is so important in maintaining the good will of GPs in developing the primary care-led NHS.

Local medical committees provide professional input and expertise to local planning on subjects such as GP-led commissioning, health authority or health board purchasing, the distribution of resources and patient education activities. The committees will not be able to do that so effectively, or continue to have the full confidence of health authorities, boards and GPs if the new category of GP—those working in pilot schemes providing personal medical services—are excluded from the process of consultation and representation.

Examples of the role played by local medical committees include matters concerning the administration of the GP contract and providing the health authority or board with views and advice on a range of matters. They play an important role in NHS complaints and disciplinary procedures, and are also involved in monitoring professional performance. Many of those local medical committee functions will apply equally to GPs working in pilot schemes.

Furthermore, information and advice on professional development, health promotion activities and complaints handling can all be disseminated widely through the local medical committee structure. GPs working in pilot schemes under part I of the Bill should similarly be in a position to receive such advice from a local medical committee.

Labour's plans for primary care centre on the ending of two-tierism, the levering up of quality and the securing of innovation within a coherent strategic framework. The last thing we want is new varieties of fragmentation and two-tierism, either of primary care services or of the primary care work force. To avoid that, it is essential that the new clauses are taken on board.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): Before speaking to amendment No. 9, I should like to add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on his excellent maiden speech. The Minister may recall that I made my maiden speech on the British Telecom Bill, and shared many hours on Committee with him.

I should like also to endorse the eloquent testimony given by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) to the late Barry Porter. I remember my shock on learning that he was so ill. I know that he fought his illness bravely up to the last weeks of his death. The sense of loss is shared not only by North-West Members, but, I am sure, by all Members on both sides of the House.

Amendment No. 9, which stands in my name and that of my hon. Friends, is similar to an amendment that we debated in Committee. I hope that the Minister will be able to give a slightly fuller reply than he was able to in Committee to the points I raised. The amendment has been changed to make it, I hope, more acceptable to the Government. It calls for an annual report to Parliament of reviews of the pilot schemes in England, Scotland and Wales, including an overall summary of the pilot schemes' effect on the distribution of both general practitioners and dentists.

The amendment is strongly supported by the Consumers Association. It is a sensible addition to the Bill to see whether it is achieving its aims. One of the Bill's principal purposes is to achieve more even and equitable distribution of primary care. Clause 5(4) ensures that the Secretary of State must have regard to the effect that pilots are likely to have on the distribution of GPs when he approves pilot schemes, so it seems only sensible that Parliament should be given the opportunity to find out whether pilots are being successful in achieving that end. The amendment provides for an annual report to Parliament on the effect of pilot schemes on the distribution of primary care services.

The Minister will, I am sure, recall that, during the debate in Committee, I touched on some of the regional variations of which we are only too well aware in the north-west. In 1980, the Black report highlighted many of the unfavourable variations there. Sadly, many of those variations are still with us.

In Committee, I discussed three examples concerning children's services, renal services and dental health. I could, of course, discuss others, including heart disease. The north-west has the worst record on early heart disease of any district in England.

I remind the Minister of the points that I made in Committee about perinatal mortality rates in Bolton, which are substantially above the national average. The figures for the past five years show that, in Bolton, still births and deaths within one week, which are, of course, tragic events, are 40 per cent. above the national average. There has been no improvement in the past five years, and the national average is deteriorating, so I call on the Government to encourage pilot schemes that would particularly address that issue, and to find out whether we cannot have some improvement in that respect.

On the same subject, there is considerable concern in Bolton about the future of the specialist children's hospitals at Pendlebury and at Booth Hall. I hope that the Minister will say how the Government will come to a decision about the future of the services in those two hospitals. Both face closure proposals. I hope that a decision will be made at an early date to concentrate the services at Hope hospital, for the benefit of my constituents.

The other point I made in the Committee's debate on the Bill was on renal services. I was very shocked to learn that the north-west has the worst renal services in the country. I learned, in a letter to me from the director of the Salford Royal Hospitals NHS trust, that there could be many benefits from an improved service and that, currently,

"only half the patients who could benefit from life-saving dialysis therapy are on treatment"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying rather wide of new clause 4 and amendment No. 9.

Mr. Thurnham: The consultation documents mention the proposals' benefits to primary services. I think that it is most important that we have primary services that deal with the concerns of renal patients. The disconnect service, for example, is not available in the north-west, and it would be of great benefit to many people there. Moreover, primary care services require that such services should be located within the reach of constituents. We could have twice-weekly renal clinics, dialysis within the district and a specialist renal physician working closely and often daily with clinicians and other health care professionals in the community and in hospitals.

8 pm

I call on the Minister to make an early decision on the future of those services, and to provide them at the Manchester Royal infirmary and at the Hope hospital. I hope that he will tell us in his reply how he will deal with the issue.

We have also been concerned about the north-west's very poor record on dental health. The Minister is aware of my concern on that matter, and he will remember the White Paper "An Oral Health Strategy for England", which contains a map clearly showing that the north-west region is much the worst region for dental health. The figures on the map are supported by tables published by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry, which, sadly, show that Bolton is at the bottom of the national league table, with north and central Manchester. It is significant that the bottom 12 areas, all of which are in the north-west, suffer—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to stop the hon. Gentleman again, but new clause 4 deals with pilot schemes. I hope that he will confine his remarks to that matter, and that I do not have to pull him up again.

Mr. Thurnham: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the point on which I wish to press the Minister is that he should encourage the establishment of pilot schemes that will deal with the regional differences that I have mentioned, which are acute in the north-west. My constituents are anxious that there should be improvements in dealing with those differences, and that pilot schemes should be established which deal with the differences.

I ask that the Minister tell us in his reply what can be done with pilot schemes to deal with those severe differences, which have developed not only generally in the north-west but specifically in dental health in Bolton. In Committee, I quoted figures that showed that children's dental health in my area has deteriorated to a point at which it is now the worst in the UK.

I do not wish to press my amendment to a Division, but I hope that the Minister will either accept it or provide a very full explanation of the Government's feelings on the matter.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): From the moment that the Bill first appeared—even before, during its gestation period—everyone who was involved in thinking about it and commenting on it said that the process of evaluating pilot proposals would be the most crucial factor in its success. There could be no objection—indeed, there was wide welcome—that the Government were proceeding to develop primary care on a pilot basis. The important questions, however, were, how were those schemes to be evaluated, against what criteria, who would be involved in the consultation process, and how were reports to be made on the outcome of the projects?

In Committee, those questions were repeatedly asked of the Minister. His answer has always been to trust him to take a view on the matter. He has a committee, and, although it is a splendid little committee, he seems to be saying, "We will make judgments on those matters, and the House need not trouble itself with them." The House must decide whether it is satisfied with that arrangement, or whether it wants to impose framework obligations on the Minister.

It is quite routine in legislation empowering Ministers to require them to report on the discharge of those powers. Scarcely a day passes without the House producing a document—which is avidly read by all hon. Members—requiring Ministers to account for the powers provided by legislation.

It is very strange that at the centre of this legislation are the questions of what type of evaluation will occur, against what criteria, and who will be involved? From the beginning, the Government did not think that it was important to insert that type of criteria into the Bill. I am sure that the Minister will tell us again today that it is not the House's job to specify the criteria or to specify in detail what should be taken into account in evaluating specific pilot projects. I agree with that. However, the House should insist that there is an identified and established process by which pilots will be evaluated, and it should specify who will be involved in them.

I think that the failure to take that action will eventually be regarded as the Bill's major omission. It is important that Ministers did not feel it necessary to correct the omission. Moreover, as I look at the acres of emptiness behind the Minister, I can only remark that the House has not felt itself obliged to remedy it.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I think that the Minister knows that I am rather keen on passing this legislation, which is why I hope that I can persuade him that it is a good idea to support new clause 4.

I am keen on the Bill because, unlike many hon. Members, I live in an area in which the majority of doctors—in a ratio of 4:1—have not become fundholders. Those non-fundholders, as they call themselves, set up a scheme of their own by which they could be involved in commissioning work. They would have liked to go further with the scheme and achieve total commissioning instead of total fundholding, because it had all the benefits of fundholding without all the bureaucracy. Therefore, this legislation would allow non-fundholders to take their scheme one step further in providing a better services to their patients.

[Mr. John Heppell]

As many of my hon. Friends have said, the Bill's one omission concerns clause 4, because pilot schemes become almost useless without proper evaluation and consultation. If there is no evaluation, how will we know what is the best practice or what has failed? How will we pass on information from good schemes to GPs in other parts of the United Kingdom? Without proper evaluation, pilots become pointless or merely local exercises. They may fail or they may succeed, but they will be concerned with only one area. Even if a scheme is successful, similar schemes may be started from the beginning in other areas, again and again, because information from pilots has not been evaluated and passed on.

People say that the Minister never considered the idea of evaluation criteria at the Bill's inception, but that is not true, because the idea was spelt out clearly in the Government's White Paper "Choice and Opportunity", which expressed a general approach to piloting. The paper contained about seven or eight bullet points, all of which I will not read out. The first was:

"ideas for pilots will be formulated locally"—

and so they continue.

The point that is particularly relevant—it has been mentioned already in the debate—states:

"pilots will be evaluated against the criteria established at the start and taking account of the views of those involved and affected."

That is quite clear, and I thought that it was the Government's intention.

In addition, the White Paper identified safeguards for patients and practitioners. It said that the Secretary of State should be able to make arrangements for the evaluation of a pilot, including

"approving the criteria and process",

requiring health authorities to monitor the quality of the service provided and to provide information locally about the pilot to those affected, particularly on the quality, volume and cost of services to ensure that patients were protected and taxpayers received value for money and on the

"criteria for evaluation and the process for doing so."

Very few of those commitments are on the face of the Bill, which is weakened by their omission. New clause 4 also makes provision for proper consultation with a range of bodies, including community health councils, professional groups and the Medical Practices Committee.

I have made my position clear to the Minister in other discussions, but I should like to draw attention to the provision in new clause 4 to ensure that local medical committees can continue to act as watchdogs. I am confused about why the Minister will not put that on the face of the Bill.

Perhaps the Minister recalls the words of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a BBC 2 programme "Safe with Us" in respect of previous NHS reforms:

"I was sure if you isolated a few places as pilots, all the best efforts of the BMA element in the medical profession would be bent to ensure that it failed."

That may be part of the problem. The Government treats local medical committees as if they were trade unions. I do not dispute the fact that local medical committees look after the interests of general medical practitioners. That is part of their role, but they also look after the interests of general practice. There is a difference: they look after the interests of patients as well as doctors.

Local medical committees have been operating since 1911, well before the formation of the national health service. Since 1911, they have been consulted by NHS executive councils, health authorities and, before them, insurance committees. Why should the Minister suddenly decide that local medical committees should no longer have a role in these matters?

My local medical committee represents all the doctors in the area—fundholders and non-fundholders. It speaks for all general practitioners and should be consulted. If local medical committees are not consulted, we shall lose out in terms of the professional advice that general practitioners can offer in medical and administrative matters.

Baroness Cumberlege stated in another place that consultation in the NHS was standard practice. As far as I am concerned, there is no standard practice of consultation at any level in the national health service. Nowadays we have public relations. People produce glossy brochures telling us all the good points of any proposal. It happens at every level—in trusts and health authorities. We never hear the bad news until it is too late. Nor are we told about any proposed changes to the health authority until they are so advanced that we can do nothing about them.

Consultation in the health service has become a farce, with supposedly public meetings packed with health authority and trust staff rather than the general public. If the Minister really believes that the general public are being consulted, he should realise that, if he were not a Minister, he would not find it easy to get information out of certain trusts and health authorities.

The Minister may not know that I have written two letters to the Secretary of State about the fact that neither I nor the general public were consulted about multi-million-pound schemes in my constituency. We knew nothing about schemes that had been in place more than a year. I asked the Secretary of State whether that went against the Government's code of practice on openness for the national health service. He did not reply yes or no, so I wrote to him again asking, "Doesn't this go against your code of practice on openness for the national health service?" Again he wrote back without saying yes or no. So I shall write to him again.

8.15 pm

About a week after I had written my second letter to the Secretary of State, I received a letter from the NHS executive headquarters about the code of practice on openness in the NHS. It was addressed to all Members of Parliament, and it said:

"Dear Member of Parliament . . . I enclose a copy of the Code of Practice on Openness in the NHS.

A report by the Health Service Commissioner on access to official information in the NHS was recently considered by the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. The Committee were concerned over the Commissioner's findings that there appeared to be a lack of public awareness of the Code of Practice on Openness for the NHS and therefore asked me to arrange for a copy to be sent to each Member of Parliament for information."

I have some advice for the NHS executive. It should send out a few more copies to chief executives of NHS trusts, chairmen of health authorities and many others who

are not applying the code. I know about the code, but it is fairly obvious that many in the health service do not. That is why it is even more important that we restore some credibility to the health service by ensuring that there is proper evaluation, and, more importantly, proper meaningful consultation with all groups, including local medical committees.

Mr. Malone: I have listened to the debate on new clause 4 wondering whether I would hear any new or more compelling arguments than we heard in Committee. With respect to hon. Members, who pressed their suits as vigorously as they did in Committee, I have to disappoint them, and say that I did not hear much to persuade me that I should accept the new clause. I shall explain briefly why, but first let me turn to two specific points that were raised by the hon. Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham).

In the context of this evening's debate, I shall not respond to his point about reconfiguration of services in which he has an interest. However, I have noted his comments, and I shall reply to him through other channels and let him know the up-to-date position.

The hon. Gentleman made another point about dental pilots, which could be relevant to the debate in terms of amendment No. 9. I envisage the pilots to which he referred dealing with problems of oral health care in centres of population where oral health is poor. That is the purpose of the Green Paper that preceded the Bill. I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance he seeks, that the pilots are specifically designed to solve such problems.

As I have said many times, we are committed to evaluating the pilot schemes in a open and consultative manner. I remind the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) that there is a statutory underpinning for that in that clause 7, which commits us to evaluating each scheme within three years of its beginning to provide services. The question is whether we should set out criteria on the face of the Bill. I have not changed my view, although we have every intention of setting criteria for evaluation.

The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) described the national consultative group as a small committee. I was trying to signal to him that a large, wide group will consider criteria that will apply to all schemes.

The universal criteria will be based on the advice of the groups and the local criteria on the work of health authorities and providers. They are likely to cover issues including quality of services, the wider impact on the provision of local general practitioner and dental services—returning to the point made by the hon. Member for Bolton, North–East—administrative efficiency and value for money. With a wide variety of schemes, some of them fairly small, an elaborate system of reports for each would be unnecessary, and out of proportion to other scrutiny arrangements. There is no need for such a requirement.

We believe in using the established mechanisms, well known to the House—Select Committee inquiries, parliamentary questions and debates. From nearly three years' experience as a Minister for Health, I know that some hon. Members are not slow to use such devices to air their concerns. Those are the appropriate ways to deal with such matters, ensuring that information is made available to Parliament and obtained in the form required. The process envisaged in the amendments is likely to be unwieldy and bureaucratic. It may be appropriate for large schemes, but not for the many smallish schemes that we anticipate.

The hon. Member for Leith asked about community health councils. I looked carefully at what I said in Committee, when I answered the point in another way. Community health councils will be consulted in two ways. I expect them to be consulted in the general sense, but I also pointed out in Committee that they have a statutory right to consultation if what is being proposed in a pilot amounts to a major service change. They are reassured by that.

I should like to clarify the Government's position on the issues exposed by new clause 7 on local representative committees. They will play an important role in the development of the new arrangements. Health authorities will need to seek their views on the impact of pilots on existing arrangements and when pilots are evaluated. They will definitely be involved, continuing the long-standing relationship between health authorities and LRCs in the provision of general medical and dental services.

I have an important opportunity this evening to set out my views on the future arrangements and the statutory role of LRCs. The statutory role and funding of LRCs relates to the existing general medical services and general dental services contracts, and various functions performed under them. However, they have also voluntarily undertaken other roles relating to professional matters outside those that are statutory and funded, in which they have been a helpful forum for seeking representative views of GPs and general dental practitioners. That has grown up without the protection of statute.

Health authorities will continue to need to seek representative views on such non-statutory matters that affect all GPs, GDPs and dentists working elsewhere. In doing so, they will need to embrace all those providing primary care services. The mechanisms for securing that should be decided locally by GPs and dentists. I expect LRCs to continue to demonstrate their strength as representative organisations across a spectrum of activity outwith their statutory responsibilities.

In the light of what I have said, I hope that hon. Members will accept that the arrangements in the Bill are the best way forward, showing our strong and genuine commitment to the principle of consultation. I hope that they will not press the amendments.

Mr. Chisholm: I have two points in response to the Minister. First, he repeated the claim that evaluation was already provided for in clause 7. Leaving aside the issue whether a review is evaluation, the fundamental point is that there is no provision for adequate consultation in the clause. That is our main objection, quite apart from the lack of any mention of criteria.

The Minister persists in repeating his assertion in Committee that we wish to put criteria in the Bill. There is no mention in the amendments that we moved in Committee or in the new clause of putting criteria in the Bill. We are merely asking the Secretaries of State for Health, for Scotland and for Wales to make a report on

[Mr. Chisholm]

the criteria. The Minister has conceded that criteria for evaluation will be set out by the national consultative committees. Why cannot that be presented as a report for proper consultation? The Minister has not answered that point, because he has no valid objection to our proposal.

Clause 7(4) says:

"the procedure on any review is to be determined by the Secretary of State."

That reminds us that the best safeguard for the clauses is a new Secretary of State in a new Labour Government. In view of that, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 5

PRIOR APPROVAL OF MEDICAL PRACTICES COMMITTEE FOR AGREEMENTS

'.—(1) In the 1977 Act, before section 28C (as inserted by section 21(1)), insert—

"Prior approval of agreements by Medical Practices Committee

28BB. Before making an agreement which relates to the provision of personal medical services under section 28C below, a health authority shall submit the proposed agreement to the Medical Practices Committee, and an agreement shall be subject to the approval of the Committee as if section 30 applied to the services proposed to be provided under that agreement.".

(2) In the 1978 Act, before section 17C (as inserted by section 21(2)), insert—

"Prior approval of agreements by Medical Practices Committee

17BB. Before making an agreement which relates to the provision of personal medical services under section 17C below, a health board shall submit the proposed agreement to the Medical Practices Committee, and an agreement shall be subject to the approval of the Committee as if section 20 applied to the services proposed to be provided under that agreement.".'.—*[Mr. Chisholm.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 61 and 64.

Mr. Morgan: My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) said that our original expectation—which was somewhat confounded by the way in which the clauses were grouped—was that he would speak on the Medical Practices Committee and I would speak on consultation and evaluation. However, we do not complain about how matters have turned out: we regard it as part of the multi-skilling schemes of the kind that you probably remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the Coal Board, when the electricians had to learn a bit about plumbing and plumbers had to learn a bit about electrical work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but it has just been drawn to my attention that he is not on the list of those who tabled the new clause, so another Member must move it formally.

Mr. Chisholm: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Morgan: I think that I was picked as a scrum half—I hope that you will excuse my obsession with the events of next Saturday, Mr. Deputy Speaker—as I was the seventh name down and therefore in the second line. I appreciate your point and your correction on that technicality.

We are in the unusual position of trying to restore the reputation of the Secretary of State for Health. On Second Reading, he said that the position of the Medical Practices Committee in the existing red book contract remained unchanged by the Bill. The new clause would make those words true. Unfortunately, without the new clause there is a problem. As the Secretary of State has already had his previously fairly untarnished reputation heavily tarnished over the past few weeks by his comments on Scottish devolution and the European single currency, perhaps it is time for us to help him to burnish his reputation to what it was before he embarked on his new-found middle-aged obsession with banana skins.

The new clause goes to the heart of the philosophy of the Bill. That philosophy has two aspects. One is to let a thousand flowers bloom and have some ideas from the medical and other professions in the national health service family to improve the health care of the nation through the NHS. The other is to try to do that against the problem best encapsulated as the law of inverse care—that those with the fewest health problems tend to get the best health care, while those with the greatest problems tend to get the poorest.

8.30 pm

Since the foundation of the NHS, the Medical Practices Committee has tried to prevent the inevitable drift of the medical profession towards the areas of the country with the fewest health problems. Through its negative vetting power, it tries to correct that by pushing doctors into areas with fewer doctors and more health care problems. The Bill will remove that power and transfer it to the health authorities.

We find that odd. The purpose of the Bill is to improve health care, but it weakens one of the mechanisms preventing the law of inverse care from operating. The Government have taken on board some of the complaints made by the Medical Practices Committee in that regard and have dealt with those in their two amendments—No. 61, which deals with England and Wales, and No. 64, which deals with Scotland. However, those amendments are weak attempts to achieve the same objectives as new clause 5 achieves in a strong, direct and clear manner.

Having removed the MPC's ability to correct the tendency of areas with too many doctors to get more doctors and of areas with too few doctors to get even fewer, the Government are now trying to reassert it in a

milk-and-water fashion through their amendments. Why are the Government trying to reinvent that ability when the MPC has done a good job in protecting us from the law of inverse care for the past 50 years, since the creation of the national health service, simply because the Government recognise with a late, guilt-ridden feeling that they should try to reinsert some of those powers? Moreover, their attempt to do so is weak and incompetent.

New clause 5 restores the reputation of the Secretary of State for Health, because what he said on Second Reading would come into effect—namely, the MPC's powers would remain in place. Without the new clause, we simply have a weak reinsertion of the MPC's powers to try to correct the tendency. We entirely understand why that tendency happens: there is a natural incentive for doctors to wish to settle down in leafy suburbia where medical problems may not be quite so great, rather than in inner cities, pit villages or Welsh valleys.

We are suspicious that, in removing the power that the MPC has always had to vet vacancies and try to prevent people from being appointed as additional doctors in areas that already have too many doctors, the Government see no problem in having more doctors, appointed to certain areas. Clearly, the work load is lighter in leafy suburbia and in areas with too many doctors. Areas with too few doctors may require a more challenging, missionary zeal on the part of a doctor.

The basic principle of the involvement of the MPC has been to seek to even out the provision of general practices throughout Great Britain. We do not want to see that diluted. We are suspicious that, in diluting the MPC's ability to correct disparities, the Government are complacent about how the law of inverse care might operate in future. The MPC's powers would, by and large, be transferred to health authorities.

However, whereas there are only two MPCs, there are 120 health authorities or health boards that would take on the powers instead. The 100 health authorities in England and five in Wales and the 15 health boards in Scotland each have a duty to look after its own patch. If there is a disparity in the number of doctors in two neighbouring health authorities, the job of the health authority with too many doctors is not to help the authority next door with too few doctors by saying, "We had better not have too many doctors; it would be greedy, given that the health authority next door has too few." The MPC, in contrast, has exactly that role.

There is also a bureaucracy aspect. Why should one attempt to develop expertise in ensuring a reasonably even spread of general practitioners in 120 health authorities or health boards when that area of expertise is currently carried out by two bodies—the England and Wales MPC and the Scottish MPC? Would the health authorities ever attain the level of expertise of the MPC and the ability to recommend whether to prevent a doctor joining a practice because the area is already well served by doctors and there are vacancies that are difficult to fill nearby? It is absurd to transfer that responsibility to 120 bodies from two, and it could result in a huge proliferation of bureaucracy.

The MPC combines that skill and expertise with another skill: the detection of bogus doctors, or doctors who change their name and reappear elsewhere because doubts have been expressed about their competence to practise. The MPC has an extremely good record in detecting bogus doctors. Why allow health authorities to take on a role that has been satisfactorily conducted by just two bodies for the past two and a half years?

If the Minister wants to help the Secretary of State for Health—perhaps he does not—to restore his reputation for keeping his word, he should accept new clause 5. The Secretary of State said on Second Reading:

"The position of the MPC within the existing red book contract remains completely unchanged by the provisions of the Bill."—[*Official Report*, 11 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 155.]

The Minister accepted in Committee that, as the Bill stands, the MPC's role changes. Indeed, he boasted about that change and objected to our amendments Nos. 1, 2, 3, 12 and 4 precisely because they attempted to retain the role of the MPC in evening out the supply of general practitioners. He said:

"the Secretary of State must lay regulations to the effect that the MPC will retain its current role"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 18 February 1997; c. 179.]

The Minister seemed to think that that was objectionable, although it was exactly what the Secretary of State for Health had promised on Second Reading would be the effect of the Bill on the MPC's duties.

I appeal, if not for Cabinet unity—that would be too much to expect these days—at least for departmental unity between the Secretary of State for Health and the Minister for Health. I ask the Minister to accept that new clause 5 is far superior to the Government amendments. It should be incorporated into the Bill because of the embarrassment that will otherwise be caused to the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Malone: Whenever I hear the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) preface a speech by saying that he is about to enter into the philosophy at the heart of the Bill, I know that we are heading for slightly troubled waters. He issued a kindly invitation, but I must point out at the outset that what he said was based on a misunderstanding of the differences between part II arrangements—what happens now in primary care—and what is proposed in the new clause.

The new clause would require health authorities to submit all proposals for personal medical services to the Medical Practices Committee for approval, which is entirely different from the power that the committee currently exercises in deciding how general practitioner manpower, or personpower, should be distributed in respect of part II arrangements.

Health authorities have the responsibility for planning services to meet the needs of their populations. In doing so, they work closely with the profession locally and are able to take full account of local circumstances and needs. As I pointed out in Committee, health authorities are closely involved in matters in which the MPC exercises its current powers, particularly in providing all the necessary information for validation of a doctor's credentials.

I understand the concerns expressed by the profession about the need to ensure an even distribution of the GP workforce, which is why we tabled amendments Nos. 61 and 64, which are the direct result of extensive discussions with the MPC, the profession and others. I referred in Committee to our intention to table such amendments. The discussions resulted in an agreement with the profession to give legislative effect to proposals that

[Mr. Malone]

recognise that national distribution of the GP work force must be kept in view by the Secretary of State in considering both pilot and permanent schemes.

We agreed to amend the Bill to provide for the MPC to be consulted on pilots where the number of GPs practising in the relevant health authority area would change, and for the Secretary of State to have regard to the effect on the distribution of GPs nationally in approving pilots, and to ensure that any regulations governing the introduction of permanent arrangements are framed with that in mind.

We amended the Bill in Committee to provide the MPC with a consultation role on pilots. Amendments Nos. 61 and 64 will implement our agreement on permanent arrangements by placing a duty on the Secretary of State to consider whether any proposed permanent scheme is likely to have an adverse effect on the distribution of general practitioners. They will provide the framework for proper consideration of the equity issues to which the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) quite rightly referred.

I concede that we need to bring in measures to deal with GP distribution throughout the country. As I said in Committee, in a slightly different context, we shall take the work forward jointly with the resource allocation group, the Medical Practices Committee, representatives of the profession and health authorities.

Our intention is to form a national view of relative need between health authorities that will inform decisions about the distribution of GPs and contribute to the continuing work on a fairer allocation of financial resources. Such a view will be taken in the context of the new provisions in the Bill. I therefore commend the Government amendments to the House and hope that the Opposition will not press the new clause.

Mr. Morgan: I am grateful to the Minister for his response, but I do not agree with it—partly because he has not even touched on why the Secretary of State said on Second Reading that the position of the Medical Practices Committee would be unaffected by the provisions of the Bill, if he had no intention of implementing that promise.

Does the Minister accept that, since the merger of the family health services and district health authorities on 1 April 1996, some of the intimacy of contact between the health authorities and the primary health care services has been diluted? In the days of family health services authorities, there was always a specific health authority with the specific role of dealing with primary health care. That is no longer the case, so there has already been a loss of the intimate knowledge of the primary health care side.

What about the expertise of the health authorities? Is the Minister defending the measures as deregulatory, in the manner that we have often heard from the Government in the past 18 years? Does he think that it is much better for 105 health authorities and 15 health boards to have a go at evening out the supply of doctors between under-doctored and over-doctored areas? If so, how would he deal with the issue as between different health authorities, each of which has a duty only to look after its own patch? How could the job currently done by only two MPCs, one for England and Wales and one for Scotland, be done better by 120 health authorities or boards?

We believe that the measure is a thoughtless act of deregulation without regard to consequences, but it is most unlikely that it will be implemented as the Government wish because after the change of Government that we and the country now hope for and expect in the next few weeks we can either repeal the section or never make the regulations necessary to put it into effect. I therefore will not press the new clause.

Mr. Chisholm: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 6

WHISTLEBLOWERS' RIGHTS

'.—(1) Nothing in, or done under, any agreement entered into under the provisions of this Act shall be taken in any proceedings in any court or before any tribunal to deprive a medical practitioner or an employee of a pilot scheme of his undoubted right to raise in whatever manner he sees fit any concerns over the clinical care provided to patients within that scheme.

(2) In the 1977 Act, after section 28C (as inserted by section 21(1)), insert—

"Whistleblowers' rights

28CC. Nothing in, or done under any agreement entered into under the provisions of section 28C shall be taken in any proceedings in any court or before any tribunal to deprive a medical practitioner or an individual who is providing personal medical or personal dental services in accordance with section 28C arrangements of his undoubted right to raise in whatever manner he sees fit any concerns over the clinical care provided to patients under those arrangements."

(2) In the 1978 Act, after section 17C (as inserted by section 21(2)), insert—

"Whistleblowers' rights

17CC. Nothing in, or done under, any agreement entered into under the provisions of section 17C shall be taken in any proceedings in any court or before any tribunal to deprive a medical practitioner or an individual who is providing personal medical or personal dental services in accordance with section 17C arrangements of his undoubted right to raise in whatever manner he sees fit any concerns over the clinical care provided to patients under those arrangements.".'.—*[Ms Jowell.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Jowell: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 6 seeks to safeguard the right of medical practitioners, or those engaged in pilots, to raise issues of concern about their patients through whatever means they consider fit. It would protect the right of general practitioners to raise publicly in the media, rather than with their managers, concerns about the treatment and care of their patients that they feel cannot otherwise be properly addressed, and where the management or other clinical practice in the service has been found to be inadequate. We sought to raise the matter in Committee. Because of the strength of feeling among GPs and other health service professionals, we have brought it back on Report. I hope that even at this late stage the Minister may be persuaded of the importance of safeguarding this freedom.

It is a fundamental protection for health service staff to be able to speak out. It is impossible to describe the terror, the sense of conflict, that doctors and nurses feel before they speak out. We should think of the well documented

scandals with hospitals and other forms of care. I remember especially some of the scandals with long-stay mental hospitals which erupted into public consciousness.

8.45 pm

Mr. Thurnham: Although I did not have an opportunity to speak in Committee on the point, I would like the hon. Lady to know that I support her point. It is vital that NHS employees should not feel gagged when important issues arise.

Ms Jowell: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has made clear his support for new clause 6.

I had a case several years ago in my constituency where there was evidence of brutality to people suffering from learning difficulties. It was also clear that staff in the hostel concerned knew what was going on, but because of the reign of terror prevailing there they felt unable to raise publicly the concerns that they felt defeated in raising privately. This provision would be part of any good legislation.

It would be much better if we could take it for granted that staff have this power, but we know that they do not. In Committee, I set out in detail the constraints on speaking out that different forms of contract place on staff. Many health service staff are expected to comply with a byzantine procedure. Often it is only after several weeks—a long time—that they can use the course of last resort and go public with their anxieties. Staff may feel unable to raise concerns about the care of their patients with the management in units that are badly managed or where the management is out of touch, or out of sympathy, with the clinical and caring objectives of the service. In those circumstances, the power to act independently in defence of patients' interests is very important.

It is essential that, where bad things are happening to patients, staff are able to take whatever steps they feel necessary to seek a quick remedy. One of the consequences of the Bill will be that following the expected increase in the number of salaried GPs, more GPs will be potentially compromised by being employed rather than being independent contractors. As independent contractors, they have the freedom to speak out. As salaried employees of trusts, they are denied that right.

In the interests of protecting patients, I hope very much that the Minister will support the new clause. If he fails to do so, it will send an extraordinary message to the people of this country—that, despite all that he said in Committee, he supports the gagging of staff, which has the highly undesirable effect of damaging the independent representation of patients. The Government should put the health and safety interests of patients before any other organisational consideration.

Mr. Malone: I will be brief, as I have little to add to what I said in Committee. I do not pretend that this is an easy issue to deal with, and it is extremely important. No one is suggesting that people should be inhibited in any way from raising proper concerns about what is going on in any organisation in which they work within the NHS, and I will show in a moment how we have reinforced that as an obligation on employees. These are not easy issues, but I repeat to the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) that she has overdone it somewhat. There are a range of examples, some of which she herself has cited, where important cases have been brought to the attention of the proper management—or if not the management, to the attention of Ministers or local health authorities.

We issued guidance to staff in June 1993 which not only stressed that staff concerns should be taken seriously by all managers and should receive full and sympathetic consideration, but made it plain that staff have a duty to raise these concerns in the first place. It is not a question of trying to prevent anyone from doing that, and I hope that there is a culture in the NHS in which people feel that they have a proper responsibility to raise matters of concern with a view to patient confidentiality, fidelity to the employer and, ultimately—if they are professionals—their professional obligation.

The hon. Member for Dulwich mentioned what will happen with salaried GPs. One of the interesting effects of one of her amendments is the strange suggestion that an independent practitioner will have the right to raise problems concerning the clinical care provided to his or her own patients which he or she is providing—a strange exemplification of a whistleblowers' charter. The fact that some may become salaried GPs takes them into the other arrangements and the guidance that we have set out.

I repeat that we take this matter seriously, and we are tackling the issue. We see no need for further legislation on it, and I urge the House not to support the new clause.

Ms Jowell: What is important is that clinicians have an overriding responsibility to their patients. We know that one of the undesirable effects of the Government's reforms has been, in many cases, to compromise institutionally their sense of loyalty. This culminated in the remark of one Roy Lilley a year or so ago, that the principal responsibility of clinicians in the NHS was not to their patients, but to their employer. The suggestion that fidelity to the employer has become the overriding obligation is what causes us great concern.

The Minister has no right to sneer at the comparison between the position of independent contractors and that of salaried GPs. GPs acting as independent contractors are perfectly free to raise concerns about the care that their patients receive in hospitals or other parts of the health service, whereas salaried GPs may feel compromised in raising such concerns. That is why we have tabled the new clause.

The Government's failure to support the new clause speaks volumes and will send out a clear message to staff in hospitals and to workers throughout the health service in this country about the Government's indifference to the protection of patients. Fortunately, for reasons that were stated earlier, that indifference will not persist for much longer and a Labour Government will be able to safeguard the interests of staff and patients in the national health service. In view of that, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 9

PROVISION OF SPECIAL OPHTHALMIC SERVICES UNDER A PILOT SCHEME

'.—(1) This section applies to any pilot scheme under which special ophthalmic services are provided.

(2) An agreement which constitutes, or is one of the agreements which together constitute, a pilot scheme may be made by an authority only with one or more of the following—

(a) an NHS trust;

(b) a person on an ophthalmic list;

(c) an NHS employee or a pilot scheme employee;

(d) a qualifying body;

(e) an individual who is providing special ophthalmic services under that or another pilot scheme.

(3) In this section—

"NHS employee" means an individual who, in connection with the provision of services in the health service, is employed by—

(a) an NHS trust;

(b) a medical practitioner whose name is included in a medical list; or

(c) a medical practitioner who is providing personal medical services in accordance with a pilot scheme;

"ophthalmic list" has the same meaning as in section 4A(3) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 or section 17AA(3) of the 1978 Act;

"pilot scheme employee" means an individual who, in connection with the provision of special ophthalmic in accordance with a pilot scheme is employed by an individual providing those services;

"qualifying body" means a company which is limited by shares all of which are legally and beneficially owned by persons falling within paragraph (a), (b), (c) or (e) of subsection (2).'.—*[Mr. Simon Hughes.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 24, Noes 198.

Division No. 96] **[8.56 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Begg, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Chidgey, David
Dafis, Cynog
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Thurnham and
Mr. Simon Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bitten, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Egger, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John

Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann (Congleton)
Winterton, Nicholas (Macclesfld)
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Matthew Carrington
and
Mr. Roger Knapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1

PILOT SCHEMES

Amendment made: No. 10, in page 1, line 23, after 'Part I' insert 'or III'.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

Clause 4

PROPOSALS FOR PILOT SCHEMES

Amendment made: No. 11, in page 4, line 18, leave out from beginning to end of line 24 and insert—

'(2) An authority must prepare and submit such proposals if they are asked to do so by a person—

(a) who wishes to provide piloted services, and

(b) with whom an agreement which constitutes, or is part of, a pilot scheme may be made;

but otherwise they may not do so.'.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

Clause 5

APPROVAL OF PILOT SCHEMES

Mr. Thurnham: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 5, line 7, at end insert—

'(2A) Before approving any pilot scheme, the Secretary of State shall give consideration to the effect that any proposals might have on the ability of the authority concerned to implement arrangements for the joint commissioning (with any social services authority) of personal medical services in combination with community care services.'.

Amendment No. 1 is similar to an amendment that I moved in Committee, although it has been tabled in a somewhat simplified form—which will, I hope, help the Minister to decide to accept it. [*interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Member, but there is a buzz of private conversations, which is not acceptable. If hon. Members want to talk, they must leave the Chamber.

Mr. Thurnham: The amendment aims to ensure that, before any pilot scheme is approved, consideration must be given to the authority's ability to implement joint commissioning of primary health and community care.

I am surprised that provision for the establishment of pilot joint commissioning schemes has not been included in the Bill, given that the Government last month announced their desire to move further to break down the organisational boundaries between health and social care through the establishment of pilot primary care joint commissioning projects. The Government said that through the Scottish White Paper entitled "Ready for the Future".

I am disappointed that the amendment that I tabled in Committee was rejected by the Minister. The Bill would be a perfect vehicle for pilot joint commissioning schemes such as those which were specified as an option in the White Paper. The Minister said, however, when I quoted two examples of joint commissioning initiatives, that they were excellent and that the Government wanted to make them more the norm than the exception. I am not sure whether the Minister realised that the two councils to which I referred were Liberal Democrat-controlled. Perhaps he will note that.

The Minister said that joint commissioning is the way forward and a sensible way to provide "seamless care". That being so, I urge the Government to accept the amendment, so that consideration can be given by the Secretary of State, when giving approval to pilots, to the ability of the proposed schemes to take on board joint commissioning with social services. That is especially important in the light of last week's report following the inquiry into the dreadful Martin Mursell tragedy, when a mentally ill patient was released into the community. He murdered his stepfather and seriously assaulted his mother.

The chairman of the inquiry listed what he called the "appalling lack of co-ordination" between health and social services. I want to be sure that nothing in this highly commendable primary care Bill should jeopardise the future of joint commissioning initiatives, especially as the Government describe joint commissioning as the way forward for primary care.

Joint commissioning is necessary given the introduction of community care reforms in 1993. Boundaries of primary and social care have become increasingly blurred, especially where the care of the elderly, the disabled and the mentally ill is involved. Those who previously would have been looked after in long-term hospitals are now living more and more in the community. The process is to be welcomed, but I would not presume to say that it is at all easy.

The gaps and loopholes that we have created are becoming increasingly evident. For example, the practice of bed blocking is one appalling instance of the lack of a coherent framework for health and social care. It has become a particular problem of late in the North Manchester Healthcare NHS trust area. At the launch of the Green Paper on mental health last month, the Secretary of State acknowledged the glaring gaps in the care of mentally ill people because of the failure to ensure interdepartmental co-operation.

The Green Paper specifically examines the need for funding mechanisms to be modified to support more effective partnerships between health and local authorities. If the amendment were agreed to, it would not preclude any of the options set out in the Green Paper. There is no benefit in waiting, as suggested by the Minister. Why wait? Why not allow one option to be implemented now?

There is an overriding consensus in support of joint commissioning. The British Medical Association and many other bodies have made that clear. Mr. Philip Hunt, the director of the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts, said:

"We must remove all the obstacles to joint commissioning."

[Mr. Thurnham]

Denise Platt of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities said:

"We call on the government to work with us to develop joint commissioning as a reality for the future."

Jennifer Bernard of the Association of Directors of Social Services said:

"We all want the outcomes for users and carers to be the best possible. Closer working is the best way forward."

The director of the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health said:

"Joint commissioning is happening in some parts of the country, but this is usually because of the determination of a handful of dedicated people who want to make it work. What's needed is a proper statutory framework for joint commissioning which will create a single funding stream."

At a recent seminar organised by the BMA on long-term care, 18 different organisations drew attention to the need for pilot schemes, which would allow shared budgets and joint commissioning.

One of Bolton's top doctors on geriatrics, Dr. Arup Banerjee, the medical director of Bolton Hospitals NHS trust and president of the British Geriatrics Society, said only recently:

"health services have been failing our older generations through inadequate and sub-standard medical and social care."

He drew attention to the gap in provision between hospitalisation and care by untrained staff. GPs are in an excellent position to help, through joint commissioning schemes with social services departments. The BMA itself has said that, all too often, GPs experience a nightmare with community care. I should like to be able to ensure that the Bill will take community care into account as a vital factor in the granting of approval to pilot schemes.

9.15 pm

The current legal framework for joint commissioning and interdepartmental co-operation is contradictory and confusing, not only to the public but to GPs and social workers. Under the National Health Service Act 1977, funds can be transferred from health authorities to local authorities, but it is illegal to transfer funds from local authorities to health authorities. At present, the only way around that is via schedule 113 of the Local Government Act 1972, which permits local authorities to have access to the services of the staff of health authorities or trusts.

The Department of Health's own guidelines—in its practical guidance on joint commissioning, published in 1995—state that expert legal advice should determine how joint commissioning projects are established. That is clearly absurd. The needs of patients, rather than inconsistent legal technicalities to be dealt with by expert legal advisers, should determine the provision of services.

The Minister may recall that I have given two examples, relating to Sutton and Bexley. I feel that the health authorities and social services departments of both councils should be commended for their many initiatives. They have worked together to try to secure more and better services for users and carers with the same, or fewer, resources. Sutton is one of the authorities that have approached joint commissioning with enthusiasm and vigour, achieving enormous success in mental health provision. It has helped those with learning difficulties, and integrated the care of older people and those receiving continuous NHS care in the community. The King's Fund has adopted Sutton as a pilot site for a national joint commissioning research initiative involving joint primary care. It is also working closely with the south-west London total purchasing pilot to develop more co-ordinated services for older people.

Bexley is another authority that has established useful precedents of co-operation with the health authority, and a joint strategy for primary care. Those are just two of the many local authorities and social services departments that would support moves to rationalise their options in joining GPs in the provision of comprehensive primary health and social care.

As I said earlier, I was delighted by the publication of the Scottish White Paper "Ready for the Future", which established pilot joint commissioning projects in Scotland. I entirely agree with the Government's arguments in that paper about the need for such projects as a way to achieve a seamless service that is based on the needs of the individual rather than the services of the agency first contacted. The paper refers to the

"repeated pleas from those who work within the Service for greater flexibility . . . across the health/social care interface",

and goes on to say:

"Care in the Community is an important policy which complements the development of Primary Care . . . It requires co-operation at the strategic, operational and service provision levels between health, social work and housing interests and also requires a shift in resources and provision from long-term hospital care to community care."

In paragraph 95, which deals with breaking down barriers between health and social care, the paper states:

"The Government now judges that it would be desirable to move further to break down the organisational boundaries between health and social care, as these can be confusing to patients and can hinder the co-ordinated provision of care. Either the GP or the Social Work Department can be the key to the services needed, and in consequence there can be confusion and uncertainty about who to turn to in particular cases. This is especially so in more complex cases where the need for assistance is greatest. This confusion is not confined to the public. It occurs amongst those responsible for providing the services. It follows that one of the main ways of making the system more responsive to public needs is to help to remove some of the confusion about existing organisational arrangements."

Those are the Government's own words.

The White Paper goes on to describe the initiative of six pilot schemes to promote local integration of primary health and social care through the devolution of funding and accountability, and team working across all the professional groups involved in primary care. Health boards, trusts, GPs and local authorities in Scotland will be invited to submit proposals.

The benefits of joint commissioning are many, and will continue to become more important as the impact of demographic changes and community care policies leads to more people needing care in community settings. Joint commissioning would mean a seamless service and solve the problems of inter-agency arguments, cost shunting and loopholes in the provision of care to some of the most vulnerable people. It would give maximum value for money, reduce duplication and provide complementary services. People would get a higher-quality service, which would combine expertise and ideas. It would also give a better general picture of need, and facilitate planning for future needs.

In the light of their arguments, the Government should include the amendment, to ensure that the growing problem of gaps in provision between health and social care are

taken into account when approving pilot schemes. The Bill gives an opportunity to make progress on the development of a seamless service of primary care.

When the Minister replied to these same points in Committee, he said,

"it seems sensible to consider the responses to the consultation on the Green Paper before progressing with any legislation."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 27 February 1997; c. 207.]

I can see nothing whatever to be gained by waiting. I can see no reason why we cannot proceed. That does not preclude any other options that were in the Green Paper. There is nothing to be lost by proceeding. I urge the Minister to accept the amendment.

Mr. Malone: The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thornham) raises an important issue. He gave examples of a number of sensible objectives on which we are at one, but I hope that I can persuade him that his amendment is not necessary. I draw his attention to clause 4, which requires health authorities to comply with any directions given to them by the Secretary of State about the extent to which, and the manner in which, they are to consult on proposals. It also requires health authorities to make a recommendation to the Secretary of State when they submit proposals for a pilot scheme to him. The Secretary of State will be able to direct them on the matters that they must take account of when they submit their proposal.

The hon. Gentleman's objectives can already be achieved through the exercise of the direction-making powers as matters proceed. I can reassure him—I hope that he will find this helpful—that we want health authorities to consult on proposals locally, including, where appropriate, social services departments. In the recommendations that health authorities make, we will want them to set out the impact that the proposals would have on local services. The hon. Gentleman wishes to achieve that through his amendment.

We will want assurances that the new arrangements will lead to improved local services and not just skew services in one particular direction at the expense of other patient services. That is an important criterion, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and it is a matter on which we have made some progress. In 1995, we published practical guidance on joint commissioning. There will be a development programme, including a series of locality workshops, to encourage and enable authorities to develop their joint commissioning further in taking this work forward.

A second strand of the development project is the establishment of a number of locality sites to explore the involvement of GPs and primary health care teams in joint commissioning. I hope that I have been able to reassure the hon. Gentleman that not only is this something we expect to happen, there is a programme of work to ensure that it will happen. The provisions in the Bill are sufficient to ensure that. I ask the hon. Gentleman, having considered that, to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Thurnham: I am sorry that the Government do not feel able to accept the amendment, and hope that if we cannot make further progress in this Parliament there might be an opportunity to make rapid progress in the next. I shall not press the matter further now. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Thurnham: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 5, line 12, after 'practitioners', insert 'or dental practitioners'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in page 5, line 16, after 'practitioners', insert 'and dental practitioners'.

No. 4, in page 5, line 18, after 'practitioners', insert 'and dental practitioners'.

No. 5, in page 5, line 20, after 'practitioners', insert 'and dental practitioners'.

No. 6, in page 5, line 23, after 'consult', insert '(as appropriate)'.

No. 7, in page 5, line 23, leave out '(as appropriate)'.

No. 8, in page 5, line 29, after 'services', insert '; and

"dental practitioner" means a dental practitioner whose name is included in a dental list (within the meaning of section 3(3) above).'.

Mr. Thurnham: The Secretary of State must have regard to the distribution of services when he gives approval to pilot schemes. These amendments correct what I can only think was an oversight on the part of the Government. It must have been an error that dentists were not included in the Bill.

Clause 1(1)(b) specifically calls for dental services to be provided by pilot schemes in the same way as medical services.

Clause 3 details the nature of dental services that can be provided under a pilot scheme in the same way as clause 2 details medical services.

Clause 5, which establishes the factors on which approval of pilot schemes should depend and the obligation of the Secretary of State to have regard to their effect on the distribution of services and so on suddenly seems to forget about dental services and talks only of general practitioners. The distribution of dental practitioners has been entirely forgotten.

There are enormous variations in dental health between different parts of the country. The paper, "An Oral Health Strategy for England" contains a map from which it is clear that the north-west region is the worst for dental health. The bottom 12 areas are all in the north-west. The tables published by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry show, sadly, that Bolton, of which my constituency is a part, is at the bottom of the national league table, along with north and central Manchester.

Dentists in my constituency, and the dental consultants to the Wigan and Bolton health authority, are extremely concerned about those figures. I share their concern that the Bill should play its full part in raising standards of dental health. It is vital that the distribution of dentists should be included in the Bill, as is the distribution of GPs. Dentists in my constituency and the dental consultants to the Wigan and Bolton health authority have pressed me on what the Bill will do to improve dental health in the north-west, which is bad and, in areas such as Bolton, deteriorating.

[Mr. Thurnham]

The single biggest issue for dentists who are concerned about primary services is fluoridation. Legislation is weak in that area. I was disappointed recently to receive a letter from the Minister in which he said that it should be a matter for the courts if a water authority does not go ahead with fluoridation when it has been requested to do so by the health authority. That fills the health authority with dismay.

I received a copy of a letter, dated 13 February, from North West Water to Wigan and Bolton health authority, in which the company made it clear that it will not go in for fluoridation unless Parliament decides that it should. It is wrong for the Minister to say that these matters should be taken up in the courts. We need much stronger legislation to ensure that fluoridation is introduced. The figures show that lack of good dental health correlates to deprivation. The best way to solve that problem, and hence provide better primary care services in the north-west, is to introduce strong legislation on fluoridation.

I quoted figures in Committee to show that the situation in Bolton is deteriorating. The number of five-year-olds who are free from dental decay has decreased from 41 per cent. in 1988 to only 26 per cent. in 1994. There is no chance of our achieving the Government's target of more than 70 per cent. of five-year-old children free from dental decay by 2003 unless much stronger measures to deal with the problem are taken.

The Minister may be aware that I am carrying out my own pilot scheme in my area—my own initiative—to help improve primary care services. I carry in my pocket a child's toothbrush, courtesy of sponsorship by Colgate and North West Water. I have already visited half the primary schools in my constituency to discuss with the children how they could better clean their teeth. I hope that the Minister will tell us whether pilot schemes could be introduced in the north-west to deal with the problem of deteriorating decay, so that dental practitioners and the dental consultants to the Wigan and Bolton health authority can have confidence that the Bill will help to address one of the most serious health deficiencies in the north-west.

Mr. Malone: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the distribution of the dental work force has an entirely different history from that of general practitioners. The statutory system established in 1947-48 did not include dentistry. Dentists have differing commitments to the NHS, and the distribution of dentists is often not the whole story, because they are free either to participate in NHS services or provide private services. If we were to impose a national distribution service of dental health care, I am not sure that it would work.

We want to use the dental work force as it is spread around the country in a more innovative way to deal with problems of oral health care. I hope that that deals with the hon. Gentleman's point and gives him the reassurance that he was seeking. What is important is how dentists spend their time, not how many of them there are in a particular area. The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that dentists can be targeted by contracts to meet local priorities in the most effective way.

The hon. Member described an oral health scheme in which he is actively participating. A scheme where it can be demonstrated that there will be an improvement in local oral health care over a segment of the population, rather than one in which people carry toothbrushes around in their pockets, is precisely what the changes in the Bill presage. That is what we said in our Green Paper, what we have said since, and what the Bill will bring about.

The amendments would give unnecessary and inappropriate weight to the number of dentists in a given area in the assessment process for pilot proposals. The information would not even enable us to influence the overall number of dentists providing NHS services. That must be done through contract. The Bill will provide the ability to target improved oral health care on areas of population that are deprived of it just now. I hope that the hon. Member will understand that that is the proper purpose of the legislation, and that his amendment is effectively unnecessary.

9.30 pm

Mr. Thurnham: I am disappointed that the Minister is not able to accept the amendments. I feel that they would improve the Bill. If we had more time, we could debate the matter further, but I shall not press the matter now.

The issue is of serious concern. There is a high concentration of poor dental health in the north-west. According to Mr. Colin Dean of the Bolton Dental Company, Bolton has the highest concentration of dental manufacturing businesses in the world, which indicates the extent of the problem. I hope that the Minister will be able to address the issues that I have raised in the remaining days of this Parliament, and that they will be fully addressed in the next Parliament. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 10

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS PART AND THE 1978 ACT

Amendments made: No. 37, in page 7, line 8, after second 'by' insert 'regulations made or'.

No. 12, in page 7, line 9, leave out 'Part I of'.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

Clause 11

MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS TO BE SUITABLY EXPERIENCED

Amendment made: No. 59, in page 7, line 13, at end insert—

'( ) Subsection (1) does not prevent the performance of personal medical services by—

(a) a person who is acting in the course of acquiring the experience prescribed by regulations made under section 32 of the 1977 Act or section 22 of the 1978 Act;

(b) a person who is provisionally registered under section 15 or 21 of the Medical Act 1983, acting in the course of his employment in a resident medical capacity in an approved medical practice (within the meaning of section 11(4) of that Act); or

(c) such other category of person as may be prescribed.'.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

Clause 21

PROVISION OF PERSONAL MEDICAL OR DENTAL SERVICES

Amendments made: No. 13, in page 13, line 17, leave out 'and section 28E'.

No. 14, in page 16, line 8, leave out 'and section 17E'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 22

SUPPLEMENTARY REGULATIONS

Amendments made: No. 60, in page 18, line 16, leave out from beginning to end of line 18 and insert—

'medical practitioners performing personal medical services, and dental practitioners performing personal dental services, in accordance with section 28C arrangements.

In paragraph (b) "practitioner" does not include a practitioner who is undergoing training of a prescribed description.'.

No. 61, in page 19, line 24, at end insert—

'( ) The Secretary of State must—

(a) consider whether section 28C arrangements are likely to have an adverse effect on the distribution of medical practitioners providing general medical services or performing personal medical services in England or in Wales;

(b) if he thinks that the arrangements are likely to have that effect, consider whether it is necessary to include in the regulations provisions designed to secure that, so far as is possible, the arrangements do not have that effect; and

(c) if he thinks that it is necessary, include such provisions in the regulations.'.

No. 62, in page 19, line 24, at end insert—

'( ) Regulations which impose conditions on persons performing personal medical services or persons performing personal dental services (whether made by virtue of subsection (2)(b) or otherwise) may, in particular, include provision of a kind that may be made by regulations under section 32.'.

No. 15, in page 19, line 31, after 'arrangements' insert

'or corresponding services under section 17C of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978'.

No. 63, in page 20, line 18, leave out from beginning to end of line 20 and insert—

'medical practitioners performing personal medical services, and dental practitioners performing personal dental services, in accordance with section 17C arrangements.

In paragraph (b) "practitioner" does not include a practitioner who is undergoing training of a prescribed description.'.

No. 64, in page 21, line 27, at end insert—

'( ) The Secretary of State must—

(a) consider whether section 17C arrangements are likely to have an adverse effect on the distribution of medical practitioners providing general medical services or performing personal medical services in Scotland;

(b) if he thinks that the arrangements are likely to have that effect, consider whether it is necessary to include in the regulations provisions designed to secure that, so far as is possible, the arrangements do not have that effect; and

(c) if he thinks that it is necessary, include such provisions in the regulations.'.

No. 65, in page 21, line 27, at end insert—

'( ) Regulations which impose conditions on persons performing personal medical services or persons performing personal dental services (whether made by virtue of subsection (2)(b) or otherwise) may, in particular, include provision of a kind that may be made by regulations under section 22.'.

No. 16, in page 21, line 34, after 'arrangements' insert

'or corresponding services under section 28C of the National Health Service Act 1977'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 28

TERMS AND CONDITIONS, ETC.

Amendments made: No. 17, in page 29, line 28, leave out '63(2)(a)' and insert '63(2A)(a)'.

No. 18, in page 30, line 17, leave out '63(2)(a)' and insert '63(2A)(a)'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 30

PROVISION OF CERTAIN SERVICES UNDER NHS CONTRACTS

Amendments made: No. 19, in page 31, line 20, leave out '63(2)(a)' and insert '63(2A)(a)'.

No. 20, in page 31, line 36, leave out from second 'body' to end of line 37 and insert

'which is a health service body for the purposes of section 17A'.

No. 21, in page 32, line 6, leave out '63(2)(a)' and insert '63(2A)(a)'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 37

REGULATIONS AND DIRECTIONS

Amendments made: No. 38, in page 39, line 28, after 'under' insert 'or by virtue of'.

No. 39, in page 39, line 31, at end insert—

'( ) Subsection (2) applies in relation to any power of the Secretary of State under or by virtue of this Act to give directions as it applies in relation to any power of his to make regulations.'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 38

INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: No. 22, in page 39, line 38, at end insert—

' "authority" has the meaning given by section 1(8);'.

No. 36, in page 39, line 38, at end insert—

' "medical list" has the meaning given by section 2(5);'.

No. 66, in page 39, line 38, at end insert—

' "health service" means the health service in England and Wales and the health service in Scotland;".'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 39

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT, ETC.

Amendments made: No. 40, in page 40, line 18, after '(9)' insert 'and (13) and (14)'.

No. 41, in page 40, line 28, after 'by' insert 'or under'.

No. 42, in page 40, line 35, leave out 'and (8)' and insert ', (8) and (13)'.

No. 43, in page 40, line 41, at end insert—

'(13) The Secretary of State may by order make such amendments or repeals of any enactment passed before, or in the same Session as, this Act as appear to him necessary or expedient in consequence of any provision of this Act.

(14) An order under subsection (13)—

(a) may contain such supplemental, incidental, consequential or transitional provisions and savings as the Secretary of State considers appropriate; and

(b) shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.— *[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Schedule 2

AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 67, in page 43, line 29, leave out 'Section 59 of'.

No. 68, in page 43, line 31, leave out 'subsection' and insert 'section 59'.

No. 69, in page 43, line 34, leave out 'subsection' and insert 'section 59'.

No. 70, in page 43, line 39, at end insert—

'( ) After section 63(2)(b) insert—

"(ba) the provision or performance of a service in accordance with arrangements made under section 28C of the 1977 Act or section 17C of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 and an activity involved in or connected with the provision or performance of such a service".'.

No. 71, in page 44, line 7, at end insert—

'( ) After subsection (1) insert—

"(1ZA) It is the duty of each Health Authority, in accordance with regulations, to perform such functions in relation to section 28C arrangements as may be prescribed.

(1ZB) Regulations under subsection (1ZA) may, in particular—

(a) prescribe functions in relation to training;

(b) provide for appeals to the Secretary of State or a prescribed body in relation to functions prescribed by the regulations.".'.

No. 44, in page 44, line 27, leave out from 'means' to end of line 31 and insert '—

(a) in relation to a medical practitioner who practises otherwise than in partnership, an individual who is on that practitioner's list of patients (or, if that practitioner and one or more other medical practitioners together have a single list of patients in connection with section 28C arrangements, an individual who is on that single list);

(b) in relation to a medical practitioner who is one of two or more practitioners who practise in partnership with each other, an individual who is on the list of patients of any of those practitioners (or, if any of those practitioners together have a single list of patients in connection with section 28C arrangements, an individual who is on that single list)." '.

No. 23, in page 44, line 31, at end insert—

'.—(1) Section 26 is amended as follows.

(2) For subsection (2) substitute—

"(2) The Secretary of State may supply or make available to persons—

(a) providing general medical services, general dental services, general ophthalmic services or pharmaceutical services, or

(b) providing, in accordance with section 28C arrangements, personal medical services, personal dental services or other services of a kind that may be provided under this Part,

such goods, materials or other facilities as may be prescribed."

(3) In subsection (4), after the words "pharmaceutical services" at the end of paragraph (a) insert—

"(aa) persons performing, in accordance with section 28C arrangements, personal medical services, personal dental services or other services of a kind that may be provided under this Part,".'.

No. 24, in page 44, line 31, at end insert—

'. After section 28G insert—

"Immunisation

28H. Where the Secretary of State arranges with medical practitioners for the vaccination or immunisation of persons against disease, he shall so far as reasonably practicable give every person providing, and every medical practitioner performing, personal medical services in accordance with section 28C arrangements an opportunity to participate in the arrangements for vaccination or immunisation.".'.

No. 25, in page 44, line 31, at end insert—

'. After section 28H insert—

"Use of accommodation

28I. If the Secretary of State considers that any accommodation provided by him by virtue of this Act is suitable for use in connection with the provision of personal medical services or personal dental services in accordance with section 28C arrangements, he may make the accommodation available on such terms as he thinks fit to persons providing those services.".'.

No. 45, in page 45, line 25, at end insert—

'. In section 85(1), references to functions conferred or imposed by or under the 1977 Act are to be construed as including references to functions conferred or imposed in relation to pilot schemes by or under this Act; and references to regulations and directions are accordingly to be construed as including regulations or directions under this Act.'.

No. 46, in page 45, line 25, at end insert—

'. In section 86, the reference to a function conferred by virtue of the 1977 Act is to be construed as including a reference to a function conferred in relation to pilot schemes by virtue of this Act.'.

No. 26, in page 45, line 32, at end insert—

'. In section 103(1)(a) after "Act" insert "or in accordance with section 28C arrangements".'.

No. 27, in page 45, line 32, at end insert—

'. In section 105(2)(a) after "examined" insert "or as part of his duty to perform personal medical services for that person in accordance with section 28C arrangements".

No. 47, in page 45, line 32, at end insert—

'. In section 126(3), after "under" insert "or by virtue of".'.

No. 72, in page 45, line 32, at end insert—

'. In section 102(1)(a)(iii) and (2)(b), after "section 32 above" insert "or by regulations which make provision in relation to section 28C arrangements of a kind that may be made by regulations under section 32 above".'.

No. 28, in page 47, line 45, at end insert—

' . In section 15(1)(a)—

(a) after "persons" insert "—

(i)"; and

(b) after "Part II" insert "; or

(ii) providing, in accordance with section 17C arrangements, personal medical services, personal dental services or other services of a kind that may be provided under this Part or Part III,".'.

No. 29, in page 47, line 45, at end insert—

' . In section 17A(2), at the end insert "and in this Act "health service body" means any of those persons or bodies".'.

No. 30, in page 47, line 45, at end insert—

' . After section 17G insert—

"Immunisation

17H. Where the Secretary of State arranges with medical practitioners for the vaccination or immunisation of persons against any disease, he shall so far as reasonably practicable give every person providing, and every medical practitioner performing, personal medical services in accordance with section 17C arrangements an opportunity to participate in the arrangements for vaccination or immunisation.".'.

No. 31, in page 47, line 45, at end insert—

' . After section 17H insert—

"Use of accommodation

17I. If the Secretary of State considers that any accommodation provided by him by virtue of this Act is suitable for use in connection with the provision of personal medical services or personal dental services in accordance with section 17C arrangements, he may make the accommodation available on such terms as he thinks fit to persons providing those services.".'.

No. 32, in page 48, line 15, after '17C' insert 'arrangements'.

No. 48, in page 48, line 16, leave out from 'means' to end of line 20 and insert '—

(a) in relation to a medical practitioner who practises otherwise than in partnership, an individual who is on that practitioner's list of patients (or, if that practitioner and one or more other medical practitioners together have a single list of patients in connection with section 17C arrangements, an individual who is on that single list);

(b) in relation to a medical practitioner who is one of two or more practitioners who practise in partnership with each other, an individual who is on the list of patients of any of those practitioners (or, if any of those practitioners together have a single list of patients in connection with section 17C arrangements, an individual who is on that single list)." '.

No. 49, in page 49, line 16, at end insert—

'. In section 77(1), references to functions conferred or imposed by or under the 1978 Act are to be construed as including references to functions conferred or imposed in relation to pilot schemes by or under this Act; and references to regulations, schemes, proposals and directions are accordingly to be construed as including regulations, schemes, proposals or directions under this Act.'.

No. 50, in page 49, line 16, at end insert—

'. In section 78, the reference to a function conferred by or under the 1978 Act is to be construed as including a reference to a function conferred in relation to pilot schemes by or under this Act.'.

No. 51, in page 49, line 38, leave out from '"practice patient"' to end of line 42 and insert

', in relation to a recognised fund-holding practice, means an individual who is on the list of patients of any of the members of the practice (or, if any of those members together have a single list of patients in connection with section 17C arrangements, an individual who is on that single list)." '.

No. 73, in page 49, line 42, at end insert—

' .—(1) Section 87D is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (1), for "subsection (2)" substitute "subsections (2) and (8)".

(3) In subsection (3)—

(a) in paragraph (a), after "who" insert "is on the medical list of a Health Board and"; and

(b) for paragraph (b) substitute—

"(b) in the case of two or more medical practitioners who practise in partnership with each other, each medical practitioner who is on the medical list of a Health Board;".

(4) After subsection (7) insert—

"(8) This section does not apply in relation to the performance or provision of personal medical services in accordance with section 17C arrangements.".'.

No. 74, in page 49, line 42, at end insert—

'. In section 88(1)(d) and (2)(e), after "section 22" insert "or by regulations which make provision in relation to section 17C arrangements of a kind that may be made by regulations under section 22".'.

No. 33, in page 49, line 44, leave out 'within the meaning of' and insert 'specified in'.

No. 75, in page 51, line 46, at end insert—

'The Medical Act 1983 (c.54)

.(—(1) The Medical Act 1983 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 11(4), in the definition of "approved", for ", in relation to a hospital or institution," substitute "(except in subsection (5))".

(3) In section 13—

(a) in subsection (1), for "approved hospital or approved institution" substitute "approved hospital, approved institution or approved medical practice";

(b) in subsection (2), for "hospital or institution" substitute "hospital, institution or medical practice";

(c) in subsection (3)(a), for "an approved hospital or an approved institution" substitute "an approved hospital, an approved institution or an approved medical practice".

(4) In section 15(3), for "approved hospitals or approved institutions" substitute "approved hospitals, approved institutions or approved medical practices".

(5) In section 21(3), for "approved hospitals or approved institutions" substitute "approved hospitals, approved institutions or approved medical practices".'.

No. 52, in page 53, line 23, leave out from '"practice patient"' to end of line 27 and insert

', in relation to a recognised fund-holding practice, means an individual who is on the list of patients of any of the members of the practice (or, if any of those members together have a single list of patients in connection with arrangements made under section 28C of the principal Act, an individual who is on that single list)." '.

No. 34, in page 53, line 27, at end insert—

'( ) In section 62(7), after paragraph (a)(i) in the definition of "services" insert—

"(ia) arrangements made under section 28C of that Act;".'.

No. 76, in page 53, line 27, at end insert—

'( ) In section 18(1) for "subsection (2)" substitute "subsections (2) and (8)".

( ) In section 18(3)—

(a) in paragraph (a), after "who" insert "is on the medical list of a Health Authority and"; and

(b) for paragraph (b) substitute—

"(b) in the case of two or more medical practitioners who practise in partnership with each other, each medical practitioner who is on the medical list of a Health Authority;".

( ) After section 18(7) insert—

"(8) This section does not apply in relation to the performance or provision of personal medical services in accordance with arrangements made under section 28C of the principal Act.".'.

No. 35, in page 54, line 40, after 'Service' insert '(Scotland)'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Title

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (PRIMARY CARE)

Amendments made: No. 53, in title, line 3, leave out 'ophthalmic,'.

No. 54, in title, line 6, after 'Authorities' insert

'and Health Boards; to make provision about ophthalmic services'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—[*Mr. Malone.*]

9.36 pm

Ms Jowell: We have had a full debate both on Report and in Committee. As my hon. Friends have made clear, in many respects we support the Bill, but, having completed its consideration in Committee and on Report, there are still aspects of the Bill that leave with us grave concern.

We believe that the Bill still creates the possibility for commercialisation of primary care—the presence, as the British Medical Association put it, of the third party in the consulting room, compromising the overriding responsibility of general practitioners to their patients, regardless of other considerations. We believe that the Bill still represents a leap in the dark. We do not know how many pilots are likely to develop as a result of the Bill. As it stands, they will be unevaluated, without systematic parliamentary scrutiny through regular annual reports, and without adequate local consultation with local medical committees.

We believe that the strategic role of the medical practices committee has been compromised and we are not satisfied that there are adequate safeguards for patients. There remains the possibility of GPs and staff employed by pilots being gagged and losing their present freedom to speak up for patients when they are concerned about aspects of their clinical care.

At the beginning of the Committee stage, we were promised not only that we would hear the Government's case put by the Minister, which it certainly was, but that Conservative Members would speak up at relevant points in Committee and on Report. However, apart from the odd intervention and some sedentary interventions, they remained silent. It was a case of Malone alone.

We hope that the Bill's provisions will be implemented by a Labour Government, who will replace the drive to commercialise with a drive to restore the national health service and primary care as a public service. We want to put the fragments of the national health service back together again, and consequently end the lottery that has been created by the internal market. We want a national health service that provides proper protection for patients and for staff by ending the gagging that has again been imposed by trusts which are competing under the internal market.

Perhaps most of all, we want an opportunity to restore fairness between patients. Primary care is an essential part of the service that all of us most often use as patients. We are usually not patients in hospital but patients of our general practitioner or of another part of the primary care system. The overriding obligation within that context is to establish fairness between patients, which is the essence of our argument against fundholding. The fundholding system has deliberately been established, not to treat patients on the basis of their clinical need, but to allow patients access to treatment on the basis of their GP's status. We do not think that that is acceptable, because it drives at the very heart of the NHS's purpose.

The Government cannot understand that message, which is why the NHS will be at the centre of a general election campaign that Opposition Members believe will result in the Government being driven from office, and not a moment too soon.

9.41 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I shall speak very briefly indeed. I thoroughly endorse the entire concept of competition that runs through the Bill's provisions. However, I should like to mention briefly the problem of rural dispensing surgeries, on which I have been campaigning for some time. Unfortunately, under current regulations—some of which come under section 43 of the National Health Service Act 1977—some of which are being amended by the Bill, provision of existing services are prescribed for a one-mile radius, thereby creating a monopoly. I believe that that provision creates an uncompetitive situation and that it should be removed.

I know that the Minister is closely involved in current discussions between the British Medical Association and the pharmaceutical industry, and that he is doing his best to knock their heads together in an attempt to reach a sensible solution, which is necessary. I believe very strongly that rural dispensing surgeries are useful and essential for patients and consumers. I should like to have it on the record that the Bill makes no provisions that could in any way prejudice the continuation of rural dispensing surgeries.

9.42 pm

Mr. Bayley: It is in the nature of our debates to emphasise our differences, because we debate the parts of a Bill on which we disagree. In this debate on the Bill's Third Reading, I should like to say that I support its basic principle, which holds out the prospects of innovation, of new service patterns and—should Ministers desire to do so—of targeting resources on areas with considerable unmet health care need, thereby tackling inequalities. Although the current Government may not implement the Bill to achieve those objectives, I am sure that a Labour Government would.

My single greatest reservation on the Bill is the extent to which it leaves open the door to commercialising services. That is a serious flaw in the Bill but I anticipate that in a few weeks' time the current Minister for Health will be on this side of the House and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) will be at the Government Dispatch Box. If that happens after the general election—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Third Reading speeches should be confined purely to the content of the Bill and should not involve speculation.

Mr. Bayley: I am glad that I have been called to order. I look forward to a statement from a Minister that the commercialisation of primary health care services will not take place. I feel that is likely to happen in a few weeks' time when my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich is in a position to do so.

9.45 pm

Mr. Thurnham: I broadly support the aims of the Bill and I should like it to reach the statute book as soon as possible. It gives medical and dental practitioners the opportunity to be innovative and co-operative, so I hope that it will improve health services throughout the country.

I was amazed by the Labour party's failure to support free eye tests for the over-60s as they have in the past. It would be a self-financing measure that would improve the quality of life of over 60-year-olds and reduce the need for expensive health treatment by attending to matters at an early stage.

Mr. Bayley: When the House voted on the matter, did the hon. Gentleman vote against the Government's proposal to introduce charges for eye tests?

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to support my speech in Committee. As I said at the time, I gave the Government the benefit of the doubt. I am now thoroughly persuaded that eye tests should be free, and I hope that the Labour party has not made a U-turn on the matter, as the arguments to support that are so strong.

I hope that the regional differences will be addressed. As I mentioned to the Minister, I celebrated my 5,000 days as a Member of Parliament by distributing 5,000 toothbrushes and tubes of toothpaste to five-year-olds in my constituency. If the Minister has time to visit my constituency, I hope that he will join me in showing five-year-olds how to clean their teeth with those toothbrushes. I support the Bill and look forward to it reaching the statute book.

9.47 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: I shall be brief. As I said on Second Reading, it is in essence a good Bill. The Liberal Democrats supported it on Second Reading and we shall support it tonight.

For most people, the test of the health service is primary care. We should allow practitioners to be as innovative as possible and in many ways the Bill does just that.

Like the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley), I believe that the Bill could be interpreted in a way that he, I and most people outside the House would not want—that behind a respectable frontage there could be profiteering enterprises in the health service. We must certainly close that loophole.

The Bill is good, but for those who work in the health service the test will be in the resources that are made available to implement its provisions. Although my hon. Friend and I welcome the Government's commitment—if they are re-elected, which seems unlikely—to provide the health service with inflation-linked additional resources every year, that will not keep pace with basic demands, let alone catch up with past requirements.

As I have said before, the Labour party's best intentions will come to nothing—if a Labour Government are elected—unless it commits significantly greater resources to the health service. Labour is now well and truly in third place in terms of promising resources for the health service. That should be an embarrassment to Labour Members as it is to many of their supporters. We are happy to go into the election on the basis of supporting primary care and the health service, but unlike the other parties, we put our money where our mouth is.

9.49 pm

Mr. Malone: It gives me great pleasure to commend this important Bill to the House. I thank the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) for her concern. I have never felt alone during our proceedings, although on occasions I have felt, to use the parlance of the Bill, like a single-handed practitioner. However, they now practise in different—usually high-quality—circumstances in a way that would not have been thought of before.

I thank hon. Members from all parties who have supported what will be an important milestone in primary care in this country. This is the first time that the House has addressed itself in detail to legislation on primary care since the inception of the health service 50 years ago.

The Bill is rooted not so much in Government policy as in NHS practice. It follows a comprehensive listening exercise based on ideas brought to us by the professions on how they could come together to provide better primary care. It addresses many problems of the quality of primary care and the uneven distribution of primary care and dental services in parts of the country.

As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has pointed out, new schemes without additional funding are meaningless. The Government are committed, after being re-elected in the coming election, to developing the legislation and the pilot proposals with additional funding. In the Prime Minister's words, that funding is committed year on year on year on year on year throughout the life of the next Government, which will develop the legislation practically, improving primary care for the whole country. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Under Standing Orders, items 9 to 13 on the Order Paper will be dealt with at 10 o'clock. We shall now deal with motions 14 to 18 before a suspension until 10 o'clock.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Road Traffic

That the draft Courses for Drink-Drive Offenders (Experimental Period) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Property (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 24th February, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Special Grant Report (No. 26) (HC 326), which was laid before this House on 27th February, be approved.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the questions on the deregulation orders.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14A(1) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

SCHOOL ACTION PLANS

That the draft Deregulation (Provision of School Action Plans) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 17th February 1997, be approved.

OCCASIONAL PERMISSIONS

That the draft Deregulation (Occasional Permissions) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 24th February 1997, be approved.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

9.52 pm

Sitting suspended.

10 pm

On resuming—

It being Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Questions required to be put by Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of estimates etc.).*

ESTIMATES, 1997–98 (NAVY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1998 a number not exceeding 51,440 all ranks be maintained for Naval Service, and a number not exceeding 17,195 for Service in the Reserve Naval and Marine Forces.

ESTIMATES, 1997–98 (ARMY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1998 a number not exceeding 129,950 all ranks be maintained for Army Service, a number not exceeding 112,579 for Service in the Reserve Land Forces, and a number not exceeding 6,000 for Service as Special Members of the Reserve Land Forces under Part V of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.

ESTIMATES, 1997–98 (AIR) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1998 a number not exceeding 59,100 all ranks be maintained for the Air Force Service, a number not exceeding 23,000 for Service in the Air Reserve Forces, and a number not exceeding 105 for Service as Special Members of the Reserve Air Forces under Part V of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 1995–96

Resolved,

That a sum not exceeding £215,096,760.90 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to make good excesses of certain grants for Defence and Civil Services for the year ended on 31st March 1996, as set out in House of Commons Paper No. 239.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1996–97

Resolved,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £1,554,472,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges for Defence and Civil Services for the year ending on 31st March 1997, as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 238 and 334.

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in on the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. William Waldegrave, Mr. Phillip Oppenheim, Mrs. Angela Knight and Mr. Michael Jack do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (No. 2) BILL

Mr. Michael Jack accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 1996 and 1997: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time this day, and to be printed [Bill 130].

CONSOLIDATED FUND (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Order [6 March] and Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

PETITIONS

Child Protection

10.3 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I have two petitions to present, both of which are on the same subject and relate to a Bill that is to come before the other place on Friday. The first is

The Humble Petition of the Conference of Religions of England and Wales with Action for Children campaign and other Citizens of the United Kingdom.

The second is

The Humble Petition of Citizens of the United Kingdom residing in Switzerland and elsewhere.

The petitions

affirm our commitment to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which seeks to protect children from sexual exploitation;

and call upon Her Majesty's Government to seek to play an active role in bringing about concerted international action to tackle this problem and in particular to examine ways of ensuring that individuals involved in such exploitation are brought to justice within the United Kingdom;

wherefore, your petitioners pray that your honourable House do introduce legislation to ensure that citizens of the United Kingdom who commit serious sexual offences against children abroad can be prosecuted in this country.

The petitioners wanted the petition to be presented before the debate in the other place on Friday.

To lie upon the Table.

10.5 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): This petition is on the same subject as the previous two. I have the honour to present it on behalf of my constituent, Mrs. Lois Hainsworth, chairman of the Bahai national women's committee and of Rev. Graham St. John-Willey, director of the Action for Children Campaign, and Mrs. Sandra Khambatta, its assistant director, the other officers of those organisations and the Bahai community in the United Kingdom. This is this first of four similar volumes that hold, in all, 10,000 signatures.

The petition states:

The Humble Petition of Members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom with Action for Children Campaign and other Citizens or Residents of the United Kingdom,

sheweth

That we, the undersigned, hereby:

express our deep concern at continuing reports that citizens of developed nations travelling abroad may be encouraging the use of children in prostitution and pornography;

affirm our commitment to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which seeks to protect children from sexual exploitation; and

call upon Her Majesty's Government to seek to play an active role in bringing about concerted international action to tackle this problem and in particular to examine ways of ensuring that individuals involved in such exploitation are brought to justice within the United Kingdom.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House do introduce legislation to ensure that citizens of the United Kingdom who commit serious sexual offences against children abroad can be prosecuted in this country.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Lariam

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

10.7 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise a matter of urgent public health concern. One of the most remarkable phenomena of the past 30 years has been the increasing prevalence of foreign travel. People now travel to parts of the world that two generation ago were considered the preserve of the intrepid explorer. Before people travel, whether for holiday or business, they seek professional advice about endemic diseases in their country of destination and the medications or treatment that they should take—prophylaxis—to avoid contracting diseases. That is especially true of malaria.

Unfortunately, a more aggressive strain of malaria has emerged recently in some parts of the world, principally sub-Saharan Africa and parts of the far east. The previous prophylactics, chloroquine and paludrine were considered not to be effective enough. Another drug entered the market: mefloquine, which was marketed by Hoffman La Roche under the name Lariam.

I know someone in Bristol who took Lariam 10 months ago to travel to east Africa to finish some academic research. He was a highly competent professional and a married man with children. He was a young person with a great deal to give to the academic world. Just a few days after arriving in Nairobi, he collapsed in the street with total amnesia and was taken to hospital. He has since suffered psychotic attacks, and has had paranoid delusions and terror attacks. He cannot concentrate or work, and he cannot drive a car. His family life has been severely disrupted and he feels at the moment—at best—as though his life was on hold.

I have since discovered that he was not the only one. When he was in hospital in east Africa, he was told by a tropical diseases consultant that severe neuro-psychiatric side effects from Lariam were quite common. The consultant said that he saw hundreds of patients, and that the problem was that the symptoms could be diagnosed as a breakdown.

Following a BBC television programme last week in the west country, someone wrote to me to say that he had been a resident in east Africa, and now travelled there. When he was last in east Africa, he said, he

"consulted a doctor in the Nairobi hospital who is considered to be the leading expert on Malaria in Africa and he told me that NO doctor in East Africa will recommend Lariam as they all consider it highly dangerous. I told him my doctor had recommended it and his reply was that UK doctors do not know what they are talking about. I am in the medical business and in frequent contact with doctors and I have not yet found a single doctor in Africa who will recommend Lariam."

As long ago as 1989, the World Health Organisation reported that mefloquine can cause severe mental disturbances, and that the reported side effects were a "cause for concern". Nothing to this effect was put in the product data sheet until 19 March 1996. Hoffman La Roche put out a press release on 16 March 1996 in which it blamed background depression as the cause of Lariam reaction. But the facts of acute neuro-psychiatric reactions in people with no previous history have been highlighted worldwide in many leading medical journals. The person I know certainly has no previous neuro-psychiatric history, and was an extremely fit young man.

I have since heard many instances of Lariam poisoning. An Officer of the House approached me last summer when I was tabling parliamentary questions on the matter to say that he knew a highly competent professional woman who had taken Lariam, who, he told me, was now psychotic. I have spoken to GPs who are very concerned. I met members of the Lariam support group, which is principally based in the west country but whose members come from all over the UK. I met a highly motivated young woman police officer, who has not been able to work for nearly a year and a half because of the serious side effects.

Lariam was made the drug of first choice in 1995 for sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia by the malaria advisory committee, which is headed by Professor David Bradley. It is also recommended as the first choice in MIMs, which gets its information from the malaria research laboratory of the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London. The medical advisory service for travellers abroad also suggests Lariam as the first choice. British Airways travel clinic also recommends it on the basis of advice from MASTA.

On 7 October 1991, a change was made to the product data sheet with regard to the ability to drive. The recommendation was that such a task should be avoided for three weeks following therapy, because the patient may experience dizziness, a disturbed sense of balance or a neuro-psychiatric reaction. I do not know whether this is observed, and whether people who take that drug cease to drive a car for three weeks afterwards. I do not how people who go on fly-drive holidays manage.

It is interesting to ask what advice is given to travellers on the side effects. For example, somebody from the BA travel clinic said on the "Close Up West" television programme on the BBC:

"There are some possible side effects that have been experienced by some people."

But surely people want to know how likely these are, how serious the effects might be, and how much testing has been done. On the BBC "Watchdog" programme, Dr. Peter Barrett—the MASTA director—said

"I have to say that personally I think I would probably tend to go for doxycycline in many of the areas where mefloquine might be used . . . I do find it difficult sometimes advising the use of mefloquine quite as widely."

Many experts also argue that Lariam may not be suitable for two to three-week holidays.

I asked a series of parliamentary questions last June, and was told by the Department of Health that revised guidelines were still being developed by the malaria advisory committee and that no publication date had been set. I assumed that the MAC was a statutory body, but it turns out to be a self-selecting volunteer group of about 40 experts, which has met eight times since 1980. I asked again in early February when the committee would report, and was told by the Minister for Health that the consultation process was "taking longer than anticipated".

A leading figure in travel health in this country who is a member of the committee has told me that she is very impatient for the new guidelines to be published, so that she can advise practice nurses, who are often the people who talk to the traveller, and that she is keen to ensure

that prophylactic drugs are taken far enough in advance so that any side effects can be ascertained. However, on BBC television on 6 March, Dr. David Bradley, the chair of the MAC, said:

"I have no idea when we will reach a consensus or whether we will reach one at all."

It is safe to assume that there is a dispute about Lariam among acknowledged experts. The MAC held an emergency meeting on 25 March 1996, and it is right to ask whether that was because of increasing concern about neuro-psychiatric disorders. If that was when the committee last met, and if there has been no agreement nearly a year later, is the committee ever going to agree, and should not some other avenue be pursued?

It is important to ask what advice GPs give and what they say about Lariam. Dr. David Chisholm of the British Medical Association GPs committee, when asked whether he would take Lariam, said on BBC television:

"I would be reluctant to, because of the information that is reported to me and to all doctors about its safety profile and its side effects. Some of these side effects are serious and extremely unpleasant."

It must be admitted that there are disputes about the prevalence of side effects. Hoffman-La Roche has always claimed that the rate of serious side effects, defined by the company and by the WHO as leading to death, prolonged hospitalisation or significant disability, as one in 10,000. Dr. Gordon Cook, an expert on malaria at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases, has described that as "sheer nonsense".

When doctors working at MASTA found that the number of their clients suffering from side effects seemed to belie the one in 10,000 assertion, they conducted their own trial, and found that one in 140 were so affected by Lariam as to make them temporarily unable to carry out day-to-day activities. Hoffmann-La Roche disputes those findings. Dr. Gordon Cook says that the MASTA figure is nearer the truth, but that

"personal experience leads me to conclude that the true prevalence is more than that".

It would appear that wrangling over the definition of "serious" side effects may be another factor in the delay of the new guidelines that are awaited by travellers and all in the medical profession. My friend in Bristol would not be considered as suffering from serious effects according to the manufacturer, yet nearly a year later he cannot resume work.

A reply to a parliamentary question I tabled in July 1996 to the Secretary of State for Defence revealed that Lariam is not prescribed to service pilots and air crew, because of the possible side effects of dizziness or a distorted sense of balance. Furthermore, the Civil Aviation Authority has also stated that Lariam's

"significant side-effect profile makes its use in aircrew inappropriate."

Surely that would lead a traveller on an aeroplane to ask, "If the pilot can't take it because it isn't safe, why should I be taking it? What is the pilot taking if he routinely flies to these areas, has stopovers and has not keeled over from malaria?"

As long ago as April 1992, the WHO removed mefloquine from the recommended anti-malarial drugs list for duty troops visiting high-risk malaria areas, on the basis of its concern about neuro-psychiatric side effects. What about people such as train drivers or brain surgeons, who have jobs in which they cannot afford to suffer dizziness, which require them to be in full command of their faculties? Those people go on holiday and take anti-malarial drugs, and the potential consequences are too awful to contemplate.

I am also concerned about the effects on children. Changes made to the precautions on the product data sheet in June 1993 included:

"a statement indicating that use in children below 15 kg is not recommended."

However, a six-year-old girl died last year after suffering a severe reaction to Lariam, which she had been prescribed for a holiday in Nigeria. She developed a condition known as toxic epidermal necrolysis, which causes skin blisters and mucus in the eyes and nose. Her nails and hair fell out, and she died in intensive care.

Dr. Gordon Cook has said that Lariam appeared to cause an especially adverse reaction in young women. I do not know to what degree Lariam has been tested on young women, or any women. They are certainly given the same dosage as men, never mind the difference in their weight ratio, and I gather that the drug was trialled on Thai soldiers.

The statutory body that assesses data and gives product licences in the United Kingdom is the Medicines Control Agency. It also monitors and evaluates reports of suspected adverse reactions. It is worth drawing an analogy with something that was called to my attention when I served on the Select Committee on Agriculture, when we found that the veterinary medicines directorate gave product licences to organophosphate dips, and it had to monitor the suspect adverse reaction. That is asking people who guarantee the safety of a product to seek evidence that they are wrong. The Agriculture Select Committee recommended that those two functions should be separated because of potential conflicts of interest; a similar recommendation should probably be made in this case.

All the information that I have sought to date from the Department of Health regarding the number and nature of trials that have been done on Lariam before and since licensing has been refused, on the basis of section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968, on the restriction on disclosure of information. That section lays down that information supplied to the licensing authority in connection with the application for, and granting and maintenance of, a product licence or clinical trial certificate must be kept in confidence by the licensing authority and its advisory bodies.

However, a book published by the MCA in 1993 called "Towards Safe Medicines" says that section 118 is intended to protect the commercial secrets of the pharmaceutical industry. It says:

"But where there is a safety issue the necessary information is given because the need to protect public health takes priority. Interpretation of this section is kept under review in the light of developments in the EC Single Market to enable more information about the licensing process to be made public."

An Internet trawl reveals adverse reactions and side effects reported from throughout the world.

There were three malaria deaths in the United Kingdom in 1990, and in the subsequent years there were 11, nine, four, 11, five, and 13 in 1996. The argument for retaining Lariam is based on the premise that the risk of not taking the drug are higher than those of suffering the side effects. There is anxiety that the MAC report may be being held

[Ms Jean Corston]

up because of the concern that malaria deaths might increase in time if people do not take Lariam, but effectiveness must be balanced with compliance. If people suffer serious side effects, they will stop taking the prophylactic. Resistance to mefloquine is already being reported in sub-Saharan Africa and the far east.

This matter has the makings of a Government health scandal. The Government are awaiting a report from a non-statutory body, which has no obligation to report, and whose chair has cast doubt on whether it will do so. The Department of Health appears to be doing nothing while purporting to wait for others to act. The Medicines Control Agency appears to be sitting on its hands because it and the Department are responsible for a failure, first to organise and prioritise the conclusions to be drawn from research and monitoring, and secondly to ensure that those priorities and conclusions are unambiguously conveyed to the public via the organisations that I have mentioned.

The system does not appear to be working. Meanwhile, there is utter confusion and much misgiving over what advice to give travellers. There are arcane disputes over the severity of side effects. The manufacturers are involved in personal injury litigation. There are 1,000 litigants UK-wide; anyone who has practised law knows that personal injury litigation is a waiting game, and that is obviously unacceptable.

I congratulate the Lariam Support Group, some of whose members are in the Strangers' Gallery tonight. They are people who—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. There is no one in the Gallery that the hon. Member and I are aware of.

Ms Corston: I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to you for drawing that to my attention. It may be that people who have an interest in that matter will be listening intently to the debate.

These people have suffered terrible side effects and ill health after taking that drug, which they took in all good faith and on the basis of advice, sometimes for a very long time. Many of them are young, high-achieving people, who feel that their lives have been destroyed. They have suffered denial and, at times, disbelief. They have suffered the isolation of serious illness. They have been very brave in overcoming such adversity, and have joined to fight one of the giants of the pharmaceutical world.

It should not be left to them. I hope that the Minister's response tonight will give me confidence that some proper advice will be provided to people who must recommend prophylaxis for malaria, and that urgent steps will be taken to discover what it is about mefloquine that causes terrible side effects in so many people.

10.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) on raising this matter, because it enables us to discuss two very important public health issues: the prevention of malaria and the safe use of medicines. Lariam—which is otherwise known by its approved name, mefloquine—is one of several medicines used in the prevention and treatment of malaria. It has an important place in medicine, although, as the hon. Lady has made clear, its use may lead to adverse reactions.

The starting point for this debate should be a recognition that malaria is a serious disease that can lead to death. It is a major cause of ill health and death in many parts of the tropics and sub-tropics, and effective prevention of malaria is a concern to anyone who travels to areas where it is endemic. Malaria is a parasitic disease, which is transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. Of the four types of human malaria, falciparum malaria is the most serious.

The symptoms of malaria may include fever, chills, sweats, coughs, diarrhoea, respiratory distress and delirium. However, these can be very varied, and malaria can easily go unrecognised and be misdiagnosed. Falciparum malaria leads to bleeding disorders and failure of various organs. It may also involve the brain, leading to coma and death. Prompt treatment of malaria is essential, even in mild cases, since irreversible complications may develop rapidly.

In the United Kingdom, malaria is an imported disease. About 2,000 cases a year are reported to the public health laboratory service malaria reference laboratory, and, as the hon. Lady said, between four and 12 people a year have died of it in recent years. An increasing proportion of cases is due to the more severe falciparum malaria, which currently accounts for about 60 per cent. of the total.

The Government have long recommended that all travellers to malarious areas take appropriate measures to protect themselves against malaria. Travellers to the tropics and sub-tropics should consult a doctor before travelling. We issue recommendations on malaria and its prevention, both to the general public and to doctors.

Advice for the public is contained in the free booklet, "Health Advice for Travellers" and in a new leaflet on malaria, both produced by the Department of Health. That advice is kept up to date, and is also available on Prestel and Ceefax. The United Kingdom Health Department's book "Health Information For Overseas Travel", which every general practitioner receives, contains more detailed information for doctors. Additionally, the malaria reference laboratory has pre-recorded information on malaria prophylaxis for travellers, and provides advice on specific problems to healthcare professionals.

Prevention of malaria in travellers consists of four components: first, awareness of the risk in the area visited; secondly, preventing mosquito bites by the use of insect repellants, protective clothing after dark and sleeping under bed nets; thirdly, taking an appropriate medicine regularly throughout the stay and for four weeks after returning; and, finally, remembering that malaria can still occur despite all these precautions, and seeing a doctor urgently in the event of fever or flu-like symptoms for up to a year after returning.

As the hon. Lady said, there are several medicines available that protect against malaria, and a range of alternatives is needed, because the disease varies from one part of the world to another. This depends on the type of malaria that is predominant, and on whether local malaria parasites are resistant to particular medicines—a problem that has increased in recent years. In many countries, falciparum malaria is now resistant to chloroquine, which has been the mainstay of malaria prevention for many years.

Advice on the prevention and treatment of malaria has been provided by an ad hoc committee convened by the malaria reference laboratory. The committee's guidelines, which are aimed at health professionals, were last published in the *British Medical Journal* in 1995, where they are available to all those interested in the subject. Its report includes advice on the use of mefloquine.

The committee is presently producing a new set of guidelines. When consultation has been completed, its advice will be published and the Government will review the implications fully. I heard clearly the hon. Lady's impatience with the procedure. I take her comments seriously, and I shall determine when the committee intends to conduct a further review or publish work on the subject.

Once licensed, the Government closely monitor the use and adverse effects of medicines to ensure that experience from widespread use is appropriately acted upon. This work, which is called pharmacovigilance, is a top priority for the Medicines Control Agency, and an area where the UK is a recognised world leader. Our record in identifying unexpected drug safety hazards, investigating them thoroughly and taking effective and prompt action is second to none.

The yellow card scheme encourages doctors to submit reports of adverse effects to medicines to the MCA through one of the best supported reporting schemes in the world, underpinned by a purpose-designed, state-of-the-art computer system. This scheme enables us to identify important hazards as early as possible.

The Government also use a range of other methods to assess adverse drug reactions, so that effective preventive measures may be put in place. The UK has taken a lead by developing the methodology of, and guidelines for, formal post-marketing surveillance studies, and by using databases such as the general practice research database for the investigation of possible drug safety hazards.

Mefloquine is an anti-malarial drug derived from quinine, which was first authorised in the UK in 1989. It has a high level of effectiveness—between 90 and 100 per cent.—in both preventing and treating malaria. Mefloquine is an important anti-malarial drug because it is useful in areas where the parasite is resistant to other drugs, notably chloroquine.

As with any medicine, the safety of mefloquine depends on appropriate use, but adverse effects may occur even when it is used as recommended. The authorised product information for mefloquine describes the recommended uses, provides dosage schedules, indicates who should not use it, and sets out the precautions necessary for safer use, and lists the recognised adverse reactions. This is available to both doctors and patients, in the latter case supplied with the medicine in lay language. Perhaps it is not plain English, but it is understandable lay language.

The most important adverse reactions to mefloquine are those affecting the nervous system—the so-called neuro-psychiatric reactions. The most common are depression, headache, anxiety and panic reactions. When relatively mild, these reactions are distressing to the user and his or her companions, and may curtail their trip abroad. Fortunately, most such reactions are mild and short-lived, and do not lead to serious consequences or a need for hospitalisation. Rarely, neuro-psychiatric reactions are serious or more prolonged, and no one is underestimating the consequences of such reactions for the individuals concerned.

We must see the problem in its proper context. First, travellers to tropical and sub-tropical regions face an important risk of malaria, which is an illness with significant morbidity and mortality. Secondly, used correctly, mefloquine is highly effective in preventing malaria, and where there is resistance to chloroquine, it is the best treatment available. Finally, alternative anti-malarials are also associated with adverse effects, and these may also be serious on rare occasions. Overall, the balance of risks and benefits for mefloquine is favourable, and similar to alternative treatments.

Adverse reactions to mefloquine have received considerable publicity in the media, and it is right that the public should be aware that medicines may have important side effects. It is unfortunate, however, if the messages provided are not well balanced, as this may unjustifiably scare the public and lead them to take inappropriate action, such as stopping medication needed to prevent malaria. For travellers to endemic areas who do not use preventive medicines, the risks and consequences of contracting malaria are much greater than the risks of serious adverse reactions occurring with mefloquine.

The hon. Lady mentioned the number of adverse reactions. About 1,200 people are reporting possible adverse reactions in any one year. It is probable that 700,000 have taken the drug. The MCA and the committee on the safety of medicines have carefully monitored the safety of mefloquine since it was authorised in 1989. In the light of accumulating experience, product information has been amended on no fewer than five separate occasions to make 16 significant changes to the recommendations on its use and safety. That should ensure that doctors and patients are fully aware of the adverse effects of mefloquine, and know that appropriate action can be taken to minimise them.

An important further change is currently being made to recommend that people start a course of mefloquine up to two to three weeks before travelling. The effect will be that most patients who do not tolerate it will be aware of the problem before they travel, and will not experience difficulties in unfamiliar surroundings.

We have also provided doctors and pharmacists with information and guidance about neuro-psychiatric adverse reactions, in an article published in the bulletin "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" in July 1996. That followed a review initiated by the Committee on Safety of Medicines. Safety monitoring is a continuous process, and, as with any medicine, further action will be taken as and when new evidence becomes available that has an impact on the risks and benefits of the drug.

I assure the hon. Lady that I was impressed by what she said. I take it seriously, and I will monitor the situation in the light of it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 March 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Airport Taxes

1. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many EU countries levy (a) higher and (b) lower airport taxes than the United Kingdom. [18519]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): The total tax a passenger pays can include embarkation taxes, passenger service charges and security charges, as well as VAT-type taxes.

On the basis of a £120 ticket for a domestic flight, the charge in Germany will be £27.61 in comparison with the £10 payable in the UK after November this year. Greece, Austria, France, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Portugal and the Netherlands also have higher charges; France, Luxembourg, Denmark and Ireland have lower charges.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Is not the Minister forgetting that airports in Germany and elsewhere are Government owned, so their taxes are hidden? A fair comparison shows that United Kingdom airports are charging two to three times more. In addition, does not the fuel form show the number of children? Could not that be reconciled with the number of children taxed rather than taking £5 million to £6 million in a tax on children?

Mr. Oppenheim: I did point out that the tax in Germany is higher. Landing charges in the UK tend to be much lower than those on the continent, partly because we have privatised our airports which are therefore now more efficient. The hon. Gentleman's point concerning children is valid, and it is often made. Children under two who are carried by their parents are not charged, but anyone occupying a seat is charged. A cut-off point for children aged 10 or 12 would be almost impossible to administer because airline staff and ticket sellers would have to check children's age. However, I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's general point.

Privatisation Proceeds

2. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the contribution of forecast privatisation proceeds in 1998–99 to the expenditure plans set out in his "Financial Statement and Budget Report". [18520]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave): The Red Book assumed privatisation proceeds of £1½ billion in 1998-99, reflecting the Government's continuing commitment to privatisation. Privatisation reduces borrowing and secures long-term benefits for UK taxpayers and consumers.

Mr. Jessel: I believe that £1½ billion works out at about £80 a head for every man, woman and child in the UK. If the Labour party were to attempt to stop privatisation, would not it have to increase the rate of VAT by about 1 per cent. or income tax by about 1p in the pound, or a bit of each, to raise the same amount of money?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right; the absence of the predicted income from privatisation proceeds seems to have been missed by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who says that he will stick to our plans. Unless the right hon. Gentleman has done yet another U-turn on the matter, the Opposition are £1½ billion short on this, which contributes to the £12 billion gap that they have during the first two years, which is part of their £30 billion spending gap in general.

Mr. Stevenson: Is the Minister aware that, according to figures produced by the House of Commons Library, since the Government embarked on their privatisation policy, privatisation receipts show a shortfall of £5.7 billion compared with the share market price the day after privatisation? Does not that show remarkable Government incompetence, and that the Government are prepared to pay any price in their dogmatic pursuit of privatisation?

Mr. Waldegrave: No, it does not show any such thing. If we cast our minds back, on each of those occasions the Labour party either said that such businesses could not be privatised or would not be sold—or it tried to talk the market down. The hon. Gentleman helpfully makes another point, which is that the Labour party's proposed so-called windfall tax is based on the idea that there was a windfall—some 15 years ago in many cases. How one taxes the present shareholders to catch up with an alleged windfall 10 years ago is rather odd.

Mr. Congdon: Given the success of the privatised industries in reducing prices while paying more than £2.5 billion a year into the Treasury, does my right hon. Friend think that it is somewhat perverse to reward that success by imposing a windfall tax? What incentive is there for such companies to be profitable when their success would be rewarded by the Labour party plundering their profits?

Mr. Waldegrave: The Labour party justified that policy on the basis that it thought that some of the executives in those firms were too highly paid, but the proposal makes no difference to executive pay. It is a random tax on a selection of successful businesses, such as British Telecom, which has delivered a 40 per cent. cut in real terms in its prices to the consumer. It shows Labour's real underlying approach to industry: if it is successful, Labour does not like it.

Mr. Milburn: Do the Government intend to privatise the Post Office?

Mr. Waldegrave: The figures in the Red Book do not include any potential receipts from the Post Office.

They include the privatisation of National Air Traffic Services, which has been announced, and there are plenty of other candidates in line that will continue to make the privatisation receipts flow. This is a major gap in Labour's plans to which it has not yet found any answer.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend confirm to the House whether the figures include receipts from the proposed privatisation of London Underground? Will he confirm also that, unique among privatisations, the receipts from that privatisation will be used to increase investment in London Underground?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is quite right: the Red Book does not include any assumptions about London Underground.

Taxation

3. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the amount of tax paid by a typical family has changed since 1992. [18521]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): A family on average earnings should be around £370 better off next financial year, 1997–98, after tax, inflation and earnings growth, relative to the current financial year, 1996–97. This takes the total rise in real take-home pay for the typical family to more than £1,100 since 1991–92.

Mr. Olner: Will the Chancellor take this last opportunity before the general election to come to the Dispatch Box and apologise to my constituents in Nuneaton for the 22 Tory tax rises that they have suffered, which have put them £2,000 out of pocket since this Government came to office? Will he join Labour in not pursuing increases in VAT on food, children's clothing, books and newspapers?

Mr. Clarke: Untypically, the hon. Gentleman does not appear to have paid any great attention to my answer. The average family in Nuneaton is £1,100 a year better off compared with the year before the last election, after taking account of changes in incomes, tax and inflation. If the Labour party had been elected—it had pledged to increase taxes and has since opposed everything that we have done to get the recovery going—families would have been poorer.

People face the prospect of being asked to elect a Labour Government, but the Labour party cannot explain how it would raise £12 billion in the first two years. Labour would make people poorer if they turned to it. The hon. Gentleman's constituents are better off under the Conservative Government and, to quote another occasion, he should rejoice in that fact rather than try to find ways of getting around it.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, as the typical family is earning much more today than in 1979—it has an extra £1,000 a year in its pockets—people are quite happy to pay a few more pounds to protect our vital public services? Will he also accept their thanks for the 25 tax cuts that he has made in his last two Budgets?

Mr. Clarke: When people are able to earn more in cash terms in a successful economy, they tend to pay more in tax. We have made tax rises, tax reductions and made the economy thrive. As a result, the typical family is much better off. I am sure that that is what matters to any sensible, intelligent constituent of my hon. Friend or mine.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Chancellor acknowledge that living standards have risen in spite of the Government's tax increases, not because of them? Will he acknowledge that the cut in the basic rate of income tax and overall cuts in income tax have been financed by the receipts of privatisation and North sea oil and the extension of the tax base in other areas? Is that why he told *The Grocer* magazine that the next challenge was to ensure that VAT on fuel was put back up to 17.5 per cent.?

Mr. Clarke: That is absolute nonsense; the economy would not have recovered if we had not tackled borrowing. That is why I had some tax increases in my first two Budgets, and thereby controlled public spending. By controlling public spending thereafter, we reduced borrowing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) said, we have had 25 tax cuts as well. The lady from *The Grocer* who spoke to me was surrounded by other journalists, who failed to hear any reference that she says I made to tax on fuel, and what she says I said does not represent my views.

We have had tax-cutting Budgets for the past two years because we have done what was necessary to get borrowing on course and, therefore, the economy on course. The average family is therefore becoming better off and will continue to do so for so long as we stick to my Budget plans.

Mr. Spring: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that we shall soon be having the lowest basic rate of tax for 60 years? Will he confirm also that it is his intention to move towards a 20p basic rate of tax, thus further boosting the living standards of the average British family?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right. In April, the income tax rate will come down to the lowest since Stanley Baldwin was Prime Minister before the war. That gives credibility to our pledge to reduce the standard rate of income tax to 20p in the pound when, and only when, it is safe to do so, and consistent with keeping the economy on the strong growth pattern that it is maintaining at the moment.

Ms Primarolo: Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer take this opportunity to explain to the House exactly what he meant when he said to the reporter from *The Grocer* that

"the challenge now is to get"

VAT on fuel

"up to 17.5 per cent."

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman deny that it is the Government's intention, if re-elected, to do that?

Mr. Clarke: I was surrounded by other journalists and others, none of whom recalls my making that remark, which does not in any event represent my views. If we stick to my published Budget plans, in due course we shall maintain our tax-cutting agenda. If a Labour Government

are elected, they will have to raise £12 billion in the first two years, because a Labour Government would not follow the policies to which we are committed to deliver our Red Book projections. They would have to raise taxes and increase borrowing. It is the Labour party that has to explain its tax intentions when its figures do not add up, as it has presented them so far.

Mr. Garnier: Is it not the case—indeed, is it not certain—that whereas dogs bark and lambs bleat, Labour Governments increase taxes? Is that not the only way in which the Labour party will be able to fill the enormous black hole that it has in its public spending plans?

Mr. Clarke: Just so. The Labour party is already committed to raising the windfall tax, which will increase the total burden of taxation on the people of this country and raise their fuel bills. It is on top of that that the Labour party is £12 billion short in the first two years and £30 billion short over five years. My hon. and learned Friend is right: on all past and present form the Labour party will turn to taxation to raise that money and thereby make the public worse off.

Income Tax Rates

4. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received in respect of (a) the basic and (b) the higher income tax rates; and if he will make a statement. [18522]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): I receive a steady flow of representations regarding all aspects of the tax system.

Mr. Hughes: I want the Minister to be really honest to the House. I want him to tell us whether he receives mailbags full of letters stating, "Please put income tax down and please do not put higher rates of tax up for high earners," or whether the strong balance of view is that people want better services—better education, better health, better housing and better transport—and are willing to pay a bit more income tax, and with higher earnings a bit more higher-rate tax, to fund better public services. Is not the second approach the truth?

Mr. Jack: That question comes from the member of a party whose 1996 alternative Budget pledged it to raise public spending, by its calculations, by £4 billion. I receive representations that tell me, "Isn't it good that we can see that the basic rate of tax falls to the lowest level for 60 years while at the same time, year on year, there is a real increase in spending on the health service along with more money spent on education and public services in general, but within a Budget where controls are tight, and we have the fastest growing economy in western Europe?" That is the package that people like to write to me about.

Mr. John Townend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that any Government could increase the overall burden of direct taxation without putting up tax rates, merely by abolishing mortgage tax relief, reducing tax relief on pensions, reducing allowances or lifting the ceiling on national insurance contributions? Does he further agree that any Government who propose to spend £12 billion extra would have to put up taxes, otherwise borrowing would go through the roof?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend has clearly been looking at various posters around the country. He is entirely right to give that health warning, because the official Opposition seem to be committing themselves to two of our rates of tax. Therefore, as my hon. Friend inferred, it is clear that everything else is up for grabs. His warning should be heeded by every elector.

Mr. Darling: The House will recall that the Conservatives put up national insurance after the last election, even though they promised not to do so.

Will the Financial Secretary clarify what the Chancellor said and, in particular, give an undertaking that the Conservatives would not seek to increase the rate of VAT on fuel during the next Parliament?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman was not listening to my right hon. and learned Friend, who made his views entirely clear on every aspect of tax policy, and, indeed, on his policy on VAT. I have nothing to add.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Labour-controlled Waltham Forest council raised its council tax two days ago and that, over a three-year period, that tax has been increased by 41 per cent.? I have a mailbag full of letters from people telling me that they are sick and tired of paying increased charges. The Liberal Democrats on the council voted with the Labour party to increase that tax and now have an outraged public chasing them.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend has illustrated the underlying desire of anybody in the Labour party who is in power to spend more of other people's money and to tax more. He is entirely right.

Economic Growth

5. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations have been made to him on the rate of economic growth. [18524]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I receive many representations on economic growth. Since 1992, the United Kingdom has had the strongest and longest recovery of any major European Union nation, and can expect continued, healthy growth. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development expects the United Kingdom to grow faster this year than the United States, Japan and all the major European economies.

Mr. Hall: Under the Tories, Britain has suffered two of the worst economic recessions since the war, and slower growth than any other major industrialised country in the world. Can the Chancellor tell us why we have fallen from 13th to 18th place in the world prosperity league and why we have been relegated to the European second division?

Mr. Clarke: With respect, I think that the hon. Gentleman was not paying close attention to the reply that I gave to his main question. I could go back to the rather

serious recessions that took place in industrially bankrupt Britain when the Labour party was last in power. At the moment, we are enjoying the strongest growth of any major country in western Europe. We are expected to outperform other members of the G7. It is not only me who says so. It is not only the OECD that says so. The International Monetary Fund expects us to outgrow the other major European economies next year, and we are on course to be one of the most successful industrial economies in western Europe. That is the prospect. It is the result of very tough and effective decisions that we have taken over the past few years.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one of the reasons for our outstanding economic performance in the past few years is the enormous competitive advantage that we have enjoyed because we have escaped the onerous obligations of the social chapter? Does he further agree that if a Government ever came to power who accepted those obligations, the consequences would be the destruction of a huge number of jobs in this country and the erosion of our competitive advantage?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. I think that the vast majority of Finance Ministers of the other European countries realise that they have now to go through the difficult structural changes in their economies and the changes in their labour markets that this country has undergone during the period of Conservative rule. We will continue to outperform them until they do—unless, of course, we have a Labour Government who plunge us back into the old-fashioned type of social democratic economy from which the rest of Europe has desperately to try to escape over the next few years.

Finance Bill

6. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with industry representatives about clause 37 of the Finance Bill; and if he will make a statement. [18525]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): My hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary met industry representatives on 22 January. The amendments to clause 37 passed on Report now address the concerns expressed by the property industry.

Mr. Salmond: Why did the Government back down on clause 37? Were they concerned about the legal position if they pursued the matter as they originally intended? If so, is the Minister worried about payment and prepayment traders in other related aspects of the Finance Bill? Is there not a ticking time bomb of legal action in the Finance Bill because of discriminatory treatment as between similar traders in different industries? Is the Minister worried about that, or does she think she and her colleagues will not be at the Dispatch Box, so it will be someone else's problem?

Mrs. Knight: The hon. Gentleman is incorrect. The amendments to the clause targeted avoidance more tightly, and we are convinced that that will work. We shall keep a close eye on the matter. The important point is to ensure that correct transactions can go ahead, but that avoidance is stopped. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would support those measures.

Mr. Brooke: Will my hon. Friend pass on to the Exchequer Secretary and to Customs and Excise the thanks of my constituents for the hard and constructive work that went into resolving the original problems posed by clause 37? Will she, at the same time, congratulate our hon. Friend on having become this very day the owner of Westminster's top dog?

Mrs. Knight: I assure my right hon. Friend that my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary has heard his thanks. It is clear that, when my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend get together, they can resolve matters in an honourable and friendly way. I understand that my right hon. Friend came second in the top dog awards. In fact, the first three top dogs were Tory top dogs. That is a good omen.

Interest Rates

7. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next plans to meet the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss interest rates. [18526]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Thursday 10 April, and frequently thereafter.

Mr. Hoyle: Will the Chancellor explain why he is keeping interest rates at an artificial level, if not for political and electoral reasons?

Mr. Clarke: That is the first opinion that I have heard expressed on interest rates from any Opposition Member, so it is a start. With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, I will not take his advice on monetary policy. We have achieved an inflation rate of below 4 per cent. for more than four years, which is the best performance this country has seen for almost 50 years. The OECD survey said:

> "Inflation performance over the past 4 years has been remarkably good."

I am determined that it will remain as good for the next four years, once we get this Government back in office.

Mr. Legg: Will my right hon. and learned Friend explain what the impact on the public sector borrowing requirement would be if local authorities were allowed to spend all their capital receipts? What implications would that policy have for the overall level of interest rates?

Mr. Clarke: The best estimate that I can give is about £2½ billion per year. It is clear that the Opposition are committed to such a policy, but they will not say how they would finance it. If they return to borrowing, which must be one of the methods that they are contemplating to fill the obvious gaps in their public spending plans, that will put upward pressure on interest rates, as my hon. Friend said. That is an irresponsible approach to an area of policy in which the Government are achieving remarkable success.

Mr. Sheerman: The Chancellor cannot get away with this snapshot of the past two years. People want to know

why the Government have not, in the past 18 years, kept long-term interest rates low. We have had the highest long-term interest rates in Europe, which has meant low investment and poor prospects for working people throughout this land.

Mr. Clarke: With the greatest respect, the latest authoritative figures for European Union inflation show that we are below the average. Our record has been sustained throughout the recovery. I was the first Chancellor to publish this year the International Monetary Fund's article 4 annual report, which says:

"The inflation targeting framework for monetary policy has delivered impressive results."

High inflation used to be an endemic weakness of the British economy, and tended to destroy our recoveries. The Government have tackled that problem successfully, which is why this recovery is so healthy.

Private Finance Initiative

8. **Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the impact on the public finances of financing capital projects under the private finance initiative rather than entirely from public funds. [18527]

Mr. Waldegrave: The PFI is delivering better value to the taxpayer, better services to the public sector and new business opportunities for the private sector. The PFI entails real transfer of risk and responsibility to the private sector, and on that basis has been shown to improve value for money. That is why it was endorsed by the IMF as a

"welcome innovation that has the potential to increase the efficiency with which services are provided to the public".

Mr. Elletson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the private finance initiative is making a huge contribution to projects in the national health service? Does he agree that ending its use in the NHS would add substantially to public expenditure, and would that not be precisely the effect of the Labour party's policies?

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes. There is fundamental confusion about that in the Labour party. Its document "Renewing the NHS" states:

"We strongly disapprove of the Government's efforts to dragoon hospitals and health authorities into tying themselves up in long-term private finance contracts."

Mr. Robert Hughes: Hear, hear.

Mr. Waldegrave: "Hear, hear," says the hon. Gentleman, most helpfully. That is the truth. Labour Members are, and always have been, against real PFI in the health service. They always say that they are against any transfer of management responsibility, and that it is necessary for real PFI.

Mr. Timms: Why has none of the major hospital PFI schemes yet been completed? The Government said in the Red Book that there would be £2.5 billion-worth of investment under the PFI next year, but only £1.3 billion had been committed by last December. What is the present shortfall in the amount committed to the PFI, and what will the Government do to bridge the gap and provide desperately needed investment in hospitals and other public services?

Mr. Waldegrave: The deals are big, complex and very important, but they will be sorted out. The hon. Gentleman may like to watch this space.

Mr. Stephen: Does my right hon. Friend really believe in Labour's apparent conversion to the merits of private finance, given that, only six months ago, its deputy leader thought that PFI was a furniture store?

Mr. Waldegrave: To be fair to the deputy leader of the Labour party, he claims to have invented the PFI. Unfortunately, however, he did not: he invented something very different. He just thinks that letting public authorities borrow is private finance. It is not; it contributes to the public sector borrowing requirement. That is the fundamental misunderstanding in the Labour party.

European Single Currency

9. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on how adherence to the criteria for joining the European single currency would affect the United Kingdom economy. [18529]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Maastricht convergence criteria of low inflation and sound public finances make sound economic sense in their own right, with or without economic and monetary union. They will continue to form the basis of the Government's policies.

Mr. Williams: Has not the Chancellor lost the argument in the Conservative party over monetary union? Are not the Tories being increasingly driven by Euro-sceptics into supporting a complete withdrawal from the European Community, which would cost 3.5 million jobs?

Mr. Oppenheim: As I understand it, new Labour's policy is exactly the same as ours. As soon as we changed our policy and said that we would have a referendum on economic and monetary union, Labour poodled along behind us on that policy, as on so many others. Is the hon. Gentleman also arguing, for the sake of symmetry, that the many Euro-sceptics in his party—including the 50 who signed a letter condemning Labour's policy—have driven the Labour party into exactly the same position as us?

Mr. Forman: Under a responsible Conservative Government, would not one answer to the question be that adherence to the Maastricht criteria would have little effect on the British economy, because we are very likely to meet those criteria whether we are in or out of EMU? Is there not a strong pro-European case for saying that EMU should not go ahead on the timetable that is now being talked about unless it does so on the basis of a very small homogeneous core of countries?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It looks as if we will meet the Maastricht criteria. We have lower debt than any other major European Union

country, and our debt has been lower every year under the present Government than in any year under the last Labour Government. Our borrowing is running at half its level under the last Labour Government, our inflation is below the EU average and our unemployment is lower than that in any other EU country. We have done all that while looking very likely to meet the Maastricht criteria.

Contrast that with the position of other countries such as France and Germany which are suffering terribly by having to meet those criteria. The reason for that is that they have not made the structural reforms that we have made in the teeth of bitter Labour opposition. Those reforms have meant that three quarters of the competitiveness gap with Germany has been closed over the past 18 years. It is no wonder that new Labour's unique selling proposition to the electorate is, "Those guys have made such a mess of things that we shall copy all their policies."

Mr. Mike O'Brien: When the Exchequer Secretary speaks about "our" policy, which "our" does he mean? Does he mean the Foreign Secretary, who says that he is hostile to a single currency, or does he mean the Chancellor, who has always said that he is a supporter of economic and monetary union? Who now speaks for the Government?

Mr. Oppenheim: I could ask the hon. Gentleman exactly the same question. Who speaks for new Labour on Europe? Is it the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the shadow Chancellor or the leader of the Labour party? For the hon. Gentleman to suggest that there are no divisions whatever in the Labour party, when 50 of his colleagues signed a letter condemning Labour's policy on Europe, is ridiculous. He has dodged—*[Interruption.]* I am relieved that the hon. Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) has decided to stay on Government Benches. No doubt he recognises the success of Government policies.

Share Dividends (Income Tax)

10. **Sir Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the amount of income tax raised from individual investors' dividends on shares in the privatised utilities. [18530]

Mr. Jack: We estimate that more than 5 million individuals may have a taxable dividend entitlement arising from their shareholding in privatised companies, but we do not keep records of the amount of income tax derived from dividend payments made in respect of any one company.

Sir Colin Shepherd: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the tax derived would be much less if there were a windfall tax? Would not the 5 million shareholders who would pay for that tax through reduced dividends also have the value of their shares reduced accordingly?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is entirely right, and his assertion was supported by Professor Littlechild when he gave evidence to a Select Committee. He said that shareholders would be the first in line if there were a windfall tax of whatever amount. Whether it was £3 billion, £5 billion or £10 billion, it would be a dawn raid on the shareholder-owners of this country's privatised companies.

Public Borrowing

11. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Chartered Institute of Housing regarding his policy on the level of public borrowing. [18531]

Mr. Waldegrave: The chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend on 3 March asking for a large increase in Government spending on housing, and my right hon. and learned Friend will reply shortly.

Sir Irvine Patnick: As my right hon. Friend will be aware, some organisations, including the Labour party, advocate the spending of capital receipts. What effect would such spending have not only on the public finances but on cities such as Birmingham and Sheffield?

Mr. Waldegrave: That same chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing recently secured what I take to be an unbreakable pledge from Labour that it would release the accumulated receipts of local authorities. On a phased basis, that would probably amount to about £2.5 billion a year of additional net borrowing in the economy. That ends up as nonsense because, as my hon. Friend hints—I suspect that as a former local authority leader he knows—in Birmingham, for example, there are no accumulated receipts. Therefore, there would be no gain at all to Birmingham. In Surrey, there would be huge additional spending. That would be an extremely odd and foolish way to deal with housing policy.

Mr. Fraser: Has the Minister made any calculation of the extent to which public expenditure would be reduced by not having to place so many families in private accommodation at exorbitant rents, with 100 per cent. housing benefit?

Mr. Waldegrave: Any such calculation, which would be difficult to make, would be dwarfed by the increasing borrowing and spending to which the hon. Gentleman's colleagues on the Labour Front Bench are committed. They have found no answer. They have pledged themselves to an additional minimum £2.5 billion—it might be more—net borrowing.

European Single Currency

12. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet his EU counterparts to discuss the introduction of the single currency. [18532]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The forum in which EU Finance Ministers meet to discuss economic and monetary union is the Economic and Finance Council, which is known as ECOFIN. The next ECOFIN meeting is scheduled to be held on 17 March 1997.

Mr. Atkinson: What assessment have my right hon. and learned Friend and his European Union colleagues made of the overriding need to ensure that the computer systems involved in the introduction of the single currency are millennium-compliant? Is he aware of the

growing concern among information technology experts that, because those are the two largest information projects ever to be undertaken, it will prove impossible to meet the deadline of introducing a single currency on 1 January 1999? Even Brussels would be unable to keep the clock back at five minutes to 12 at the turn of the millennium. Will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that the matter is on the agenda of the forthcoming intergovernmental conference in Amsterdam?

Mr. Clarke: It would be more suitable to raise the matter at ECOFIN in due course and in the Monetary Committee, where all such practical matters are addressed, but at this stage the European Commission obviously should be consulting as widely as possible about all these practical problems. I think that the date of 1 January 1999 is looking surrounded by doubt in many other ways, but certainly the problem of computer compliance is complicated by the important millennium problem, which my hon. Friend points out.

Mr. Winnick: When the Chancellor meets his EU counterparts, will he consider the possibility of taking the hon. Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) with him? If he does so, should the Chancellor not explain that, on the issue of the single currency, the hon. Gentleman, who is now in the Referendum party, represents far more of his former Tory colleagues than the Chancellor does?

Mr. Clarke: I have known the hon. Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) for many years and I remember him as a passionate supporter of the European Movement. He and I held similar views on the whole question until five or six years ago. He seems to have wandered away from my views a little, but I always hold hopes that one day he will return.

Mr. Bill Walker: My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that I am not a member of such an organisation and never have been. Will he also recognise that the important thing about structures of any type is that they must be sound, they must be based on what can be delivered and they must last? In the present circumstances, it looks unlikely that any dates will ever be met.

Mr. Clarke: I share my hon. Friend's approach. One of the British contributions that we can make to the discussions is to be sensible, to concentrate on the practicalities and to insist that all decisions are taken on the clearest possible basis of a judgment of what is in the interest of the European economy and then of what is in the interest of the British economy. It is absolutely essential that no economic and monetary union should take place unless there are genuinely convergent economies. Convergence matters more than any artificial timetable.

Mr. MacShane: In any consideration of the single currency, the level at which the pound enters to promote British interests is important. This soon-to-go Chancellor is presiding over a yo-yo currency. Why is he refusing to meet British Steel and other businesses, which want to discuss with him the fact that the rise in sterling that we are experiencing will cost dividends, reduce profits and have an impact on jobs? His final gesture of goodbye will be to hurt British manufacturing industry because of his incompetence in handling our currency.

Mr. Clarke: We have a floating exchange rate at the moment and, for that reason, I do not control its level. Finance Ministers do not control the level of exchange rates in today's deregulated foreign exchange markets. We are pursuing strong, stable economic policies aimed at keeping inflation down, keeping the public finances healthy and maintaining the fundamentals of the economy, but thereafter the markets make their own judgment. The consequences of that cause people to keep addressing the question whether to have a single currency in the European Union, but it remains at the moment quite uncertain where we are going to go on that great issue.

Income Tax

13. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people (a) are paying income tax in the current financial year and (b) would have been paying income tax if the tax regime had been indexed and maintained since 1978–79. [18534]

Mr. Jack: There are 25.6 million income tax payers in 1996–97. If we had maintained and indexed the 1978–79 tax regime, 1.8 million more people would pay income tax.

Mr. Greenway: Do not those figures say it all?

Mr. Mackinlay: Last time, Harry.

Mr. Greenway: We are the party of low taxation, and it is time that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) learnt that. He supports a party of high taxation—individual, collective and every other kind. That is the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, and it always will be.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is right. He knows that people are better off under the Conservatives because of our tax policies. He knows that we have one of the lowest tax burdens in Europe. The burden is 39 per cent. of gross domestic product in Germany and 45 per cent. in France, but only 35 per cent. in the United Kingdom. He also knows that, with £30 billion-worth of spending pledges attached to their name, the Opposition would raise taxes to fill their black hole.

Mr. Pike: How many people in Tory Britain work full time, but still do not earn enough to pay tax?

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Gentleman to today's *Financial Times*, where he will see a demolition job of Labour's attempt to deal with that problem. The minimum wage is described, effectively, as a tax milch cow for Labour.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 March. [18548]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had

meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Chidgey: No doubt the Prime Minister will join me in condemning the leaking of the Select Committee report on nursery vouchers. Does he share the Committee's concern that nursery vouchers appear to be failing to provide parental choice, failing to improve standards and failing to provide more places? Does he accept that there is great folly in pressing ahead with a national scheme before the pilot schemes have been properly tested?

The Prime Minister: I share the hon. Gentleman's dismay that someone has chosen to leak a report. I have not yet read it, so I am unable to comment in detail on what may or may not be in it. As a matter of principle, rather than on the specific issue raised by the Select Committee report, parents have choice because of the voucher scheme. Without the voucher scheme, the only way to obtain a free nursery place would be to send one's child to a state school. There was no choice or opportunity and the half a million parents who have taken up the option will be indicating that they believe that choice is right. The voucher scheme has also led to an increase in the number of places.

Ministerial Visit (Kent)

Q2. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit north-west Kent. [18549]

The Prime Minister: I have, at present, no plans to do so.

Mr. Dunn: Is the Prime Minister aware that the people of north-west Kent are glad to be part of an independent nation state and to play their part in our dynamic enterprise economy? They want nothing to do with those who spend their time selling Britain out or who would like to spend their time selling Britain short.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that the people of north-west Kent are glad to be part of an independent nation state. I agree that they and the rest of the United Kingdom have benefited enormously from the economic improvements of the past few years. They, like everyone else, enjoy the benefits of much lower inflation than we have had for many years, the lowest mortgage rate for 30 years and the lowest unemployment rate of any major European country. We intend to continue to pursue the policies that will ensure that they can continue to enjoy those things for many years to come.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 March. [18550]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stewart: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the policy of central Government control of non-domestic rates has yielded immense benefits to industry and commerce, especially to small companies? Does he also agree that placing decisions on business rates under local control would add billions to industrial costs in the United Kingdom, undermine our inward investment efforts and threaten the very existence of huge numbers of small firms throughout Britain?

The Prime Minister: I have no doubt that my hon. Friend is right about that. The non-domestic rate set by central Government for England and Wales has never risen faster than the rate of inflation, and in Scotland the rate has been reduced in real terms. That is in sharp distinction to what occurred when local authorities set the business rate, often by attempting to hold down the domestic rate and pile costs upon business. That is one of the significant reasons why so many companies were forced out of inner-city areas, leaving the problems that we have been attempting to deal with.

Mr. Blair: I have given you, Madam Speaker, and the Prime Minister notice of my question. Will the Prime Minister join me in recalling that it is a year to the day since the terrible events in Dunblane? We remember the little ones who died, and we grieve with their parents and their friends. They will not be lost to the nation's memory. We all say to the people of Dunblane that our thoughts and prayers are with them today and in the years to come.

One year ago, the House stood united in shock at the senseless and appalling tragedy in Dunblane. Today, whatever our differences are on any other matter, we are united again, this time in sorrow and in commemoration of those who died.

The Prime Minister: I have no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman has spoken for everyone in the House, and for millions beyond it. We all remember with great clarity the horror we felt when we heard of those appalling events. I remember visiting the school and the gymnasium with the right hon. Gentleman, and I do not believe that either of us will ever forget the scenes that we saw there; neither will anyone else who visited the school. Clearly, this will be a very difficult and emotional time for the bereaved and for the entire community of Dunblane. I am sure that the thoughts not only of the House but of the nation are with them today.

Mr. Harris: May I raise with my right hon. Friend another tragic matter—the loss of two fishing boats, the Westhaven, from Arbroath, and the Gorah Lass, from St. Ives in my constituency? Will he express the sympathy of all hon. Members to the relatives of the seven men who are feared dead? Will he also honour the debt that we all owe to the fishing industry, and ensure that the investigating authorities have the resources to conduct speedily and thoroughly the urgent task of investigating the cause of that double tragedy?

The Prime Minister: Seven fishermen have lost their lives this week, in two separate incidents. I am sure that the House will join my hon. Friend in extending every sympathy to the family and friends of those involved in those tragic accidents. I understand that both incidents are being investigated by the marine accidents investigation

branch. I will attempt to ensure that that occurs as speedily and as comprehensively as possible, and of course the findings will in due course be made public.

Q4. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 March. [18551]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jamieson: Has the Prime Minister seen the written answer to me from the Secretary of State for Defence on 20 February 1997, which confirmed that most of the "British beef" consumed by Her Majesty's armed forces is purchased from Spanish-speaking South American countries? Does he not think it more likely that the ban on British beef would be lifted by the European Union if it saw that the British Government were backing British beef?

The Prime Minister: I have not seen the particular answer to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I assure him that the British Government back British beef. That has been apparent in the resources that have been put into supporting the beef industry during the difficult past year or so.

Sir George Gardiner: My right hon. Friend will have read of the campaign being waged by the British section of the European Movement to persuade the voters to scrap the pound and to move towards a federal European state. In view of the vast sums being given by the European Commission to that movement, will he say how much British taxpayers' money is being laundered through the Commission for that rather dubious exercise?

The Prime Minister: I am not entirely sure that without notice I can give a figure to my—to the hon. Gentleman on that particular matter. I would add that, from all that I read and understand, there is quite a lot of money available to both sides of the argument.

Q5. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 March. [18552]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fraser: As this is probably the last opportunity I shall have to ask the Prime Minister a question, may I, as one ex-Lambeth councillor to another, wish him a long and happy retirement? It might have been otherwise—because does he realise that when he was running a housing department in Lambeth, under a Labour Government, he started more municipal homes to rent in one year than every single housing authority in England and Wales is now starting in the current year, and that the shortfall is by no means made up by housing associations?

The Prime Minister: The reason for that, of course, was the dereliction and despair that I inherited from the Labour council, which had spent 30 years damaging the quality of life in Lambeth and has continued to do so whenever it has managed to persuade the people of Lambeth to re-elect it.

Mr. Dykes: If my right hon. Friend has the chance during his busy day, will he reconsider the strange question of the hon. Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner)—a man of unshakeable principles for many years, as we know—whose description of European Movement funding is a travesty of the truth? The sums involved are extremely modest compared with the millions spent by Sir James Goldsmith on his own campaign, which is triumphantly scoring 0.3 per cent. in the opinion polls?

The Prime Minister: I believe that my hon. Friend has made his point very clearly and forcefully.

Sanctions (Libya)

Q6. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Clinton the impact on sanctions against Libya of the legal actions by the United States authorities against (a) Juval Aviv and (b) Les Coleman. [18553]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. Mr. Aviv's acquittal has no bearing on the case against the two Libyans accused in respect of Lockerbie. Legal proceedings against Mr. Coleman are pending in the United States, and it would not therefore be appropriate for me to comment on them.

Mr. Dalyell: Have not the American courts driven the proverbial coach and horses through the case of the American Government on Libya? Does the Prime Minister realise that many serious people in legal Edinburgh doubt whether the Crown Office now has a substantial case to provide the basis for sanctions against Libya? Given the view of the families, could there be another fatal accident inquiry into these tragic events to get the truth?

The Prime Minister: It is not for me to say whether the Crown Office has a case or not; it clearly believes that it does. I have made inquiries in the light of the question that the hon. Gentleman tabled, and I am advised that all the theories about responsibility for Lockerbie, including those of Mr. Aviv and Mr. Coleman, were thoroughly investigated. The evidence supports charges against the accused Libyans, and not against anybody else. The hon. Gentleman asks for a further inquiry of some sort. As he knows, there have been a number of inquiries already—a fatal accident inquiry that was held in public, a police inquiry, a Transport Select Committee inquiry, an air accident investigation branch inquiry, and the US presidential commission. In the light of those, I do not believe that a further inquiry would be productive.

Engagements

Q8. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 March. [18555]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thompson: Does my right hon. Friend deplore, as I do, the increasing tendency for Government policy to be discussed as a result of leaks in the media and elsewhere? Does he share my increasing concern about that trend?

The Prime Minister: I certainly do. It means that policies that are legitimately a matter for discussion in the

House are often discussed and misunderstood before the details of the policies or the Select Committee report have been made public. That is damaging. I believe that the leaking of Select Committee reports, as happened last night, is an abuse of the procedures of the House. On that matter, I entirely share the views of my hon. Friend.

Q10. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 March. [18557]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Barnes: It is probably seven weeks to the general election. Will not many people get a shock to find that their names are not on electoral registers? Why cannot we be told how many people are on the electoral registers in England and Wales, which should have been available for a month, before the House dissolves for a general election?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, electoral registers are published at the appropriate time. I believe that when he raised the matter about three weeks ago I told him that the full count is likely to be available towards the end of March.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 MARCH—Committee and remaining stages of the Building Societies Bill.

Remaining stages of the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill *[Lords]*.

Proceedings on the following Bills, which are consolidation measures: the Architects Bill *[Lords]*, the Lieutenancies Bill *[Lords]*, the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill *[Lords]*, and the Justices of the Peace Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on the Church of England Pensions Measure.

TUESDAY 18 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the Birds (Registration Charges) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 19 MARCH—Until 2 pm, there will debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motion relating to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee.

Motion on the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc.) Act 1996 (Cessation of Section 3) Order.

Motion on the Northern Ireland (Emergency and Prevention of Terrorism Provisions) (Continuance) Order.

THURSDAY 20 MARCH—Debate on jobs and inward investment on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 21 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

MONDAY 24 MARCH—Opposition Day [8th Allotted Day].

There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 19 March there will be a debate on structural funds and cohesion policy in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

In view of the interest in the House, I should say straightforwardly, albeit with regret, that I am not yet in a position to make a definitive statement about recess dates.

[*Wednesday 19 March:*

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: 11382/96, Structural Funds; 12614/96, Cohesion Policy. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 36-xi (1996–97).]

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for the limited information that he has been able to give us. Before I come to the business that has been announced for next week, will the Leader of the House tell us what is happening about the privatisation of the Building Research Establishment? He has been asked for a statement or a debate on that for several weeks. Today, there is further evidence that all bidders were not operating on a level playing field.

This appears to be yet another case of Ministers misleading Parliament. As time is running out for this Session of Parliament, what guarantees can we have that the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment will explain the apparent contradiction between his parliamentary answers and reality, or will that Minister behave like his colleagues at the Ministry of Defence on Gulf war syndrome and at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on bovine spongiform excephalopathy and abattoir safety? Do Ministers really believe that waiting for the election will provide them with an escape route to avoid answering to the House on those important matters?

On future business, the House will have noted that the Leader of the House was, in his words, not able to give "a definitive statement" about dates for the Easter recess. We can only speculate as to why that might be. The Leader of the House has announced that Monday 24 March will be an Opposition day. Will he guarantee that that day's debate on an Opposition motion will take place, or does he anticipate it being overtaken by other events? Will he confirm that, in 1992, the then Leader of the House announced on Thursday 5 March the business for the following 10 days, only to return shortly afterwards to cancel most of it because the Prime Minister had been to the palace?

I know that the Leader of the House would not wish to mislead hon. Members with regard either to the business statement or to the recess date. He is an honourable man. Is there any other information that he would wish to share with us?

Mr. Newton: I am grateful for the final remarks of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), which I imagine were intended to be complimentary and which I shall certainly accept as such. I am not, however, in a position to join her in the speculation in which she invited me to engage.

I should make it clear that I do not accept the allegations of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) about the Building Research Establishment. In my view, my hon. Friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency has dealt in a factual manner with his questions on matters of fact. Moreover, I do not accept what the hon. Lady said about the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), and the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), who came to the House and dealt very effectively with the points on which the House could expect information.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): May I echo the compliments of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) to my right hon. Friend on the way in which he has acted as Leader of the House? In view of the high excitement of the fare that he has placed before us for next week, will he find time for a crucial debate on an affirmative motion on how the House has dealt with, and should in future deal with, constitutional matters?

Mr. Newton: It is certainly an attractive thought—*[Interruption.]* I mean that a debate, not constitutional

[Mr. Newton]

change, is an attractive prospect—but I cannot promise a further opportunity for debate beyond the opportunity that we had a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Leader of the House acknowledge that there was much consternation north of the border about the Government's decision to allocate the contract for the Ministry of Defence auxiliary fleet vessel to VSEL and not to Kvaerner? Will he find time at an early stage for a discussion about the working assumptions that the Ministry of Defence has in mind when it procures surface vessels for the Royal Navy?

Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge in passing that the Easter recess has always traditionally been the 10 days immediately after the Easter weekend? What could possibly happen in the next 10 days to interfere with that perfectly reasonable assumption?

Mr. Newton: It looks to me as though I am being invited to engage once again in the speculation on which I resisted the blandishments of the hon. Member for Dewsbury. I find myself even more ready to resist the hon. Gentleman's blandishments. On his first point, I hope that he will accept that the Ministry of Defence carefully evaluated bids against its normal technical and value-for-money criteria, in accordance with well-established procedures. As I understand it, he was questioning whether those procedures should not be looked at. I shall of course bring that to the attention of my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a statement next week on the possible contamination of water by cryptosporidium, especially in the Three Valleys water company area, and the failure of that company to notify people in Northolt, Greenford and other parts of my constituency that they should be boiling water? My constituents have undergone the whole crisis without receiving proper notification from the water company. That should be discussed in the House, with a view to bringing the water company to task and addressing my constituents' legitimate concerns, worries and fears.

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise a debate, but I can certainly promise to draw my hon. Friend's concerns to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): May we have an urgent debate on the crisis in higher education in Wales? Is the Leader of the House aware that, this morning, all the heads of higher education institutions in Wales met Members from both Houses to complain about the lack of parity in funding between England, Scotland and Wales? Is he aware that spending on students in England is £200 a head higher than in Wales, and that in Scotland it is even higher? Is he aware that there is a real crisis? Is it not yet another example of the Secretary of State for Wales failing to fight the corner for Wales in the Cabinet?

Mr. Newton: As a member of the EDX public expenditure committee, which is public knowledge, I certainly refute the suggestion that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales does not vigorously present his case. I should perhaps make the point that my right hon. Friend is due to answer questions on Monday.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Will my right hon. Friend give the House an early opportunity to debate early-day motion 639?

[That this House notes that the honourable Member for Cunninghame North during a speech on Monday 11th March, failed to declare an interest as a director and shareholder of a political socialist newspaper company; further notes that the company had a bespoke factory built by Highlands and Islands Development Board at a cost of £127,000 and that the company received loans and grants to the value of over £95,000 from the HIDB and a local enterprise company within the Highlands Enterprise network; and believes that the honourable Member who has made a political career out of attacking other honourable Members with links with companies which have received loans and grants as well as ordinary Scots who have received grants from public bodies, should note the Speaker's comments about his conduct and resign his position as a shadow front-bench spokesman.]

My right hon. Friend will be aware that the motion draws attention to the fact that hon. Members who make a career out of attacking other hon. Members do nothing for the standing of the House when they fall well below the standards that they asking others to follow. Does he agree that people who live in glass houses should not throw bricks?

Mr. Newton: I am aware of the point to which my hon. Friend referred. I understand that you, Madam Speaker, have already given an indication that the particular interest that my hon. Friend has in mind should have been declared by the hon. Member whom he has in mind from Monday's debate.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The Leader of the House will recall that I raised in a previous Question Time the need for a full statement on the disposal aspect of the BSE crisis, which relates to both the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for the Environment. It transpires that there has never been a report on the best overall environmental disposal option—either by landfill or by incineration methods. There is continuing confusion about how the crisis will be satisfactorily resolved. In the short time left in this Parliament, will he ensure that a full statement is made on that matter so that such scientific and public health problems can be sorted out?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and any others involved in the matter, including my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, will carefully consider the point that the hon. Lady has raised.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): During the last few weeks of this Parliament, could my right hon. Friend give serious consideration to arranging a debate on the prescribing of a contraceptive pill for children? Yesterday, Mrs. Jenny Bacon and her husband, together with some colleagues, presented a petition of 10,000 signatures to my right hon. Friend the Prime

Minister in Downing street. Their daughter was prescribed the pill when she was 13 years old. She suffered a brain stem stroke, was paralysed for an entire year and died aged 16. I believe that many more parents have similar concerns.

Mr. Newton: The first thing to say, without commenting further on an individual tragic case, is that I am sure that everyone in the House would wish to express their sympathy for the circumstances about which we have all read. It follows that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health will wish carefully to consider the petition and what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I have been a long-time admirer of his admirable Quaker character. He will appreciate that I have always been among the mildest of his inquisitors. Because of the real dangers to peace in Israel, in Albania and over Cyprus, it is essential that the House has a chance to debate those matters, even in a one-day debate, before the recess. Will he give serious consideration to giving us a one-day debate before the Easter recess or, hopefully, after the Easter recess?

Mr. Newton: Of course, I always consider what the hon. Gentleman suggests in the conciliatory and moderate way in which he puts questions to me. I cannot lay claim to a Quaker character, whatever that is, merely to a Quaker education.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): My right hon. Friend, like the rest of us, will have been subjected on every conceivable occasion to the Liberal Democrats' assertion that education is at the top of their priorities. However, in Kent, the Liberal Democrat-controlled council has chosen to take £10 million of the Government's grant and spend it elsewhere. May we have a debate to demonstrate that that fact may reflect the difference between being in power in Kent and having no chance of power at Westminster?

Mr. Newton: I would make a slightly different point without differing from my hon. Friend. On a range of matters, there is a marked discordance between what is said by Labour and Liberal Democrat Members and what happens when their friends are in power in town and county halls.

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Government propose to allow taxpayers' money to be spent on training chartered accountants from some of the biggest and wealthiest chartered accountancy practices, when they have provided the training for donkey's years at no cost to the public purse? Is that not a clear waste of public money? May we have an urgent debate on the misuse of training funds?

Mr. Newton: I imagine that the hon. Gentleman was referring to the recently published Select Committee report. If so, it will be considered in the normal and appropriate way. In any case, I cannot promise an early debate.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will my right hon. Friend consider making time for a statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on the primary school league tables, in view of the request from Opposition Members for an added value component? My right hon. Friend may be interested to learn that the Labour-controlled Association of London Government has done such a calculation, adding in the socio-economic added value, and the top-performing local education authorities are, first, Richmond upon Thames; secondly, Kensington and Chelsea; and, thirdly, the City of Westminster. The ALG has asked for extra funds to be given to those deprived areas, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment would wish to consider that.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend's question was whether I would be interested in that information, and the answer is yes. I am grateful to him for making such a telling point.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement or a debate before the general election is called so that we may ascertain precisely where parties get their money from to fight the general election? *[Interruption.]* In America, they are having a wide debate about where the money comes from for elections, especially the foreign sources. May we have a statement so that we can challenge the Tories to tell us how their party funds managed to move from a debt of £19 million last year to a £40 million surplus this year, when the public sector borrowing requirement is £20 billion or more and the national debt has doubled? How come the same people can run the country into a hole, but at the same time manage to find large sums for their own ends? The public have the right to know.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will have heard a number of points—made from what I hope were sedentary positions behind me—which he might care to weigh. I will not follow that line for reasons relating to recent answers that I have given to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—that is to say that I am the Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): While fully supporting the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) for a debate—which has been attended to by my right hon. Friend—can I bring matters closer to home? Is it not time that this House debated its own integrity and the leaking of documents, such as Select Committee reports, long before they are published? The recent problem is not the first. Could my right hon. Friend find time to allow the House to debate the issue, indicate its view to the institutions of this House—which, sadly, too often are not prepared to act, even when the individual responsible for leaking the report is identified—and give instructions which would help the next Parliament?

Mr. Newton: I am aware of the reasons why my hon. Friend has raised this matter over the past five or six years. I must make the point that an established set of arrangements for examining the source of a leak and, in certain circumstances, reporting to the House is set out in the second report by the Committee on Privileges from Session 1984-85. I refer my hon. Friend in that direction.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Would the Leader of the House go and tell himself as Chairman of the Select

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Committee on Standards and Privileges that some of us are indelicate enough to ask when the statements of Mr. Mohammed Al Fayed, while producing rolls of money, to the effect that we can be hired like London taxis will be addressed? Does he understand that it would be totally unsatisfactory to let this matter go unaddressed before there is a general election? Whatever cloak the right hon. Gentleman is wearing, what does he have to say about this matter?

Mr. Newton: I am not using any kind of cloak to put myself in a position where I have to be cautious with the hon. Gentleman. He knows that I am Chairman of the Committee and that the Parliamentary Commissioner is investigating matters closely entwined with those to which he refers. Many people would be appalled were I to start making comments against that background.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): In view of the breathtaking and awesome significance of some of the recent scientific capabilities in the sphere of cloning as it relates to animals, does my right hon. Friend agree that there would be a strong case, if time were available, for the House to have an early debate on the full ethical and practical implications of that emerging technology, since aspects of genetic engineering which are now applied to animals could, alas, at some future stage in certain circumstances be applied to human beings? Will he consider this matter carefully, because if it is good enough for the United States and President Clinton to consider a moratorium, surely this House can debate it in an appropriate spirit?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Select Committee on Science and Technology is taking a close interest in the matter and is conducting a brief inquiry into the recent cloning of sheep at the Roslin institute. I will not rule out the possibility of a debate on this important and sensitive subject, but I am not in a position to promise one from the Dispatch Box today.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When may we have a debate on early-day motion 646?

[*That this House demands international action against the dumping of medicinal drugs in Third World and Eastern European countries which resulted in the deaths of 100 children in Nigeria in 1991 and 60 in Haiti in 1996, who used contaminated paracetamol syrup, and the blinding of 11 pregnant women in Lithuania who were prescribed a medicine intended for animal use; and notes that some pharmaceutical companies enjoy tax and other financial benefits by avoiding disposal costs in their countries and thus profit from the irresponsible and often lethal dumping of medicines on unsophisticated communities.*]

The motion draws attention to a growing world scandal resulting from the donation—sometimes for good reasons—of medicinal drugs to third-world and east European countries. As a result of those donations, 11 pregnant women in Lithuania were blinded when they took a drug that was intended for animals because they could not understand the labelling and 100 children in Nigeria and 60 in Haiti died after taking a form of paracetamol that had been mixed with the wrong form of glycol. Many of those donations are made for humanitarian reasons, but others are made because American companies refuse to bear the costs of dumping the drugs—legally, but expensively—in their own country and are gaining a tax advantage by sending them to third-world and eastern European countries. As a result, children are given adult doses, and dangerous and lethal drugs, which should be taken under strict control, are taken as though they were sweets. Huge numbers of people have been damaged by the irresponsible dumping of drugs. When will Britain take a stand and introduce regulations in an area where there is none now?

Mr. Newton: I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary may have commented on those matters to the hon. Gentleman only yesterday and I am not in a position to add to that. However, I understand that the UK has supported the work of relevant organisations, such as the World Health Organisation, in promoting guidelines on drug donations, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall continue to work with other countries to try to improve standards of safety in health which are obviously a matter of concern.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): May I have some information on behalf of my rural constituents? First, when will the provisions for rate relief on village shops and rural sub-post offices under the Local Government and Rating Bill come into force? When will the hedgerow regulations, which were laid before Parliament on 3 March, be debated? Furthermore, will my right hon. Friend ask a Minister from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to come to the House in the near future to make a statement explaining the Ministry's policy on the enforcement of the regulations controlling rabbits under the Pests Act 1954? A number of my constituency farmers are suffering the depredations of rabbits on farms adjacent to railway embankments and I should be most grateful for some guidance on that.

Mr. Newton: There were three questions. First, the Local Government and Rating Bill has not yet received Royal Assent, although I hope that that will not be too long delayed. Various parts of the Bill when enacted are due to commence at different times, but if I understand my hon. and learned Friend aright, although no specific date has been set for the commencement of the part of the Bill which relates to rating—part I—we hope that the rating provisions will commence no later than 1 April 1998.

With regard to the draft hedgerows regulations, which, as my hon. and learned Friend rightly said, were laid recently, I clearly have not been able to announce a debate in the course of this statement and I cannot give him a specific undertaking on that, but I shall bear his representations in mind.

Lastly, I am well aware of the problems of rabbits since they caused serious difficulties between Braintree and Witham in my constituency, foraging out from the railway line into the neighbouring fields. I shall draw my hon. and learned Friend's concern to my right hon. Friend's attention. I wrote to Bob Horton, the chairman of Railtrack, and received what I regard as a positive response.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Twice at Prime Minister's Question Time the Prime Minister has

promised me and the House that electoral registration figures for England and Wales will be made available to the House by the end of March. The problem is that the end of March falls during Easter and there is a distinct possibility that the House will not return after Easter. Will the Leader of the House make a commitment that those figures will be available to the House before Dissolution and in sufficient time for hon. Members to raise through the procedures of the House any matters that arise from those figures?

Mr. Newton: A number of answers have been given to the hon. Gentleman in recent weeks by both the Prime Minister and me. It is not for me to make commitments on behalf of the Office for National Statistics, but my information is that the last of the forms that it needs have just been received and when the data are checked, the office plans to publish the figures on 26 March as agreed.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate next week on grant-maintained schools, such as St. John's Roman Catholic comprehensive school in my constituency, during which we could highlight the considerable dangers to such schools of up to 15 per cent. of their education funds being clawed back by the local education authority and the possibility of the appointment of political governors on the governing bodies of such schools were Labour's policies to be implemented?

Mr. Newton: That sounds like an extension of, or an addition to, the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe). I am tempted to suggest that my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) might seek another Wednesday morning debate on these matters, as the last one was very effective—even if it has not produced the necessary changes that he would like to see. However, that is not a matter for me to determine.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): When the Select Committee report on ministerial accountability was debated in the House, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that he would attempt to bring to the House a resolution on ministerial accountability that was agreed by all parties before Parliament dissolved. Can the Leader of the House report what progress has been made in that regard, and what prospect there is of the resolution being put to the House?

Mr. Newton: I understand that that remains my right hon. Friend's hope, and that he has made further progress in consultation with the authorities in this place and with those concerned with such matters in another place. I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's question to his attention.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate on crime and sentencing, during which I could welcome the fact that crime on the London Underground has decreased by 20 per cent. in the past year? If those trends are mirrored nationally, 1996 will see the fourth year of recorded reductions in crime in Britain—the first four-year reduction since records began. I would also condemn the weasel way in which those who were afraid to oppose the Crime (Sentences) Bill in the House have sought to sabotage it in another place.

Mr. Newton: I share my hon. Friend's views on the latter point. As to London Underground, I was not aware of those encouraging statistics, but I am sure that the whole House will find them heartening.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): As my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) said, the Leader of the House is an honourable man and he has not misled the House by not announcing the dates of the Easter recess. However, would he agree that the way is now open for the announcement of a general election on the 20th of the month? The business of the House could be tidied up on 24 and 25 March, there could be a Royal Proclamation on 1 April, and a general election on 24 April. I do not ask the right hon. Gentleman to speculate: I simply ask him to agree that this is a valid scenario.

Mr. Newton: From where I sit, it sounded perilously close to asking me to speculate. I have no more intention of doing so with the hon. Gentleman—despite the fact that he is a quite reasonable man—than with anyone else. As he well knows, there is a little green book in the Library that sets out all the dates of every possible occurrence from last October until the end of May.

Points of Order

4.2 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Bearing in mind the serious discourtesy to the House displayed by a Member of Parliament in leaking the report of the Select Committee on Education and Employment about nursery education—even before it was completed last evening, judging by the inaccurate representations that have appeared in the press—I ask you to protect the standards of the House by having each member of the Select Committee interviewed with a view to establishing who leaked that very important document so that that hon. Member may make her apologies to the House.

Madam Speaker: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware—he may recall the wise words of the Leader of the House at the Dispatch Box a few moments ago—the issue is a matter for the Committee to investigate. The Committee has full authority to investigate the matter itself, and it can proceed to do so at any time. The Committee may then wish to report the matter for action to the House.

I fully support the comments made by the Prime Minister today at the Dispatch Box. Speaking for myself, I have nothing but disdain for individuals who give our working documents and unpublished reports to the press before they are available to the House.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I have just given a ruling.

Mr. Brown: It is a different point.

Madam Speaker: No. The matter is concluded. I have said absolutely everything that I needed to say. I gave the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) an opportunity, and I have now made my ruling.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. My point arises from the procedure of Select Committees. I understand that it is always open to an hon. Member who is serving on a Select Committee, even if he or she is out of the Room when a decision is reached in that Committee, to express dissent in the ensuing report, as long as he or she does so—

Mr. Brown: I did.

Mr. Soley: That is as long as he or she does so before the report is finally published and before it is recorded in the report.

Mr. Brown: I did, and I want that recorded now.

Mr. Soley: I do not raise the matter in relation to the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), who is calling out from a sedentary position. I am not referring to the hon. Gentleman. The House will know that some comments have been made on the radio to the effect that Members who have been outside the Room and have not voted on a particular issue have not been able to dissent from the ensuing report. As a Chairman of a Select Committee—I think that what I am about to say applies to any other Select Committee—I take the view that every member of the Committee has the right to record dissent before the Committee finally approves the report.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman, who is very experienced, is absolutely correct. Reports that we read in the newspapers and hear on the radio are not always as accurate as we are in the House.

Mr. Brown: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The point of order that I wish to raise follows directly from the point of order made by the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley). I wish to place it on record that I voted against the report. That is why I wonder whether it is possible for the Select Committee to print the report now so that I can assure the nation that I voted against the report.

Madam Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman has done very well in informing the nation of his views on the subject.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This point of order is not about informing the nation but concerns your unfulfilled expectations. When responding to points of order on 11 March you said:

"The Minister said that he would respond as soon as possible".

You added,

"and I expect him to do so."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1997; Vol. 292, c. 145.]

I was a parliamentary colleague of Bernadette McAliskey. I was not one of her greatest admirers by any means, but I think that in addressing our first woman Speaker of the House I should say something about Bernadette McAliskey's daughter, who is pregnant, who is being held in prison in unacceptable conditions. The House should be told about the matter. To treat pregnant women in prison like this—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying to have a debate on an important issue that is not before the House. I made my position clear the other day when I said—I repeated what the Minister had said—that the Minister would reply to the question as soon as possible. I expect him to do precisely that.

Mr. Harry Greenway *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Mr. Greenway is getting ready for yet another point of order.

Mr. Greenway: In terms of procedure, Madam Speaker—I am grateful to the hon. Member for

Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) for his point of order—is it a fact that a Member who is out of the Room when the final decision to approve a Select Committee report is taken—

Madam Speaker: I have nothing further to report on that matter. It has all been done.

Mr. Greenway *rose—*

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) has been in the House for a long time and he knows our procedures. We have all been through the matter only recently.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I, too, want to make it clear to the nation that I, like my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), voted against this dog's dinner of a report.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much.

BILL PRESENTED

Pensioner Trustees

Mr. Brian David Jenkins presented a Bill to give pensioner members of occupational pension schemes the statutory right to be member-nominated trustees of such schemes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 2 May, and to be printed [Bill 137].

Pensions

[Relevant documents: Minutes of evidence taken before the Treasury Committee on Wednesday 5 March (HC355) and on Monday 10 March (HC381.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

4.8 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): Every serious commentator now recognises that only the Government are committed to improving the lot of present and future pensioners. The comparatively empty Opposition Benches show that Labour has literally abandoned the pensioners. Most Opposition Members are not in their places because they are too ashamed of their record on pensions to defend it. They are ashamed of the Labour Government's inflation, which wiped out a quarter of people's savings in a single year. They are ashamed that Labour failed to uprate the state pension properly, stealing £1 billion from pensioners. They are ashamed that Labour failed to pay the Christmas bonus. They are ashamed that, over the entire lifetime of the last Labour Government, pensioners' incomes rose little more than they have on average every single year under the Conservative Government.

Today Labour members are ashamed of their Front Benchers' reaction to our basic pension plus. Even commentators who are not unsympathetic to Labour, such as Peter Riddell of *The Times*, have said:

"Labour's reaction was a depressing example of knee-jerk opposition politics at its worst".

Today Labour members are giving the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) a chance to redeem herself and to come up with some positive response. Some hope, it would appear.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead) *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: I give way to a more promising prospect.

Mr. Field: I congratulate the Secretary of State on his non-partisan stance, and hope that that will be the temper of the whole debate.

Mr. Lilley: I understand that the hon. Gentleman has been under some pressure to be less non-partisan. I congratulate him on his objectivity.

Conservatives, of course, have long been the party of the property-owning democracy. It was Conservatives who encouraged the spread of owner-occupation—two thirds of all families now own their own homes. It was Conservatives who gave council tenants the right to buy their own homes. It was Conservatives who encouraged the spread of share ownership, so that more people now own shares than belong to trade unions. It was Conservatives who encouraged two thirds of those in work to build up second pensions. The plans that I announced last week to give everyone, over a generation, their own funded investments in their own guaranteed personal fund will be the biggest extension of personal ownership ever.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): It was the Conservatives who encouraged people to opt out

[Mrs. Jane Kennedy]

of occupational pension schemes and the state earnings-related pension scheme and take out personal pension plans. How many of those who were sold inappropriate pensions have been compensated?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady knows that everybody who was missold such a pension will receive restitution. They have the assurance of the regulators. That process is being accelerated by the vigorous action of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, and nobody will lose as a result—unlike the 1 million council tenants who would have been unable to buy their own homes if the Opposition had had their way.

Our proposal will extend to everyone rights previously enjoyed only by the better-off. It will give everyone the right to share in the success of our economy; the right to own their own personal investments; and the right to a better and more secure pension.

The Labour party, of course, has opposed every extension of personal ownership. In 1982, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who is now leader of the Labour party, said:

"Labour would ban the sale of council houses. That is for perfectly sound reasons of political principle."

In 1983, the hon. Member for Peckham and her party voted against extending the right to buy. Throughout the 1980s, Labour opposed workers, customers and savers being given the right to own shares in the former nationalised industries, so it was no surprise that, last Wednesday, the hon. Lady instantly attacked the next big expansion of personal ownership in this country. She made such a mess of it in the morning that the shadow Chancellor had to take it out of her hands in the afternoon, but he still sounded too old Labour, so the leader of the Labour party had to take it out of his hands the next day. However, even he got it wrong, so the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) had to come along and heap praise on our scheme.

I am happy to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman and his Select Committee for pointing the way to basic pension plus. In their report last October, entitled "Unfunded Pension Liabilities in the European Union", they wrote:

"our concern is to ensure that there should be no misunderstanding about the hard choices which will have to be faced when future generations of elderly people come to claim the rights to income in old age which they believe they have earned and for which the younger working generations are no long willing or able to pay."

The Committee urged us to consider

"ways in which unsustainable and unfunded pension promises can be replaced by sustainable pre-funded pensions in the individual ownership of the employee."

That is precisely what basic pension plus will do.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley) *rose—*

Mr. David Shaw (Dover) *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Pike: The Secretary of State keeps referring to basic pension plus. Will he confirm that a third of the people will almost certainly receive only the basic pension guarantee, and that there will be no plus for them?

Mr. Lilley: Everyone in work will have rebates paid into their scheme, so there will be potential if the investments do well. People will be guaranteed at least as good a pension as under the present system.

Our proposal has three key elements. The first is a personal fund for every young person starting work. They will choose an approved firm to manage it, and they will own it, so they will be able to pass on to their spouses or heirs any assets that are not used to pay their pension.

The second element is the rebate. Everyone will get a rebate from their national insurance. The Government Actuary calculates that £9 a week will generate a fund sufficient to pay the basic pension. A £9 a week rebate, rising with inflation, will be paid into people's funds over their working lives.

The third element is the basic pension guarantee. The state will guarantee that everyone will receive a pension at least equal to their basic state pension, increased in line with inflation.

Mr. David Shaw *rose—*

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) first indicated an intention to intervene.

Mr. Shaw: My right hon. Friend has referred to the report of the Select Committee on Social Security on unfunded pension liabilities. It recently hosted a seminar for parliamentarians from Parliaments across Europe. We invited them to the House of Commons to talk about their unfunded pension liabilities and our pension funds. They were full of admiration for what my right hon. Friend's policies have achieved, and they will no doubt be following very closely the basic pension plus proposal, which I am sure all European countries will want to copy.

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right: there has been much comment to that effect. We have led the way on most issues, from privatisation to labour market reform. Our reforms have been copied worldwide.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): The Secretary of State referred to labour market reform. Does he agree with me that, as a result of such reform, many men are now leading similar working lives to those that women used to lead? They are on low pay, in temporary jobs, and they change from one job to another, so they cannot build up an adequately funded pension. With basic pension plus, the right hon. Gentleman is offering the pension that the Conservative party has always said it wanted to let wither on the vine. Do not the calculations show that, by 2040, that pension, if it is increased merely in line with inflation, will be worth only 23 per cent. of average earnings?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady seems to be attacking the policy of her own Front-Bench team, so she should address her remarks to them.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lilley: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, and then perhaps I can make some progress.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My right hon. Friend's scheme is visionary, because it gives people ownership of savings

for pensions in their old age. More important, it is a basic pension plus, because, even on fairly conservative figures, it provides the possibility for the ordinary youngster starting out today to double the present rate of state pension. Does my right hon. Friend agree with that?

Mr. Lilley: I entirely agree with that. My hon. Friend is one of the people who first had the vision of moving in this direction, and I am happy to pay tribute to his contribution to the thinking that has led to this proposal.

Under the proposal, each fund should grow to provide the basic pension. If, for any reason, a person's fund is insufficient, the state will top up the pension that it provides, so he will still get his basic pension. Everyone will be protected by the basic pension guarantee. No one will do less well than under the present state scheme. Everyone stands to do better if, as we hope, the economy and people's investments do well. If returns are 1 per cent. higher than assumed by the Government Actuary, people will receive a pension 30 per cent. above the level of the basic pension. If yield is 2 per cent. higher, the pension will be some 70 per cent. better than the present state pension.

During the past week, I have been challenged to say what pension people will receive not on the basis of an actuary's assumptions, but if investments do as well or as badly over the next 50 years as they have over the past 50 years or so. Of course, they may do better or worse in the future. If they under-perform, people know that their basic pension is guaranteed.

Since 1950, equity investments have grown at a rate of 7.7 per cent. a year on top of inflation. The Government Actuary calculates that if, over the next half-century, pension fund investments grow a little less—let us round it down to 7 per cent. a year—the basic pension that will be received under our scheme will be double its present value.

We are determined that the new generation should have the opportunity to share in the potential growth. Basic pension plus extends that right even to the less well-paid. We call the scheme "basic pension plus" because it is the basic pension, plus a fund, plus a rebate, plus a guarantee, plus the prospect of growth.

In the 1980s, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as he now is, paved the way for more funded provision by allowing people to opt out of the state earnings-related pension scheme into their own funded personal pensions. Two thirds of those eligible now opt for private schemes, but a third do not, mainly because their SERPS would be too small to make it worth their while to set up a personal fund.

That problem will not exist when everyone has a basic pension plus fund. Everyone in the new generation will also be contracted out of SERPS, and, in addition to the £9 a week rebate to fund their basic pensions, employees will receive a rebate worth 5 per cent. of their earnings on which they pay national insurance. That will fund an earnings-related second pension.

A person on average wages will build up a fund that should—on the Government actuary's cautious assumptions—be worth £130,000 when he or she retires. That is sufficient to provide a pension of £175 a week at today's prices. If investments do as well over the next half-century as they have, on average, over the last, the person on average wages stands to receive a pension of around £350 a week. That is based on the assumption that that person has made the minimum contributions over most of his or her working life. Once all those in work have their own funds, however, they and their employers will be able, and encouraged, to save more in those funds.

Ms Eagle: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady has already had one bash, which turned out to be directed towards the wrong side.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: It was helpful.

Mr. Lilley: I suppose that it was helpful to me, but I do not think that the hon. Lady is helping herself.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: I will happily give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Corbyn: According to the Secretary of State's assessment of the contributions that will be made under the proposed new scheme, what would be the cost to the individual of paying into, in effect, a compulsory private scheme, as opposed to paying through taxation and national insurance contributions during his or her working life?

Mr. Lilley: Clearly, a scheme that relies on taxation and charges rather than on savings and investment costs more, because people do not receive the benefits of the return on the investments that have accumulated over a lifetime. That is the advantage of what we are proposing, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing it out.

The response to our initiative across the board has been overwhelmingly positive. *The Times* said:

"These reforms are a radical solution to a huge problem; they show a willingness to think far beyond this Parliament or the next; and they prove Britain to be an innovator ahead of its European partners. In sum, they are an example of good government."

But support did not just come from friendly newspapers.

"And even the ranks of Tuscany
Could scarce forbear to cheer."

The Guardian acknowledged:

"Like the concept of a shareholding democracy, it could also be empowering a new generation, which will have much more control over its own retirement arrangements."

The Independent put it succinctly when it stated:

"the Conservatives are trying to address the problem of how to provide a decent pension for all; Labour is not."

Of course, the only root-and-branch opposition to the proposals came from Labour, and that tells us all we need to know about the party. It still has a knee-jerk hostility to personal ownership. When the Labour leader wanted to launch his big idea, or his medium-sized idea, of stakeholder pensions, he flew off to Singapore. His model was a massive, centralised, state-controlled investment fund. The only trouble is that Governments, even the authoritarian kind that new Labour seems to admire, are not good at investing money.

[Mr. Lilley]

The return on the Singapore state scheme for its population since 1980 has been just 2 per cent. a year more than inflation. Over the same period, the average British pension fund has earned nearly 10 per cent. a year more than inflation. That was the last we heard about stakeholder pensions, at least until last week.

The second thing that Labour's reaction to our initiative demonstrates is that its pretensions to be able to reform the welfare state are a sham. The pretence lies in ruins. Labour cannot reform the welfare state, not because it has no ideas, although it does not, but because it is wedded to keeping people dependent on the state.

Labour hates the idea of people building up their own pension provision, owning their pension funds and even passing on capital to their children. The Opposition do not mind opting out of the state earnings-related pension scheme, any more than they mind opting out of the local authority education system for their children. Which Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has not opted out of SERPS? But what is good enough for them is too good for the rest of us. They cannot stand the thought of millions more ordinary people escaping the grip of the state, ceasing to depend on it, and no longer beholden to Governments for generously handing out taxpayers' money.

I shall examine in turn the three criticisms that the hon. Member for Peckham has levelled against basic pension plus. First, she says that the value of the rebates going into investment will be too great. But we are phasing this in over a generation, and more than halving the impact by switching the timing of tax revenues for that generation. Therefore, the net revenues forgone will rise by just £160 million a year on average. Moreover, even at its peak around 2040, the impact on public finances will be less than the peak cost of rebates from SERPS, which we have already taken in our stride. It is a fraction of the £13 billion annual savings which will result from our Pensions Act 1995 reforms.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North–East): The right hon. Gentleman will forgive us if we are a little cynical about this Government move. He says that he will phase this in over a generation. Will it take him any less than a generation to compensate those people who have yet to be compensated because of the misselling of personal pensions which occurred the last time he dabbled in this area?

Mr. Lilley: I have explained that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary is accelerating that process. The hon. Gentleman will recall that we have already rescued pensioners from the depredations of Robert Maxwell. Our Pensions Act, to which I have referred, was introduced to restore confidence in pension funds which had been damaged by Robert Maxwell.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington) *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: Perhaps I may be allowed to make some progress.

It is a bit rich for the Labour party, which opposed the £13 billion of savings that we made in the Pensions Act, to complain that part of that would be absorbed by the scheme, especially as all the rebates will be invested. That will not only pay for future pensions, but strengthen our economy.

When the Labour leader was extolling the virtue of Singapore's scheme, he said:

"It is a way of encouraging savings and investment . . . The idea of raising investment and savings is very important. We"—

in Britain—

"need to increase our investment significantly".

Precisely so. Basic pension plus will produce a massive flow of extra funds for long-term investment in this country.

The Labour party has argued that more investment is the key to faster growth. If the extra investment boosts our growth by just a 20th of 1 per cent., the whole scheme will be self-financing. The extra revenues generated by that growth will exceed the net value of rebates. We are not counting on that, but Labour is surely not suddenly denying that investment is good for growth.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: If I decline interventions from both my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman, I will make a little progress; I have given way quite a lot.

The second criticism made by the hon. Member for Peckham is that basic pension plus will, allegedly, be insecure. That is the reverse of the truth. We will underpin the basic pension with investments. We will guarantee the basic pension, should those investments be insufficient. I simply ask the hon. Lady which is more secure: her promise to pay the basic pension in future with no investments to fund it, or our guarantee to pay the basic pension with investments to fund it? She is welcome to come to the Dispatch Box and tell us which she thinks is more secure. I note that she does not.

Last year, the hon. Lady and her party voted to make companies invest even more to underwrite the pensions they promise their members, yet now she thinks that the state can be relied on to keep its pension promise without investing a penny to pay for it. As the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) said on "Question Time", Labour is defending the pyramid selling principle as the key to the future provision of Labour's state pensions.

The hon. Lady has made a lot of misselling. As I have said, the misselling in the late 1980s was wrong. It is essential that everyone who was missold a pension be reimbursed or reinstated into their old scheme. None of them must lose. The regulator's assurance to that effect is welcome, and so is companies' resolve, following a meeting with the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, to accelerate the process of compensating those affected.

Ms Abbott: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: I want to make some progress.

Needless to say, any company that failed to compensate for past misselling would not be eligible to manage a basic pension plus fund. However, that sort of misselling is not directly relevant to basic pension plus, and could not recur under this scheme. It occurred when people were

persuaded to opt out of their occupational schemes into personal pensions that they did not need. It did not involve people opting out of SERPs into personal pensions.

A recent study by the actuaries Alexander Clay showed that as many as 99 per cent. of those who have opted for a personal pension and out of the state system were well advised to do so. Indeed, on average, their pensions will be nearly three times as large as if they had stayed in SERPS, and they could be nearly £1,000 a year better off on today's prices, if they continue to pay into their funds.

Ms Abbott *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: Nevertheless, it will be essential to have effective but simple regulations for basic pension plus to keep costs and charges low, to prevent churning, and to prevent over-risky investment exploiting the pension guarantee.

Ms Abbott: Is the Secretary of State aware that, of the 500,000 people who were missold pensions, in two and a half years only 1 per cent. of them have received compensation? Is not the likelihood that, at that rate of progress, most of them will have died before they are compensated for the misselling? What confidence can the general public have in the private pension industry, given that poor regulatory record?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady was obviously so anxious to get out her scripted question that she did not realise that I was replying to it as she was jumping up and down.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North–East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: I will make some progress.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Member for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms) has the other scripted question.

Mr. Lilley: It is probably the same one; he just was not listening.

The third criticism made by the hon. Member for Peckham was that our reforms do nothing for current pensioners. Of course basic pension plus itself does not, but our Pensions Act reforms protect today's and tomorrow's occupational pensioners against the likes of Robert Maxwell, about whom Labour Members are singularly unconcerned. The House will remember that he was the only Labour Member of Parliament ever to take a serious interest in private pensions. It seems that his principle of providing pensions with a fund with no investment in it to meet them has now become official Labour Front-Bench policy.

Mr. Stephen: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lilley: I should like to make some progress.

Our success in curbing inflation is one of the key advantages that the current generation of pensioners has gained from the Government. They remember the damage that Labour's hyper-inflation inflicted on pensioners' savings when it was last in government. The extra £1.2 billion we have pumped into higher income support premiums is helping the less well-off pensioners, and, above all, we are not threatening them with the double whammy of a utilities tax, which would be paid for in the gas, electricity, telephone and water bills of pensioners and others, and which would hit the value of utility shares, the bulk of which are held by pension funds.

Mr. Timms: I should like to bring the Secretary of State back to the subject of pensions. If I understood him correctly, a few moments ago he said that the companies that have been involved in misselling personal pensions will not be able to be involved in basic pension plus. That includes many of the biggest insurance companies in the country, such as Prudential, Legal and General and others. Is he telling the House that those companies will not be able to be involved in basic pension plus?

As I understand it, the right hon. Gentleman is proposing that the Personal Investment Authority should regulate this matter. Is he aware that, on the day of his announcement, it produced its future strategy, in which it says that it does not want

"to get involved in any form of direct approval of products or product design"?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman should have listened carefully to me and to Colette Bowe. We both said that the companies that failed to provide restitution for those to whom they missold pensions would not be eligible to run basic pension plus. Colette Bowe also said that the report did not apply to basic pension plus.

We should not let the inadequacy of the Opposition's response to our proposals for basic pension plus obscure the threat posed to pensioners by Labour's pension policies. First, Labour is casting doubt on its ability to protect the state pension against inflation. In an attempt to demonstrate his fiscal rectitude, in a speech in January, "Responsibility in Public Finance", the shadow Chancellor said that, in order to control the cash totals of departmental spending,

"there cannot be an assumption that totals will be automatically adjusted upwards in the event of changes in inflation."

Does that mean that he is not promising to uprate pensions and other benefits, or, in view of the press release rushed out at midday by the hon. Member for Peckham, is the so-called iron shadow Chancellor proving rather ductile as soon as the heat is on, and running away from the pledge he made in January?

Secondly, Labour's policy of letting people draw their pension at age 60 will either cost the taxpayers £15 billion a year or involve cutting the basic pension by £20 a week. Labour's so-called flexible decade of retirement is identical to reducing the state pension age to 60. People are already free to defer taking their state pension, and for each year they delay, they get a 7.4 per cent. increase in their basic pension for the rest of their life.

In practice, 98 per cent. of people choose to take their pension as soon as they are permitted to do so. The Labour party does not propose to give them any extra flexibility, or incentives to exercise such flexibility. It proposes only that they can take their pension from 60 instead of 65. There is no reason to doubt that roughly the same proportion as now would draw their pension at 60 if allowed to do so, but that would cost £15 billion more than retirement at 65, unless the basic pension were cut.

[Mr. Lilley]

Imagine my surprise when the hon. Member for Peckham wrote to me last year criticising me for saying that the Labour party's policy of retirement from the age of 60 would cost £15 billion a year.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (*Doncaster, North*): *Boring drivel.*

Mr. Lilley: It may be drivel, but I am quoting the words of the hon. Member for Peckham. She wrote:

"the taxpayer should not be expected to fund this personal flexibility. In government we will protect the public purse from any increase in expenditure arising from"

allowing people to retire at 60. She continued:

"we anticipate . . . a lower level of basic state pension."

She also wrote that she would ask the Government Actuary how much that would cost.

The Government Actuary calculates that, to avoid extra taxation, Labour's plan would require cutting the basic state pension by £20 a week for the rest of people's lives, or by £37 a week for a couple, and that it would plunge up to 2 million more pensioners below the income support level. The Opposition have said that they would not spend any more money under the plan. They would therefore not be able to top up incomes even to the income support level.

There is a third new danger from new Labour: its plans for a pension entitlement, which would mean a new means test for all pensioners. Labour plans to test all pensioners to determine whether they are eligible for pension entitlement. Moreover, I am not the only one who calls it a means test. Baroness Castle attacked Labour's

"vague concept of a pensions 'Entitlement' which is clearly a means-tested guarantee by another name, with all the drawbacks".

Apparently Labour intends that every new pensioner, and presumably all existing pensioners, would undergo a once-for-all means test. If their total income fell below some unspecified level—presumably set at least at the income support level—they would be topped up to that level by a pensions entitlement. It is not clear, to say the least, whether all pensioners would like to be means-tested, however generous the Labour party's intentions might be.

However, once Labour had established the system to means-test all pensioners, it would certainly not stop there. It would be the start of a slippery slope; and how long would it be before Labour used the means test to claw back the basic pension from prudent pensioners who had saved enough for a decent private personal pension? Does anyone imagine that the Opposition would be able to fund their £30 billion of spending pledges without taking advantage of their means-testing regime for pensions?

Mr. Flynn: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: No; I will make some progress.

The Government have a fine record of raising pensioners' living standards. Pensioners' incomes are now 60 per cent. higher in real terms than they were under the previous Labour Government. On average, pensioners' incomes have increased every year by nearly as much as they did in all four years of the previous Labour Government.

In 1979, only 43 per cent. of retired people had an occupational pension of their own. Today, 63 per cent. have one, and the figure is over 70 per cent. among the newly retired. The average size of occupational pensions has doubled in real terms over that period, and, as a result of encouraging people to opt out of the state earnings-related pension scheme, we built up £650 billion of funded provision. That figure is not only greater than that in any other country in Europe: it is greater than the amount that all the other countries in the European Community combined have bothered to save and invest to meet their future pension bills.

The next Conservative Government will build on that strength. Our plans for basic pension plus involve the most radical improvement in pension provision since Beveridge. It is the biggest enhancement of pensions and the greatest extension of personal ownership. Labour has discredited itself by its knee-jerk opposition to the changes. Its plans would leave pensioners vulnerable to inflation, cut the basic pension by £20 for life, and subject all pensioners to a means test. Our plans will give the United Kingdom secure pensions, high investment and low taxes.

4.43 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): The debate on the future of pensions is one of the most important political issues facing us. Unlike the Secretary of State, I shall attempt to point to some common ground between all hon. Members on the issue. We all agree that we have an aging population, that we need long-term planning for changes and that we need to encourage people to save more for their old age by giving them a stake in their own pensions.

In this debate, I will explain the principles that must underpin any change in pensions policy, why the pension system needs to change after 18 years of Tory government, why we believe that the Government's proposals fail to match up to those principles, and how Labour's approach will provide security in retirement. Those are the principles on which any change to pensions policy must be based.

Pensions policy must strike a fair balance between the generations, and it must fairly balance the responsibilities of the state and the individual, and of the public and the private sectors. It must provide a secure retirement for people on all incomes, and it cannot leave out those on low and modest incomes. The proposals made last week by the Government fail all those tests.

The Government's proposals are costly and risky. They give nothing to today's pensioners and they leave tomorrow's pensioners without adequate income in retirement.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady refused the opportunity during my speech to answer the question of which is more risky—a basic pension promised by her with no investments to fund it, or a pension guarantee with investments to fund it.

Ms Harman: It is more risky to be blinded by dogma and to say that everything must be in either the state or the private sector. We are saying that we want a partnership between public and private provision. That is how one spreads the risk and provides the greatest future security. People understand that.

The challenge of achieving fairness for all generations will be met by striking a balance between today's pensioners, today's people at work and tomorrow's people at work. I shall deal first with today's pensioners because the Secretary of State talked at length about pension liabilities, but he did not say anything about today's pensioners. A quarter of all today's pensioners are on the poverty line or below and must rely on income support. Today, 1.6 million pensioners must rely on income support to top up their basic state pension. Another 1 million of them completely fall through the safety net, because they are entitled to income support but do not claim it, losing an average of £14 a week. It is a scandal that so many pensioners who have spent a lifetime at work or in caring for their families are among the poorest people in Britain.

The Secretary of State's pension plan will cost taxpayers a massive £312 billion over the next 40 years, but not a penny will be available for today's pensioners.

Mr. Stephen: How could pensioners have any confidence in a state pension scheme administered by Labour? When Labour was last in power, it so mismanaged the economy that it could not pay even the Christmas bonus.

Ms Harman: Pensioners' income has always been better under Labour Governments than under the Tories. Pensioners in the United Kingdom remember that the Tories promised them that they would not impose VAT on their gas and electricity but that, as soon as they got into government, they did exactly that.

Secondly, I will deal with today's work force. Millions of today's workers face financial hardship when they retire because they do not have an adequate second pension. Occupational schemes provide good second pensions, combining the employee's contribution with that of the employer. It is therefore worrying that the number of people in occupational pensions has been falling in recent years. Now, 12 million people in the work force have no access to occupational pension schemes.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): If the hon. Lady is encouraging occupational pension schemes, will she assure us that if—it is a big if—there were a Labour Government, the present tax relief on pensions would remain the same as it is today?

Ms Harman: The right hon. Gentleman seems to be unaware that the National Association of Pension Funds, which is the organisation that represents the large employers that run occupational pension schemes, said that the Secretary of State's proposals would spell

"the demise of the occupational pension system".

Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman cannot say that the Government's proposals would protect occupational pension schemes when such schemes have shrunk under this Government and the NAPF says that the proposals would spell their demise.

Twelve million people—

Sir Norman Fowler *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Is the hon. Lady giving way?

Ms Harman: No. I have given way and answered the right hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Secretary of State was given a reasonable hearing; the hon. Lady has a right to the same.

Ms Harman: Now, 12 million people in the work force have no access to occupational pension schemes. They have to choose between the state earnings-related pensions scheme, which the Government have halved in value, and personal pensions which, as the Consumers Association pointed out, can be poor value for money because of high charges and low contributions. People on low and modest incomes may find that the fees and charges associated with personal pensions can consume up to a third of their hard-earned savings—the money goes to the financial services companies and is not available for them when they need it in retirement.

Nearly 6 million people have no second pension provision whatsoever. Basic pension plus will give no help to today's work force who are destined to retire on means-tested benefit, having paid higher taxes to finance the Government's privatisation of pensions. The cost of the transition to basic pension plus will be borne by the current generation of workers who will have to pay twice through their taxes: they will have to pay for the pensions of the retired and for the pension funds of the rising generation.

The cost of privatising pensions over the next 40 years would be £312 billion. The Secretary of State said that he will get £160 billion from abolishing tax relief on pension contributions, but he may not be able to raise that amount. The NAPF warns that a new tax on contributions would cause a drop in contributions and so reduce the base and the yield for the new tax. As I said in response to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), the NAPF today said that the Secretary of State's scheme threatens the occupational pension system. How can people benefit from increasing prosperity and have security in retirement if the Government's plans are undermining their occupational pension schemes?

The Secretary of State has not even tried to explain how he will raise the other £150 billion and who will pay it. It will mean either increased taxes or increased borrowing. He has offered nothing to today's pensioners and nothing to today's work force except extra taxes and a threat to their occupational pensions, but has he put the public finances on a sounder footing for the future? No, he has not.

The Secretary of State claims that his plans deal with the so-called demographic time bomb but, as Andrew Dilnot of the Institute for Fiscal Studies points out in *The Guardian* today, he has got his timing wrong. The cost of introducing basic pension plus will peak at £14 billion a year at the very time when the demands of an aging population will be greatest. Pension costs and extra costs for long-term care and health care will be at

[Ms Harman]

their highest between 2020 and 2030, but during that decade billions of pounds will be spent privatising pensions. The public purse will be less able to meet the extra demands for health and long-term care—there will be less available to spend on the elderly just when the number of the elderly compared with the number in the work force is at its greatest.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I will not.

The Government's plans also fail to provide a secure retirement for all, whatever people's income. The Government have claimed that everyone will get £175 when they retire, but this morning the Government doubled that figure to £350, not at the suggestion of the Government Actuary because, as the Secretary of State admitted at his press conference this morning, he wrote it on the back of an envelope.

The £175 is not guaranteed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said; only £61 is guaranteed. The £175 is available only for people on average earnings, but three quarters of all employees earn less than average earnings. Today, £175 is worth half average earnings, but in 2040 it will be worth only 21 per cent. of average earnings.

If a private pension company fails to warn that the markets can go down as well as up, it is guilty of breaching the Financial Services Act 1986. If a private pension company fails to warn that one can lose the money that one puts into savings, it is guilty of breaching the Financial Services Act. If a private pension provider promoted £175 promises, as the Government have done, it would be found guilty of breaching the Financial Services Act. When the Government behave worse than the worst cowboys in the private sector, the regulatory system is wholly undermined. The regulators ought to give the Secretary of State a call—the Government have made false claims.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Lady is right to talk about regulation and making sure that people understand the figures. It is clear that her plan for a flexible decade of retirement would cost £15 billion, but she has said that a Labour Government would not raise that money. The alternative is that the basic pension would have to go down by £20 a week. I am perfectly prepared to accept in good faith what she told my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in her letter to him last August—she said that she would not raise the extra money—but will she now confirm that her plans would reduce most pensions by £20 a week?

Ms Harman: There is absolutely no question of Labour cutting the basic state pension. That is a scurrilous suggestion which the hon. Gentleman knows is untrue; it is unworthy of him—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman asked the hon. Lady a question. She is having great difficulty replying because she is not being given the opportunity to be heard. There is too much noise. The House must settle down and allow the hon. Lady to get on with her speech, just as the Secretary of State was allowed to do.

Ms Harman: I think that the hon. Gentleman's intervention was a case of the same old Tories making the same old Tory—what we have to call in this House—misrepresentations.

Mr. Lilley *rose—*

Ms Harman: It looks as though we are going to get another one.

Mr. Lilley: I received a letter from someone purporting to be Harriet Harman which said:

"We will have to consider what level of basic state pension should be paid. . . . we anticipate . . . a lower level of basic state pension."

Is the hon. Lady denying that it came from her?

Ms Harman: Some people describe the Secretary of State as an intellectual. He knows that we are not proposing to means-test all pensioners, although that is what he said this morning, and that we are not proposing to—and will not—cut the basic state pension. We will protect the basic state pension. He also knows that we are considering some additional flexibility and choice for a flexible decade of retirement. At present, some people are able to draw their pension later and take it at a higher level. We are against the idea that we are inevitably stuck with a one-size-fits-all welfare state. We shall continue to put forward proposals to modernise the welfare state to give people more choice and more flexibility. There is no suggestion of forcing anybody to retire early and take a cut in their basic state pension. If the Secretary of State wants to continue with his leadership bid, he had better build on his credentials. The main one is supposed to be his brain.

I should like explain the £175. The Government's proposals will not guarantee the full £175-a-week pension that they claim that someone on average earnings will get on retirement in 2040. The basic pension guarantee will cover only the basic pension element, not the 5 per cent. earnings-related element or any additional savings that an individual might make. The basic pension guarantee guarantees only £61 a week, which will be worth just 7 per cent. of average earnings in 2040. It is not a guarantee of £175.

The new second-tier additional earnings-related element will not provide a generous or adequate pension either. The £175-a-week pension that the Secretary of State claims that someone on average earnings will get in 2040 will result in pensioners falling further behind the living standards of people at work. A man on average earnings who retired last year, solely dependent on the basic state pension and SERPS, got a pension worth 36 per cent. of his earnings. By 2040, when living standards will have risen significantly, under the Government's plan a man on average earnings would retire on only 20 per cent. of his earnings.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I shall not give way to the hon. and learned Gentleman. I have given way six times. Each

time, I have been asked questions that were not sensible and each time Conservative Members have not listened to the answer. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. What is going on in the House this afternoon? I repeat, I hope that the hon. Lady will be given the same hearing and the same courtesies as the Secretary of State was. She has made it clear that she is not giving way, so I advise hon. Members to take that on board.

Ms Harman: The £175 guarantee, which is not a guarantee, does not apply to everyone, but only to those on average earnings. Three quarters of the work force earn less than average earnings.

Some 2.6 million pensioners live on the basic state pension, topped up by income support. In 2040, after spending £312 billion on their privatisation plan, the Government predict that 3 million pensioners will be living on the basic pension guarantee, topped up by income support. Mervyn Kohler of Help the Aged has said that under the Government's proposals, a poor worker will progress to become a poor pensioner. Basic pension plus would be a guarantee of poverty in old age for more than 3 million people. After more than £300 billion has been spent, 3 million pensioners will still be struggling on the bread line.

Basic pension plus fails to strike a fair balance between the generations. It fails to give people on all incomes a decent standard of living in retirement and it increases risks because it abandons the partnership between public and private provision, putting every penny of every pension into the private sector basket. Every part of every pension will be at the mercy of the market and every taxpayer will have to stand by to bail out failed schemes. The Secretary of State has made reassuring noises today, telling people not to worry about misselling because it is all sorted out and will not happen again. The Government have a bad record on protecting people from the risk and cost of their ideological forays into personal private pensions.

In the mid-1980s, the Government's policy, backed by hundreds of millions of pounds, was to encourage people to opt out of occupational pensions and SERPS and go instead into personal pensions. Labour warned at the time that many people would wrongly be lured out of good value for money occupational pensions and would lose out. The then Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, now the Prime Minister, swept our concerns aside. He assured Parliament that the Government would

"safeguard people against unscrupulous overselling of personal pensions."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 4 February 1986; c. 27.]

That was the Prime Minister's promise. He did not safeguard people and 1.5 million lost out. There are 500,000 urgent cases awaiting compensation. Only 7,000 have received compensation. At least 18,000 will never receive their compensation. The Personal Investment Authority told me last night that 18,000 people have died before they could be compensated. Why should the public trust the Government's reassurances this time when they got it so badly wrong last time? They are forcing everyone into the schemes that have failed so many.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Can I clarify what the hon. Lady has said, which is open to misunderstanding? If people tragically die before they can be compensated, their families, their estates and their relatives get the compensation.

Ms Harman: It will be too late for them. As a direct result of Government policy, they will have had a lower standard of living in retirement than they were entitled to. The Secretary of State and the Tory Government have shown no remorse about the personal loss and hardship that they have caused so many people. Far from it: they are trying to sweep the issue under the carpet and press on with their dogmatic and ideological proposals to get rid of all state provision and privatise all pensions.

The Government say that under their new scheme costs will be held down. Under the Financial Services Act 1986, they have always had the power to cap charges and have never used it. Their track record is to allow charges to soar. Why should we believe them now when in recent years they have allowed people's savings to be eaten up in costs and charges?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: One of the planks of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's proposals is that the market will drive down charges. This lunchtime, I was with one of the major mutual companies, which reckons that it can provide one of my right hon. Friend's pensions at about 0.5 per cent. of the fund value each year. Moreover, the top-up could be provided free of charge, so I do not know how the hon. Lady gets the idea that those private pensions will cost more.

Ms Harman: The Secretary of State asserted that, under the new scheme, charges will be lower than under existing personal private pension schemes because marketing costs, which form the greater part of the costs and charges that eat up so much of people's savings, will be brought down. As people will have to invest in those private pensions, the companies will not have to spend so much on marketing. The problem with that is that the Secretary of State fails to recognise that the system still offers a choice between different private providers. The advertising and marketing costs will be not a response to try to increase the market but a response from each personal private pension company to try to increase its market share. With more funds in play, it will be even more worth while to spend more on marketing and advertising, and to offload the charges on to people trying to save for their retirement.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ms Harman: I shall not give way.

Mr. Flynn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ms Harman: I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Flynn: I congratulate my hon. Friend on how she has coped with the bad-mannered interruptions of Tory Members, who are all suffering from bad cases of pre-defeat hysteria.

What assessment has my hon. Friend made from the nonsensical replies that she and many other hon. Members had to our questions printed in *Hansard* in the past few days, on how the Government reached the figure

[Mr. Flynn]

of £175? Conflicting answers printed on the same day say that the Government have worked on the assumption of an annual earnings increase of 1.5 per cent. and of 2 per cent. That will make a difference, as a percentage of average earnings in 2040, of between 18 and 26 per cent.—an enormous difference. The Government are confused. What assessment—

Mr. Garnier: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) to make a speech instead of an intervention when the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) refused to give way to perfectly reasonable Conservative Members?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Interventions should be brief and to the point, but it is not uncommon for hon. Members to stray from that in this House.

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) is absolutely right. Although the Government's proposals are barely a week old, they are already unravelling. The Government contradict their figures on the costs and benefits day by day.

The Government have made it clear that their pensions priority is to spend 40 years and more than £300 billion privatising state pensions. Labour does not share those priorities. We agree with the Secretary of State, however, that we cannot go on as we have for the past 18 years because it leads to poverty and insecurity for too many. Our approach, however, is different. There is not one type of provision that is right for everyone. People have different lives and different family and work patterns. We cannot have a one-size-fits-all pension privatisation. Everyone should have access to a pension that offers security in retirement and the largest number of people should have a stake in their own pension scheme and be encouraged to make further savings.

We shall do that through partnership between the public and private sectors. We shall keep the basic state pension not means-tested. We shall keep SERPS as a choice, particularly for the low-paid and for carers. We shall protect occupational pension schemes and provide a new low-cost stakeholder pension for those who do not have an occupational pension and for whom a private pension is simply too costly.

Those fortunate enough to be in an occupational pension scheme will have the benefit of employers' contributions as well as their own, but the Tories have encouraged more than 1 million people to opt out of occupational pensions. Basic pension plus will undermine them further. We want occupational pension schemes to be strengthened and, where possible, extended. We shall keep constantly under review the issue of regulation brought in by the Government. We shall aim to reduce the burden on employers in terms of the cost of compliance while continuing to protect the public interest. We shall introduce an investors in pensions award to recognise and encourage employers who make excellent pension provision for their employees.

However, millions of workers cannot join an occupational pension scheme because they are in a small firm and are more likely to move between jobs. For them, the current choice is between SERPS and a private pensions but the benefit of SERPS has been halved and the costs and charges of private pensions are too high. There is clearly a need for a value-for-money, funded pension scheme that gives those people both flexibility and security at low cost. That is why we have been working with the financial services industry to formulate a new funded second pension—the stakeholder pension.

Stakeholder pensions will help to provide decent income in retirement for people who currently fall through the net. We want to encourage new partnerships, for instance between insurance companies and groups of small businesses in one industry or with employee organisations to provide stakeholder pensions. People in those new schemes will get a better pension because of reduced costs due to economies of scale. They will be able to take breaks in employment without being unfairly penalised.

Our approach to SERPS is based on choice. No overwhelming case has been made for ending SERPS as a choice, which is why we shall keep it for people who want to be in it and want to use it as a benchmark by which to judge second pensions. SERPS can also play a role in providing pensions for those—usually women—who care for elderly or sick relatives. Many of those people face retirement on means-tested benefits, but crediting them into SERPS could help to ensure that they gain a pension in their own right in recognition of the work that they do, which is unpaid but important to the community. Together with our proposals to ensure equal treatment for women, that could greatly reduce reliance, and hence public expenditure, on income-related benefits for those in retirement.

I wish to outline our proposals for today's pensioners. We shall defend the basic state pension from the Tories. Under Labour, it will not be means-tested and it will rise no less than prices. Our first priority, however, will be the poorest pensioners. One million pensioners do not receive the income support to which they are entitled. We shall examine how to help the poorest pensioners through our plans for a pension entitlement in addition to the basic state pension—replacing not the basic state pension but income support. It will ensure that people receive what they are entitled to without having to fill in a 35-page form.

The Government have failed 1 million people. Among the poorest are retired people who are too proud to have to jump over all the hoops and hurdles which the Government place before them in order to get the income support to which they are entitled.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I will not give way.

We shall get rid of the stigma of income support, replacing it with a pension entitlement. We shall make it easier for pensioners by making it possible to claim at a far wider variety of outlets.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: How much will it cost?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman asks how much it will cost. We are talking about an entitlement for the poorest pensioners, which the Government have failed to allow them.

We shall use the information that pensioners have already given to the Department of Social Security and to their local councils to help identify those who are entitled to extra help and do not get it.

Mr. Lilley: How?

Ms Harman: The Secretary of State asks how. We pressed the Government to amend the fraud Bill to allow cross-matching of data to help pensioners as well as catch fraudsters, but they refused. The Secretary of State says that pensioners choose not to have their income support; somehow a million pensioners are choosing to lose out on £14 a week. We are clear that our approach and our framework of policies are affordable and will address the needs of today's pensioners, and tomorrow's.

Under Labour's plans, the proud 78-year-old woman in St. Albans who does not claim her income support and who was afraid to turn up her heating last winter will get an extra £14 a week pension entitlement and a cold-weather payment—her entitlement. Under the Tories' plans, she will shiver with cold next winter and the winter after that—£300 billion for privatisation, but nothing for her under the Tories.

Under Labour's plans, the man on low pay will find that it is worth his while to put aside a bit extra for his retirement in a good-value stakeholder pension. Under the Tories' plans, he will pay more tax now to finance privatisation and will retire on to means-tested benefits. We will listen to the voice of pensioners, not ignore them as the Government do.

People of all ages need a far greater understanding of pensions. That presents a great challenge to any Government due to the view often held that pensions are too technical and too complex for people to understand. We want to be sure that people in their 20s are as familiar with AVCs—additional voluntary contributions—and IFAs—independent financial advisers—as they are with Sega and Nike. We want them to understand that OPRA—the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority—is not just a chat show.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: Clearly, the trouble with that joke is that it is too complicated for Conservative Members. We shall have to start earlier.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman. I am about to conclude my remarks. I will not give way.

The Government can and should play their part in promoting a national debate on the future of pensions. The debate about pensions and their reform can be led only by a Government whom the people can trust—and no one can trust the Tories on pensions.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There have been several discussions in the past few days about declarations of interests. Would it not be helpful to the House and the country if, during this debate, all hon. Members who have a financial interest in the pensions industry declare it—although it may well be registered—at the beginning of their speech?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair—and I hope everyone else—always expects hon. Members to know the rules of the House regarding declarations of interest. I assume that all hon. Members adhere to them.

5.22 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): The House has listened to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). I have been listening to speeches by Labour Front Benchers for, I guess, more than 20 years. I have heard the speeches of Baroness Castle, those of the late Brian O'Malley, for whom I had the greatest respect, and even those of my old sparring partner, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). I have seldom heard a worse speech than the one that the hon. Lady has just made, above all because it was inadequate to the challenge of pensions policy before us. Its inadequacy was underlined by her failure even to attempt to reply to questions about tax relief in connection with pensions. The public will draw their own conclusions from that.

Clearly we shall have to go through the speech very carefully. Indeed, I suggest that during the coming election campaign it might be circulated in its entirety to Conservatives and to the public to show the complete vacuousness of what the Labour party proposes. The only new thing that I found in the hon. Lady's speech was the idea that we are to have an investors-in-pensions competition of some kind. I do not think that that quite amounts to a pensions policy or meets the challenge.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his plans. I believe that many in the pensions industry, and many who observe it, think that his proposals are among the most imaginative to have come from the Government in this Parliament. It is good for public finances—that is certain—but, above all, it is a tremendous investment for the public. I also congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as it is only with his approval, and through the Treasury and the Department of Social Security working together, that such imaginative proposals can be made.

Mr. Frank Field: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: Not for a moment—

Mr. Field: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way.

Sir Norman Fowler: Well, as I have not—

Mr. Field: What happened to his proposals?

Sir Norman Fowler: I hope that, with his normal courtesy, the hon. Gentleman can contain himself for 30 seconds.

Mr. Field: What did the then Chancellor do to his plans?

Sir Norman Fowler: The hon. Gentleman is uncharacteristically over-excited. If he can contain

[Sir Norman Fowler]

himself for 30 seconds, I shall give way. Before his uncharacteristic intervention, I was saying that the proposals before us follow changes that have been made over the past decade, which can fairly be described as a revolution in pensions.

Improvements affecting occupational pensions have hardly been mentioned. We tackled such issues as transfer rights—the scandal of the frozen pension—and put them right. The Labour Government did nothing about that. We have given the public new options—notably personal pensions, which have been taken up by millions of people. We have cut the emerging cost of the state earnings-related pension, to the undoubted benefit of future generations. On that fact, I know that the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and I stroll arm in arm, through the Chamber, if not through the Lobby. I shall now give way.

Mr. Field: I wanted to pick up what seemed to be the right hon. Gentleman's coded message to the Secretary of State, when he congratulated him on having the Chancellor of the Exchequer on his side over the proposals. Does the right hon. Gentleman recall what happened to his proposals, which in many ways were far more radical than those proposed by Ministers in this Parliament? Very late in the day, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer publicly destroyed his proposals for reform. Would it not be right to conclude from what he has said that today's Chancellor has not woken up to the proposals' long-term costs in terms of public expenditure?

Sir Norman Fowler: I would put a different interpretation on history. It has been established over the past decade that my proposals, on which I admit I encountered a certain local difficulty with the Treasury, were correct. I am glad that the Treasury has caved in with enthusiasm and is backing my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. That is excellent, and I am well content.

The criticism made by the hon. Member for Peckham centred on the misselling of some personal pensions. I do not dispute for a moment the need to put right the misselling that took place. No one feels more strongly about that than me. I do not defend it; it must be put right—and quickly. However, it is being put right—too slowly, yes, but it is certain that it will be put right. What is important about today's debate is the assurance that has been given not only by the industry but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that no one will lose out. Mr. David Prosser of Legal and General, one of the biggest companies involved with pensions, is calling for greater speed, and is saying that the company has the resources to deal with the matter.

Ms Abbott: Conservative Members, including the Secretary of State, have been insisting that the problem of compensating the 500,000 people who were missold pensions is being sorted out. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the chief executive of the Personal Investment Authority appeared before the Treasury Select Committee only this week, and was unable to give a timetable for compensating 99 per cent. of those people? The fact that there is no end in sight must undermine public confidence in a wholesale move towards privatised pensions.

Sir Norman Fowler: I hope that it will not. We will have to see what happens, but no one will push harder than me to see that the problem is sorted out. There is public and Government pressure, as well as pressure from inside the industry, to solve the problem.

I challenge the Labour party on the issue, because unfunded state schemes do not offer a miraculous improvement. The opposite is true, because mistakes made in the unfunded state scheme have never been put right—we need only turn our minds back to 1976 to recall that. The biggest pension scandal in this country was not personal pensions or Robert Maxwell's behaviour, but the action of the Labour Government when they deliberately fiddled the uprating system in 1976.

Until then, pensions had been uprated historically. In other words, we validated past inflation. Mrs. Castle and Denis Healey decided, when inflation was falling from astronomic levels, to forecast future inflation instead. The result was that they missed out the figures for inflation between March and November 1975. That decision meant a saving of £1 billion by the Labour Government—£4.5 billion in today's money. The Labour party never put that right, and it never will. That was a fiddle, a scandal and a swindle, and we all knew it.

Mr. Frank Field *rose—*

Sir Norman Fowler: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Field: Will the right hon. Gentleman compare the £4.5 billion cut with the cut that was achieved by decoupling pensions uprating from earnings?

Sir Norman Fowler: I would not mind making that comparison, but it is not the Labour party's policy to restore the link, so it is an academic point. I will come to the point on earnings, because it underlines the peculiar and strange policies that the Labour party is pursuing.

Labour Members cheered the announcement of the £4.5 billion cut in pensions spending. We know that because we have the benefit of Mrs. Castle's diaries. Diaries are a great help to the public debate. We have the diaries of Alan Clark, although they are not always read for the politics, and the Opposition have the diaries of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and of Baroness Castle. She describes the Budget that contained the uprating statement as follows:

"I slipped back on to the front bench in time to hear Denis"—

Denis Healey—

"deal with social security. All my officials' valiant efforts to make him stand up and be counted on the change from the historical to the forecasting method for the pensions uprating have failed. He skimmed over it and so got a cheer from our side for the amount of the increase, whose relevance they did not understand."

Labour Members may not have realised the significance at the time, but the people who lost out did not have the opportunity to ask the Personal Investment Authority for their money back. The cut was permanent and it has never been paid back. That is a real difference between the public and the private sectors, and it is a real plus for the private sector that mistakes are dealt with.

I now come to the point that the hon. Member for Birkenhead—I almost called him my hon. Friend, but that would embarrass him—made about uprating and earnings. That is another issue that cannot be taken to the Personal Investment Authority. Labour's promise to uprate pensions in line with earnings was made more solemnly and more often than any promise I can remember. It was made in the 1983 election and in the 1987 election.

Before the 1992 election, when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and I were responsible for social security, we were frequently attacked for not uprating pensions by the increase in earnings. What has happened? Much to the dismay of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who is in his place, Labour Front Benchers have decided to abandon the earnings-related uprating. They talk about the misselling of pensions, but the public would not be well advised to buy a pension policy offered by the Labour party, given its record in the past few years.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: I suppose I should give way, because I referred to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Corbyn: The right hon. Gentleman will recall the halcyon days of 1986 when we were members of the Standing Committee that considered the legislation to introduce the personal portable pension scheme. I am sure that he will also recall the warnings by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) about the inherent dangers and consequences of misselling. He brushed all those warnings aside. Does he now have even one iota of remorse about the legislation that he and the Prime Minister introduced?

Sir Norman Fowler: I do not feel remorse about it, and I have just dealt with the point. I thought that the hon. Gentleman might say something sensible about earnings and uprating, but I will not embarrass him further.

In the past 18 years, the Government have tackled two of the central problems of pensions policy. They have tackled some of the basic dishonesty in the pay-as-you-go system, and exposed the errors in it. I remember when Mr. Kinnock was Leader of the Opposition and intervened in a debate—when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House was winding up—under the misapprehension that the national insurance scheme was a funded scheme. He was the Leader of the Opposition, but he did not know that, of course, it is not.

National insurance contributions are, in effect, a tax. Today's contributors pay for today's pensions in the hope that when their turn comes, others will pay for their pensions. The trouble with that system is that Governments can make promises knowing that the bill will not be presented for 10, 20 or 30 years. That is the dishonesty in the pay-as-you-go system, and that is why France, Italy and Germany have enormous pension debts and will struggle in the future. Thanks to the courage of the Government, we have tackled that problem and we will be able to manage the future pension debt. That is an immense advantage for public finances.

Our policies also have immense advantages for the individual. All the evidence suggests that the public value a pension that they can call their own. Personal pensions are so popular because people have a personal fund, and that is what they want. SERPS is unpopular because it is complex and badly understood, and people do not recognise the pension as their pension. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, to his credit, has moved the argument on. He has tackled not only the second-tier pension, but the basic pension.

Furthermore, the fund offers the prospect of a startlingly better deal and a bigger pension than one would have received under the present basic pension scheme. The entitlement that goes up in the fund cannot be altered, swindled or fiddled by the Government, as happened in 1976. We are using the tax system to encourage occupational provision, and that is important. The public and the pensions press will draw their own conclusions from the failure of the hon. Member for Wentworth to give any assurance on tax relief.

I wish to make two final points. First, this is clearly a new scheme that, inevitably, is for the future. We cannot go back to the period after the second world war, when mistakes were made. Beveridge proposed a funded scheme—an idea that we never took up. Instead, we adopted a pay-as-you-go system, and we must not make the same mistake again.

We also need to concern ourselves with today's pensioners, including people who never had the opportunity of entering an occupational scheme—not because they did not want to, but because none was available—and people who were badly affected by the restrictive rules that existed in occupational schemes before the Government's reforms.

Those people did not have the opportunity to build up a pension of their own. Therefore, I advocate the development of family credit into a system of pension credit to give help where it is most needed—that is, to people in their 70s and 80s. We should not give a general pension increase for everyone, irrespective of income, but we should try to add to the income of those who need it.

Secondly, I hope that both sides will agree that we need to examine how we can improve the advice that we give to individuals in the public and the private sector. I have constituents who have lost out on their state pension entitlement because they were not provided with sensible advice. One constituent has lost about £10 a week because of that lack of advice. That has nothing to do with private advisers, and everything to do with the local DSS office and the information provided.

If we are to expand personal provision further, good advice is essential. We must learn the lessons of the past. The advice that companies provide on their products is reasonably good, but I want to see more independent advice on all companies' products. There are such advisers, but there are not enough of them.

The Government have introduced a series of reforms that promise to provide this country with the strongest pensions system in Europe. That is an enormous achievement. But we have done more than that: we have extended the options open to the public. The Government have extended the concept of property ownership and provided people with the chance to own a home of their own. We now offer them the promise of a good pension of their own. I believe that that record and that promise will stand us in good stead in the contest ahead.

5.43 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): One should not always believe what one reads in the newspapers, so what I am about to say may be unfounded in fact. Most of the newspapers reported that, when the proposals were first put to the Cabinet, the Secretary of State's slide show and introduction lasted 17 minutes. I noticed that he spent three times that long with us. I was not sure whether that was because he thought we would understand more than his Cabinet colleagues, and it was therefore worth spending longer with us, or because he felt that we would understand less and needed more time.

I welcome the debate, although I do not entirely agree with its temper—perhaps that is inevitable as close as we are to an important general election. I wanted to say—I hope that my comments will not be misinterpreted—that I welcome the proposals from the Government, but I register some surprise at the debate, which is developing as if we were debating a Bill. The Government have rightly suggested that we debate the proposals that were outlined last week, but they are merely proposals. Nevertheless, the proposals help to change the debate in a way that I believe to be constructive, and it is in that context that I want to make my contribution.

The announcement last week so changed the debate that it has become necessary to rewrite so much of the Select Committee on Social Security report, which was ready to present, that we are not sure whether we can present it this side of a general election, if at all. The Government have influenced and opened the debate, and questioned areas that some people thought one should never question. The roof has not fallen in, and one hopes that, as the months progress, the lead that the Government have given will be accepted and that the proposals will become one set of a series which future Parliaments and the country will debate in trying to find the best way forward.

On one area in which I am interested—the extension of compulsion—there was a great divide between the parties until last Wednesday. The Secretary of State always used to suggest that nobody would understand such a move and that to extend compulsion would be read by the country as increasing taxation, as people could not see the difference between compulsory savings and compulsory taxation. Since last Wednesday, we have moved on, and so dead is that part of the debate that it is hardly worth mentioning.

I stress that the proposals are for the long run. The proposals that the Secretary of State put to his Cabinet colleagues for the first time last week, and to the nation a day later, are addressed to a world that is as far in the distance as Beveridge is in the past to us now. If we look back on all the changes that have occurred in the world since the Beveridge proposals were implemented by the House—and if we look at how wrong most people were in that debate in prophesying what the world would be like—we should be cautious in thinking that our generation can read the stars better than our predecessors or that we can address with certainty a world 40 years hence with only one set of pension proposals.

It is with those long-term proposals in mind that I want to pick up one point made by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). I hope that the debate will provide us with an agenda of the issues for which we need answers in the context of the Government's major proposals. The right hon. Gentleman touched on one issue, which was that we must think seriously about the sort of financial advice that people can get. That will be an important part of the agenda.

I wish to add another issue to that agenda—trust. We have touched on that. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has referred to one aspect of trust, or lack of it, to which I shall return in a moment. If we are talking about pension reforms that will not take effect until as far in the future as Beveridge's reforms are in the past, they stand little chance of being successful if they are not operated with a degree of trust that does not exist now.

There is not only the issue of the security of pension funds, which was raised vividly by the case of Robert Maxwell, but yesterday, in the Chamber, another pension fund affecting the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral area was debated—H. H. Robertson—where something similar may have happened. That has occurred despite the introduction of the minimum solvency requirements of the Pensions Act 1995 in an attempt to give extra security to funds. The minimum solvency requirements may help with the better running of well-run occupational schemes, but hon. Members representing Chester, Birkenhead and elsewhere are seeing that they produce no funds for those pension schemes where funds appear to have gone missing.

Therefore, if we are to rebuild trust, we may have to reopen that aspect of the debate in the new Parliament and consider whether we need an industrywide insurance scheme to ensure that those who are unfortunate enough to lose their assets are compensated. It is extraordinary that such a scheme exists for those who lose their holiday, but not for those who lose the whole of their income for the rest of their retirement. That is one aspect of trust.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington, in quizzing the Personal Investment Authority before the Treasury Select Committee last week—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): As I understand it, the scheme about which the hon. Gentleman was talking was an occupational pension scheme and the matters complained of relate to a period before the introduction of changes under the Pensions Act which, of course, provides for compensation.

Mr. Field: The main thrust of ensuring that the money is there to pay pensions is in the solvency requirements; in other words, the funds must be there to acquire the policies to pay pensions if the scheme has to be wound up. That works for well-run funds, because that is what they aim to do anyway, but it clearly will not work for funds where large parts of the assets have disappeared. As I say, that will be part of an on-going pensions debate in the new Parliament. There will never be a single pensions Act that deals with all the problems.

Mr. Forman: Does the hon. Gentleman, in his analogy with the travel industry and a failed holiday, mean to suggest that the pension providers should chip in collectively to compensate, or the taxpayer should do so?

Mr. Field: I mean that, just as the travel associations run a scheme to cover the cowboys they do not want as members, so one would propose cover in occupational schemes.

The second aspect of trust, or a lack of trust, is the question of mis-selling. The Government's embarrassment in dealing with that issue is noticeable. It is intolerable to think that, in the next Parliament, we would seriously consider extending the scope of privately-funded pension arrangements without that issue being satisfactorily cleared up. If the PIA does not have the necessary authority, the next Parliament should give it such authority so that it can set a time limit of a number of months within which it expects all the compensation schemes to be complete and, if they are not, interview the various companies and personally fine the directors of those companies that have not made proper settlements. In those circumstances, the arrangements may well be speeded up.

I am not blaming only the private providers of pensions, because a number of people have great difficulty in getting replies from the occupational schemes. The inability of some of those schemes to respond is becoming as serious as the misselling was in the first place. I am not saying that one side is guilty and the other not. If we are to fine companies that will not quickly come to an agreement on compensation, we should be talking about the directors of private companies and occupational schemes.

The third aspect of trust is whether Governments are believed any more. This week, the Government have introduced long-term care proposals. That will not make much impression on an important and growing area of concern because large numbers of people who will be considering the Government's proposals are unsure whether future Governments will keep the pledge that this Government are making on behalf of future Governments. That is a point that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield presented in another way. In the new Parliament, we shall have to address the issue of how to ensure that our behaviour is such that it increases people's belief that Governments, now and in the future, will keep their word.

There is the long-term issue of reforms way into the future which, despite all the technical points which will be put forward, have to be debated within a framework of growing trust if they are to be successful and reach the finishing point of those reforms. The working and pensionable life of just the first cohort of people means a reform over an 80-year period.

Ms Abbott: On pension misselling, does my hon. Friend agree that, if there is to be a move towards funded pensions, more serious attention must be paid to the regime of financial regulation than Conservative Members so far seem to think necessary? For example, one reason there was so much misselling in the past was the commission-driven nature of product sales. The Government's proposals have more far-reaching ramifications in regard to financial regulation than any Conservative Member has considered this afternoon.

Mr. Field: I hope that my hon. Friend will take heart from the fact that, as she was making that intervention, a number of Conservative Members nodded. I hope that they were nodding in agreement rather than in the manner of those little toy dogs in the back of cars who nod according to the movement of the car. That is an important point.

The next Parliament will consider the Financial Services Act 1986 and will perhaps go for fewer rules that are more clearly understood and so easier to enforce than the complexity of rules enacted during this and previous Parliaments. When looking to that future, part of the debate must be about the most sensible way in which to advance given that the Government are now inviting the country to address itself to that long-term prospect.

My response to the reforms is that, although I see a greater role for funded pensions, I also see a role for a basic state pension within those arrangements. I accept, as my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) did when she was allowed to in her contribution this afternoon, that it is sensible to share risks in a world where, while one or two countries have gone down the path that the Government say they wish to go down, we have no experience of a Government going down that path and seeing how the policy works out in practice. It is a matter of sharing risks rather than being ideologically for or against the proposals.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield politely drew the Government's attention to the fact that this was a debate about pensions policy, not only basic pension plus. He centred our attention on one of three issues with which future Parliaments must deal before basic pension plus or other proposals are implemented.

The first issue is what immediate action we should take on behalf of the poorest pensioners. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham addressed that problem. It is crucial that we try to ensure that entitlements are tailor-made individually and die with the pensioner. They should not be built into the basic rates which we will all draw in time, irrespective of our particular needs. The new Parliament might address that issue by crediting into SERPS the oldest, poorest and frailest pensioners, and automatically paying them their pensions.

The second issue, which has not yet featured in this debate but will be addressed in the next Parliament, is long-term care. We need to increase the basic rate of retirement incomes so that, as people become more dependent on others, they can meet the associated costs quite normally without having to trigger something different in order to secure the income that they require for long-term care. We must decide how we shall pay for the one in five or one in six people who, under current arrangements, will need long-term residential and nursing care. We must consider that issue when debating the development of pension policy.

Mr. Heald: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, because only one in six people require long-term care, we should look at proposals involving insurance? That is the classic way of spreading the risk, and the Government are doing that.

Mr. Field: I do not think that the Government's proposals will take, because taxpayers will wonder whether future Governments will honour pledges about the release of funds implicit in those schemes. It is crucial to centre on insurance. If we had been debating pensions at the turn of the century, we would have said that it was totally proper to view them as insurance policies. At that time, most people did not survive to draw their pensions, so it was absurd to make most people save for that eventuality. Thankfully, the vast majority of people today do not require long-term care. I think that the Government have made the correct division: it is not sensible to suggest that everyone should save, when we know that five out of six people will not require those savings for long-term care.

[Mr. Field]

Thirdly, long before we can put basic pension plus into operation, we must consider the adequacy and the payment of pensions to the large number of people who were born after the second world war. There is the immediate issue of helping the poorest pensioners now; the big issue of paying for long-term care; and the future prospect of providing for the generation of baby boomers when they take their places in the ranks of the retired. We must address those issues before we can think about very long-term provision, such as basic pension plus.

Nevertheless, I welcome the Government's focusing attention on 45 years hence. It is sensible to have a long and detailed debate about the next stages of pension policy in this country. I am confident that that debate will be conducted in a more rational manner than the Secretary of State displayed in his contribution today. I am sorry that he is not in the Chamber to hear my criticism. During this Parliament, the Secretary of State has shown real distinction in leading the social security debate, and his performance today was a sad conclusion. I put it down to a loss of nerve as the election approaches: he felt obliged to indulge in the sort of knock-about to which we were treated today.

I shall stretch my linguistic powers and try to bring my final point within the debate's terms of reference. The Government have moved quickly on a counter-fraud measure that is yet to go on the statute book. Advertisements have been placed for the three key positions in the inspectorate that the legislation would establish when it became an Act. The advertisement that appeared on Sunday lists the skills that those three individuals will need, but it does not mention experience in counter-fraud work. It appears as though the Department has already decided which individuals will get those jobs. I plead with the Government not to fill any of those posts until after the general election.

6.4 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) in the debate. He has made a substantial, thoughtful, constructive and mainly non-partisan contribution to the discussion of pension issues. I shall return to his position in a moment.

I must declare an interest in the debate as I have just become a non-executive director of the London and Manchester insurance company. That appointment reflects my much wider life-long interest in the encouragement of individual savings, especially long-term savings and pensions. I was not able to express my interest when I was in the Government because, apart from spending some time in the Treasury, I did not have direct responsibility for such matters. Since leaving the Cabinet, however, I have been able to address those issues. I wrote a pamphlet, "Pensions in the 21st Century", for the Centre for Policy Studies last year, which covered many of the issues that we are debating today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you were critical of a number of Conservative Members for constantly seeking to intervene during the speech by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). I am sorry that she has left the Chamber. I have rarely heard a speech that was so vulnerable to criticism, which is why we tried to intervene. She must have been very much aware of that, because she failed to give way. I only hope that the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), saw her speech in advance as it was typical of many Labour Front-Bench speeches.

By criticising the current pension provisions, the hon. Lady implied that, if returned to government, the Labour party would give pensioners much more through either higher pensions or greater income support. However, she did not mention how Labour would pay for it. When asked how much her policies would cost, she replied, "We are talking about an entitlement." Like her other responses, that did not answer the question. It was old Labour writ large: make promises, pretend to be able to make provision, and claim that the issue of cost does not need to be addressed.

There is a big bill attached to the hon. Lady's remarks today. I draw attention to two points that she failed to answer. First, she criticised the fact that a number of pensioners who are entitled to income support are not receiving it. She argued that Labour would introduce measures to ensure that they did so. The Anson report, which was commissioned by the National Association of Pension Funds, discusses that issue. The operation would clearly involve a big bill—somewhere between £1 billion and £2 billion at present—and the hon. Lady did not say how it would be paid for. There would have to be corresponding cuts elsewhere if the shadow Chancellor's pledges were to be realised.

Secondly, and even more significantly, the hon. Member for Peckham refused to answer the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). I had intended to raise exactly the same point in my speech. I was much struck by the fact that when my right hon. Friend asked his question, the hon. Lady retreated into a woolly answer about basic pension plus and the criticism of it by the NAPF. Basic pension plus is a completely different scheme for future generations: it looks ahead 45 years. My right hon. Friend inquired about the position of existing occupational pension schemes and personal schemes, which are separate from basic pension plus. I suspect that the hon. Lady realised that because when my colleagues and I tried to intervene to repeat the question, she refused to give way.

What is the Labour party's position on encouraging occupational pension schemes? Does it intend to change the tax arrangements? That is extremely important, for reasons that I shall explain later in my speech. Although the shadow Chancellor said that Labour would not increase the basic or higher rates of tax, there are many other reliefs and allowances that could be tackled to meet the bill that a Labour Government would undoubtedly face. Are we talking about one of them? If so, we face an extremely serious position which means that the Labour party is flying in the face of everything that it has been saying about the encouragement of occupational pensions.

It is clear that the hon. Member for Peckham cannot come to terms with new Labour. The hon. Lady utters the old phrases but cannot explain how new Labour would fit in with the commitment that Labour would not spend more. That shows the pressures that the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East would face as Chancellor if Labour ever took office.

My tribute to the hon. Member for Birkenhead was genuine. It is important and increasingly encouraging that the debate about long-term pension issues is becoming a cross-party issue. Indeed, among all those interested, we are beginning to arrive at the same sort of conclusions. That is because we all recognise the nature of the problems and challenges that we face. There is general agreement about those and I need not repeat them. I have in mind the demographic challenge and the inability of the state to meet the bill. We all seem to agree that the United Kingdom is much better placed than the rest of the European Union. I am glad that we are coming together on the issues. The hon. Member for Birkenhead has made a notable contribution in bringing that about.

It seems that basic pension plus is not so much a switch to compulsion—because it will be replacing a state pension scheme and state earnings-related pension scheme which are compulsory unless the person has opted out—but is instead a funded contribution. It is the funding switch that is so significant, but up to now it has eluded us in most of our thinking. I hope that the hon. Member for Birkenhead will agree that that is a major element in the proposed change.

Those of us who are engaged in the debate are beginning to agree on the problems, along with the background and the challenges, and on the solutions. I hope that the hon. Member for Birkenhead will agree and forgive me for saying that that is a tribute to Conservative policy over many years, and to the extension of wider ownership and personal responsibility in which we Conservatives have always believed and encouraged in so many ways.

I so much agreed with my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield when he referred to basic pension plus as the latest in a series of measures designed to respond to longer-term problems in a Tory context. He made a notable contribution to those measures. Indeed, a long-term approach is significant when evaluating basic pension plus as politicians are frequently accused of thinking only in the short term.

The Government have done much in the long term, not least with the measures that we have taken to equalise the state pension age. We now have a classic illustration of a Government who are prepared to think really long term in addressing the problems that will face future generations unless we act now—and if things are to be done properly, we must act now. That is a notable feature of what is now being proposed.

The proposal may not be of major excitement and significance to many people in the forthcoming general election, but in the long term it will come to be recognised as a significant step forward. I therefore pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to those who work with him for producing what I regard as thoughtful, objective and far-seeing proposals which are skilful in their solution of the double-funding problem that was facing future younger generations. We have not always known how to tackle that problem, but my right hon. Friend has arrived at an ingenious way of responding to it. Some details are outstanding, but basic pension plus offers a hopeful way ahead.

There are three packages of issues to which I shall refer. First, I have two questions about basic pension plus. I do not want to take up many details because we are all beginning to become familiar with them. These details may well be taken up in later and wider consultation. I was struck, however, by a response to questions and answers about "whether my spouse will still be okay if I die". Part of the answer to that question was that the funds of those in the new scheme who died before drawing any money purchase benefits would be inherited in full by the surviving spouse, or by the estate where there is no spouse. That is interesting and significant. The response tells us that some or all of the funds would have to be used to purchase an annuity, or that income could be withdrawn.

I hope that that thought will be developed. As we look ahead to the need for pension flexibility, it will an important element of basic pension plus and may lead to a reconsideration of what we are doing about personal pensions.

The editor of *Financial and Tax Planning Through Pensions*—a journal which I have never read and did not know of—wrote a letter which appeared in *The Times* to which one of my constituents drew my attention. At the end of the letter, the writer suggested that anyone who took a similar view should write to their Member of Parliament and an assiduous constituent of mine did so. The letter in *The Times* stated:

> "Whilst annuities can remain as the ultimate income provision for those who are security conscious there is no real reason in these days of investment sophistication why pension holders should ever have to annuitise their funds . . . The legal and practical objections to eliminating compulsory annuity purchase are quite slim. A tax adjustment could be made on the ultimate passing out of the pension fund to the family of a deceased member, if this were thought appropriate."

We can all identify some of the difficulties and we can all understand that as tax reliefs were given on pension contributions it is important that there is some assurance that the funds are used to fund pensions and not merely frittered away with the result that the individual goes on income support or whatever. It is clear that there must be some conditions. On the other hand, we must consider how there can be greater flexibility in the provision of pensions.

That is the interesting feature of basic pension plus. The proposal acknowledges the possibility that some of the funds may be passed on to the family when the owner dies. If that is accepted in that context, can it not also be accepted in considering personal pensions? I fully recognise the flexibility that has now been given to everyone with a personal pension in that it is not necessary to take a decision on the annuity on immediate retirement—the decision can be taken up to 75 years of age—but why not have some of the fund invested in equities from which the pension holder could draw, which at the end of the day would leave him with something to pass on to his heirs? Why should everything go to the insurance company in the annuity settlement?

That is an example of the issues that are opened up in basic pension plus. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Minister realised that I would pick up that point out of basic pension plus, but it seems that it is one that we must all take up.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): My right hon. Friend's remarks are fundamental. We need to refocus our minds on the nature of savings for retirement. The debate has been hijacked by the insurance industry by an historical accident. There is no tax relief unless

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

there is some form of insured vehicle. We need to do away with saving with insurance because now there can be virtually no difference in the risk between, for example, a good unit trust personal equity plan and an insured life policy.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, which I shall take up in a different context. If we wish to encourage—as we Conservatives do—families to build up resources for themselves that they can pass on to their children, there is another element to be considered. I hope that that will be reflected in the consultation on basic pension plus.

It has been made clear in basic pension plus that an individual will be able to invest additional money of his or her own in the new investment account. It is argued that one of the strengths of the scheme is that it will give everyone a fund to which he or she can add additional savings. The issue was elaborated on in response to the question whether it will still be possible to take out a personal pension. The answer read:

"You will be able to add your own savings to the new personal accounts or indeed a separate account with a different pension provider."

Will the additional savings that will be added to the account have to come from net relevant earnings as at present for any contribution to the pensions? I hope not. That is important when account is taken of the life styles and life patterns that we shall all have in work and generally. I hope that it will be possible for additional savings not to be related directly to earnings. Those are my two questions about basic pension plus.

I move on to groups who will not be affected by basic pension plus because they are too old, starting from 25-year-olds plus or whatever the age is— in other words, the issues of future pensions policy for the next 40 years for those not covered by basic pension plus.

We know that the whole occupational and personal pensions movement, which we as a Government have so strongly encouraged, has made a major contribution to the fact that pensioners now retire in a much more comfortable situation on average than was previously the case, and that there has been a 60 per cent. increase in real terms in their income during the period of the Conservative Government. However, in the next 20 to 30 years—in fact, almost immediately—we shall face two different challenges, the first of which is that of changing life patterns. People will change careers more often, for which personal pensions are clearly well attuned. Men and women—not just women bringing up families—will move in and out of work, by choice, at various periods during what would have been regarded in the past as their working life.

The second issue is that defined benefit schemes are declining, as a proportion of occupational pension schemes, in favour of money purchase schemes. I have predicted for some time that that would happen, but it is happening increasingly, particularly in companies with big occupational pension funds, which now say that all new employees will have a money purchase scheme. That pattern will develop not just because of pressures on companies but because it suits more correctly the career patterns and the movement in employment of future employees. However, it is likely that money purchase schemes will not provide the same benefits as occupational pension schemes have where, traditionally, people were fortunate enough to be in one occupation or company for most of their working life.

That leads me to a number of conclusions, but I shall mention only one or two today. The first is the need to continue to persuade people—particularly young people—of the importance of investing for their pensions at an early age. Most hon. Members will recognise that anybody who waits until he or she is 35 will have a much bigger challenge in providing enough for their retirement.

Mr. Frank Field: If the right hon. Gentleman is serious about getting people to save for their retirement, why do they have to wait until they start work before they start pension savings? Why cannot parents, godparents, aunts, uncles, and so on make contributions to such accounts? They need not be substantial, but it would start a saving habit.

Mr. MacGregor: Not for the first time, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am glad of his suggestion, because my next point is that we need to continue to encourage the investment of personal pensions and occupational schemes by means of up-front tax incentives. There is no up-front tax incentive for basic pension plus, but it will continue for voluntary occupational pension schemes. We need up-front tax incentives to encourage people to make provision for themselves. That is what was so worrying about the failure of the hon. Member for Peckham to answer the question, because that is what we need to continue to do.

Mr. Stephen: If there is not to be an up-front tax incentive, people will be making provision out of taxed income throughout their lives. Some people will not live long enough to enjoy their pensions and the fund that they have built up will have to be passed on—in many cases to somebody other than the surviving spouse. In those circumstances, is it not particularly important that more progress is made on eliminating inheritance tax, which is an iniquitous tax because it is a charge on resources that have already borne tax during life?

Mr. MacGregor: That is a separate argument from the one that I am trying to pursue. Therefore, I shall not go down the route of inheritance tax.

In the short time that I have studied basic pension plus, I have been persuaded that the skilful element in it is the change in the tax regime to overcome the double funding point. Although I accept it for that reason, it is important to have up-front tax incentives for occupational and personal pension schemes, because given the disincentive to so many people to start long-term savings while bringing up a family or whatever, such an incentive is needed to encourage them to do so. Changing the tax regime for those people along the same lines as basic pension plus would not work because the fact that they will get a tax-free pension at the end of their lifetime is no big deal when they are aged 25. The difference is that those schemes are voluntary and therefore people need encouragement, whereas basic pension plus will be compulsory.

Given people's life styles and the fact that they will be moving in and out of work—the hon. Member for Birkenhead pressed me on this point—it is important that

we break the link between pension arrangements and net relevant earnings. Of course a ceiling is needed, as there is with net relevant earnings, but there can be many situations in which the top-up can come for occupational pension contributions and personal pensions outwith earnings. It could be inheritance, a windfall, grandparents, investment income—a whole range of things. People might want to save very thoroughly for their pension and therefore eschew current spending and put any savings that they currently have into their pension.

We need to break that link if we are to ensure that adequate provision is made. That is why we should move towards something like a provision for retirement account that incorporates not only earnings but other income contributions. To keep it more tax neutral, I should have been perfectly happy to see the incentives for tax-exempt special savings accounts and personal equity plans withdrawn because they do not have the long-term nature that a provision for retirement account would have and which we need.

My last point relates to the European Union. It is widely acknowledged—I was glad to hear that the seminar that the hon. Member for Birkenhead and his Select Committee organised with European contributors recognise this too—that the United Kingdom is far ahead of nearly all our other European competitors in this context. The only country that might be a little ahead of us is the Netherlands. Other members of the European Union have massive, unfunded state pension liabilities. They have not taken the action that we have taken and which basic pension plus proposes, and their state liabilities would take them miles beyond the Maastricht criteria in terms of debt and so on.

It is always argued that under the treaty of Rome other member states do not have to contribute to the public expenditure provisions of other member states and therefore countries like the United Kingdom are protected from having to contribute to the massive unfunded state liabilities of Germany, France, Italy and elsewhere. If a single currency were to be introduced—I am a strong pro-European but a great cynic in regard to a single currency and will oppose it in the next Parliament—with the increasing movement towards single fiscal and expenditure policies, we would face a very serious issue in relation to the funding of those liabilities. I hope that that point will be addressed in the debates on the single currency in the months ahead.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State deserves the greatest credit for this major contribution to long-term thinking about pension policy.

6.27 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor). His knowledge and experience were ably demonstrated in his speech, and we will all rush out now to order copies of his pamphlet. No doubt it will repay careful study.

This has been a good debate. Like the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), I think that the Secretary of State judged the tone rather inaccurately at the beginning. In my experience, Adjournment debates often give people a chance to listen carefully to what we are saying to each other and to learn from what is said. What other people can bring to bear in these debates is very important and informs our views about how we can make progress in this very important subject.

I was a bit scared when I first saw these proposals, because they are so very far reaching. The only party political thing that I will say in the next 10 minutes is that I wondered why they were being introduced in this way and at this time. There was much suspicion, which has not yet been totally assuaged, that the Government were desperate for something to say and so introduced these plans almost overnight. It is important to me that I get some reassurance about that in the Minister's winding-up speech. The last thing that we should do is to rush precipitately into making these changes. If we get them wrong, the consequences could be terrible.

I support hon. Members who have said that we cannot go into a general election campaign talking only about the year 2030. It is right that we should consider the development of pensions provision and pensions reform in the middle to longer term, but we must be fair to the pensioners who are struggling to make ends meet today and make proper provision for them now before we start to provide for the middle to longer term.

Through my casework and from other experience I have lots of evidence that many of today's pensioners feel betrayed and let down. Previous Governments of both parties have made promises, but many pensioners' perception is that the "cradle to the grave" provision has casually been withdrawn: whether that is true or not, it is how they perceive it. The basic state pension was always considered to be a settled right available through national contributions to the state pension plan that has existed for many years. People are concerned that it will now be withdrawn without proper consideration.

In these debates, the Government always refer to the fact that the average income of pensioners has improved, and so it has. It has improved dramatically, and we know why. Occupational pensions have improved, which is good. If I have any criticism of the Government, it is that they always deny and run away from the fact that not everyone has enjoyed those average increases in the past five to 10 years. We must consider the problems facing current pensioners before we do anything else.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) made an interesting speech. He rightly came to the conclusion that a much better system of information is required for future provision of private pensions, so that people know what is facing them and can make informed choices.

Information should also be available to the one third of pensioners—about 1 million of them—who are currently eligible for income-related benefits but do not claim all the money to which they are entitled. About £1.2 billion of benefits does not get into the purses and wallets of current pensioners. Those people miss out on council tax benefit, income support, housing benefit and, when the weather is severe, as it usually is in Scotland during the winter, they also miss out on cold weather payments. Individually, they may be missing only small sums, perhaps £1 or £2 a week. Other pensioners may be determined not to claim income-related benefits because of the stigma attached to them, and I understand that.

Much more could be done to inform the 1 million pensioners who are missing out because of a lack of information, and because the process of claiming benefit is too difficult. If we do nothing else in this debate, we should at least recognise that that problem should be dealt

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

with as a matter of urgency. That would be a positive approach, and would deliver extra benefits to which people already have a legal entitlement.

I come across pensioners in my constituency who are struggling. They are over 75 or 85, usually single and the majority of them are women. Some of them face dire circumstances. Come the election, I anticipate that the Liberal Democrat manifesto will refer to a top-up pension for pensioners on income support premiums. We want to target provision in a way that is affordable through public expenditure, so as to give extra help to pensioners who are entitled to extra consideration, which is more than they are getting at the moment.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead rightly refers to the importance of trust, and to the bond of trust that should be established between the pensioner population and Governments. A recent example of a breach of that trust was the Government's handling of war pensions. Some terrible cases will result from the change to the rules on hearing loss. Many people with a serious hearing loss will no longer receive a war pension. There have been arguments about that. The people who really lose out are those who just fail to meet the criterion of a loss of 50 decibels. I do not believe that there was any case for changing the rules.

If the Government are so certain that what they are doing is right, they should listen to the Royal British Legion and the Royal National Institute for the Deaf. They both want a full scientific and medical review of the entitlement of war pensioners. Such issues chip away at the trust between pensioners and Governments.

We should not exaggerate the need for precipitate action. We are not in such a bad position as some other nations. I was interested in the final comment of the right hon. Member for South Norfolk. I know that his European credentials are—I nearly said as good as mine. If he believes that there is a problem with unfunded pensions, I am willing to reconsider the matter. Some other European countries may require to deal with the problem urgently, but there is no immediate panic for us to do so.

A graph in the recent edition of *The Economist* shows percentage pension costs in relation to gross national product. The trend demonstrates that there is no great problem in Britain in the middle term. Indeed, the graph is headed, "No problem for Britain". We should not be complacent, but we do have a little time to sort out some of these problems. It is a frightening thought that, if basic pension plus were implemented, Britain would be the only country outside Latin America with a pension system entirely privately funded. We must be a bit careful about getting from where we are now to where we want to be.

I do not deny that the proposals have some merit, and we shall examine them in greater detail. But how can we be certain that the basic pension plus scheme will lead to an increase in savings? The Government seem to argue in their documentation that, by personalising pensions, the habit of saving will be encouraged. However, the fear is that the tax changes that are part of the plan could discourage savings. The basic rate taxpayer would get, roughly speaking, £24 from the Exchequer for every £76 contributed. Pension contributions would come out of taxed income, but pension payments would not be taxed. Someone aged 20 or 30 may be tempted to boost his pension contributions by tax relief available to him today, but it is much harder to persuade a 20-year-old—my children are not yet 20—or any young person getting into the system that tax relief in 2030 is an attractive prospect. That is a problem.

I am also concerned about the impact of the tax changes. By switching the tax system, we could—I put it no higher than that—be directing tax relief at people who are at the richer end of the pension income group. People might retire better off, while managing to pay almost no tax. That is one of my key worries, not just in this context but generally. I am worried about the way in which the position appears to be skewed to the benefit of those with more rather than those with less.

My third concern relates to the way in which private pension schemes might behave under the new regime. We have had interesting exchanges today about past pension misselling, and I understand all that; but how can we be certain that the administrative charges for basic pension plus can be driven below the 20 per cent. of contributions that is typical of some existing personal pension schemes? If they do not fall by enough, will the Government be able to find ways of driving those high costs down?

A further difficulty is that the Government are creating what I understand economists call "moral hazard" in the introduction of a minimum pension guarantee. How will the Government discourage investment managers from making riskier investments than they would otherwise make, safe in the knowledge that the Government will bail them out? The technical note accompanying the basic pension plus pack states that the Government will discuss with the pensions industry any appropriate restrictions to guard against exploitation of the Government guarantee. Moreover, we are told that legislation might have to be introduced to require scheme managers to publish, and to be responsible for adhering to, a statement based on prudent investment principles. Investors would be expected to disregard the existence of the Government guarantee in investment decisions.

Drafting such legislation, let alone enforcing it—trying to prove in court that someone has acted improperly in making an investment decision—would be a difficult if not impossible task. I understand that I am going into the small print, but, in the case of some of these schemes, the devil is in the detail.

Finally, I am worried about the stance that the National Association of Pension Funds has taken. Like everyone else, I am determined to encourage the future development of proper occupational schemes with a "final salary" element. Such schemes are invaluable. They have served the nation well in the past and have stood the test of time, and I do not wish to do anything—certainly not under these basic pension plus provisions—that would strike at the heart of those schemes. The Government will have to deal with the issue. If the objections of the National Association of Pension Funds were sustained, my view of what the Government's scheme means in the long term would be prejudiced.

The Government have a duty to try to persuade people like my hon. Friends and myself that the scheme will not lead to retirement incomes becoming inordinately vulnerable to the vagaries of financial markets. I am thinking of the whole issue of money purchase, and the risks involved. The stock market can go up or down. We have seen the background papers, and we know some

of the Government's working assumptions, and I am certain that it will have to be studied further before final conclusions can be made; but I believe that there is a real risk that the Government's plans will lead to more inequality in pension incomes.

The gap between rich and poor pensioners has widened significantly in the past 10 or 15 years, which is worrying. I do not think that the position of part-time and low-paid workers, and the issue of means testing, have been explicitly and properly addressed, and I feel that all these matters will have to be examined in far more detail before we can be persuaded that it would be right to abandon the universal state retirement pension scheme, occupational pension schemes and the other schemes that have benefited people to date.

I am certainly willing to enter into a debate about the issues. I think that we must all put our party political ideologies aside when we are discussing the mid to long-term future of pensions reform. We need a system that will stand the test of time and survive changes of Government—a scheme that will take us into the next 15, 20 or 30 years. We are willing to take part in a debate in that spirit, as long as we secure a system that can deal with the problems in the mid to long term, and a political consensus that will survive. That is the most important goal that we must strive to achieve in the weeks and months of debate that will rightly follow the publication of the Government's plans.

6.44 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I shall try to be fairly brief, in order not to trespass on others' time.

I welcome this timely and interesting debate. Having sat through all of it so far, I have found all the speeches interesting, and have learnt a great deal already. It is good for the House as a whole to have effective opportunities to influence the development of long-term policies, and I hope that the usual channels in both this Parliament and the next will strive to ensure that we have many more timely debates on pensions policy.

I will not comment in detail on many of the interesting points that have been made, but I shall make a couple of comments. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) said many fascinating things, but I was particularly struck by what he said in passing at the end of his speech about the strong case for tax neutrality in the encouragement of all forms of personal savings. A simple tax-free allowance of, say, £10,000 per person per year should be introduced, about which, under the law, the taxman need not know anything, provided that the saving was made in the full range of approved savings—personal, institutional or of any other kind. Such a scheme—which has been suggested by many people who are wiser than me—would encourage an aggregate approach to personal savings, rather than displacement from one category to another. That would also be useful in the context of self-assessment.

Listening to another interesting speech, that of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), I could not help thinking that one of the dilemmas involved in the whole area of pensions policy is that many people who are retiring now are either asset-rich and income-poor—hence all the schemes for reverse mortgages to help people meet the cost of long-term care by exploiting the capital value of their principal asset, the family home—or, in the case of the poorest 30 per cent., both assetless and income-poor. The House should be concerned about such people, and never forget their needs, as well as the needs of the more prosperous section of the population. The challenge for the longer term is to bring about circumstances, by the middle of the next century, in which those who retire have both assets and adequate income. That ideal should be the benchmark for any longer-term schemes.

I want to ask three main questions. First, how can we best look after the interests of today's generation of pensioners? A number of speakers have made that point. Secondly, how can we best address the needs of pensioners in the middle decades of the 21st century, in view of the demographic projections and the outlook for public finances? As we all know, much of the problem is due to the difficulty of persuading taxpayers to part with enough money to finance a pay-as-you-go system. Thirdly, how can we organise the transition from where we are now to where we hope to be between 2040 and 2060?

Over the past 18 to 20 years, we have had a coherent strategy for pensioners, based on three main pillars. First, we have maintained the real value of the state pension in relation to prices overall. Secondly, we have encouraged younger people to make their own provision for retirement, with the result that the majority of existing pensioners have done so. Thirdly, we have focused extra financial help on the poorest pensioners, and those in the greatest need. Those happen to be Conservative principles, but I am glad to say that they command widespread support on both sides of the House.

The strategy has had successful results. Between 1979 and 1994–95, the average incomes of pensioners have risen by nearly two thirds from all income sources. Almost nine out of 10 recently retired pensioners have incomes in addition to the state pension, and nearly two thirds of all pensioners have incomes from occupational pensions. That compares with about two fifths in 1979. In view of my earlier remarks, it is gratifying to note that the proportion of pensioners in the poorest decile has fallen from about 35 per cent. in 1979 to about 18 per cent. in 1991–92, the latest full year for which I have seen figures.

Despite the achievements there is a strong case, which I have put to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor several times, for a well-targeted increase in the state pension for the oldest pensioners who form the cohort that is most likely to be poor and in need and who may be too proud to claim means-tested income support to top up their low incomes. My proposal, which I shall briefly outline again, is that everyone born in or before November 1921—to take the example that would have applied at the last Budget—should have a sizeable increase in the state pension. For example, in round figures it should be £90 a week for a single person and £120 a week for a couple.

The attraction of such a proposal, apart from its simplicity and its natural justice, is that it would be a limited public expenditure commitment which, by definition, would decline over time. Clearly, if it is linked to the date of birth, the scheme has a diminishing impact on public finances. I asked the Library to supply figures and yesterday I was told that the net cost rather than the gross cost—obviously in such a calculation, one must

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

look at the net cost because of the impact on income support—would be £3.3 billion in the first year. For the reasons that I have given, it would decline in subsequent years.

Secondly, the scheme that I have sketched would be a sensible recognition of the fact that the most elderly pensioners tend to be those who are most likely to depend solely on the state pension and/or income support. Thirdly, I know from my mailbag that it would be much appreciated and that it is truly needed by the cohort of pensioners to whom we all owe so much. They are the people who participated on the home front or in the forces in the second world war and, relatively speaking, they feel that they have been left behind compared with the younger cohort of pensioners who came after them. There is a legitimate sense of concern and grievance which in natural justice we need to address.

Mr. Leigh: What research has my hon. Friend carried out on pensioners who were born in or before 1921 who are relatively well-off? Apart from the high initial cost of the scheme, there is surely no point in spending £3 billion or a large proportion of that amount on people who are already well looked after and well funded because they were able to provide for themselves in their old age.

Mr. Forman: I am not sure what proportion of the age cohort that I have mentioned is well-off according to my hon. Friend's definition. We would need to have a long discussion about what constitutes being well-off. In the context of large sums of public expenditure, I would prefer to see this approach to looking after a deserving cohort in our population in preference to some other uses of comparable amounts of public money. We should need to examine the matter further to see how many super-rich people there are in that category. Of course, if the extra pensions that I have mentioned went to people such as Lord Hanson, as the pension is taxable, the state would claw some back. However, I do not want to spend too much time on that: I prefer to rush to the second part of my contribution and speak about the principles underlying the excellent scheme that has been proposed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

I welcome the Secretary of State's initiative for a basic pension plus. It is an example of the way in which the Government are still generating all the most constructive ideas in British politics. They are still following a Conservative agenda and, as the Secretary of State has said, Ministers are responsibly and thoughtfully directing their attention to the longer term. The challenges that lie ahead derive essentially from demographic projections of an aging population. In a sense, those problems are to be seen in the figures and the only consolation is that the projections suggest that we are likely to be affected less seriously than some comparable countries.

Secondly, as the House knows, the worsening nature of the dependency ratio suggests that whereas five working people were contributing to the support of one pensioner in the late 1940s when the present arrangements were introduced, by the year 2030 it is projected that five working people will have to support three pensioners. Plainly, that is a significant change in the dependency ratio.

Those factors also need to be considered alongside the significant changes in the labour market to which hon. Members have referred. Those seem likely to make it more difficult to sustain pensions based on traditional assumptions, which could classically be described as people working a 45-hour week for 45 years in full-time employment. That pattern of the labour market is disappearing fast. In such future circumstances it must be right to move away from the precarious basis of intergenerational transfers based upon the pay-as-you-go system to a funded system that is similar to the one proposed by the Secretary of State. That is the approach that was originally advocated by William Beveridge at a time when most people lived no more than three to five years beyond state retirement age. Therefore, how much more necessary will it be to have a funded personal system in the decades to come when the average length of retirement will be about twice or thrice as long as it was in the late 1940s?

In principle, the Secretary of State is right to pursue the line that he has suggested. I hope that it will have all-party support in the years ahead because that is essential for such a system to work satisfactorily.

Lastly, I should like to speak about how to organise the transition. In such matters the devil is often in the detail, but another form of devil is often found in negotiating the difficult transitional arrangements. It is vital to ensure that the transition from one system to the other is comprehensible, fair and affordable. That is especially important because the transitional generation, if I may call it that—those entering the labour market in the early years of the next century—will have to pay twice: once on the current basis to support the pensions of those of us who will then be pensioners, and again on the funded basis to pay for their own new pensions.

I stress the importance to those people of three factors. The first is the long and gradual phasing-in of the new scheme, which is essential. The second is the degree of burden sharing that will be involved in the role of taxpayers in helping to finance the shortfall in national insurance contributions, which is implied in the promised rebates and in the ingenious switch in the tax treatment of pension contributions. That will make it easier to finance and to offer the benefit of pension income, which will be tax free to the recipients. All that has not been sufficiently brought out in the debate or in earlier debates. We are debating a partnership to help to finance the transition from one system to another.

The third essential element is rigorous and reliable regulation of the pension providers to prevent the risk of misselling on which we in the Select Committee on the Treasury recently took evidence. We must also try to work against excessive charging, which has been such a bane of the pensions industry in recent years.

The Secretary of State's proposals will need to be subjected to a great deal of further debate and consultation in the months and years ahead. They are an admirable start to what will need to be a long and sustained transition to a new, funded system which, when fully in place, will prove to be more generous and reliable and a real asset to the nation in terms of investment, economic growth and real security in old age.

6.58 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I welcome the opportunity to take part in a debate about future pensions policy, but, of course, we can look at such matters in

different ways. The debate, which has been promoted by the Government, has so far been about the continuing destruction of the universal welfare state and the promotion of the interests of private insurance companies and pension providers.

That systematic theme has run through Government policy for the past 18 years, and I hope that 1 May will bring some liberation from the gobbledegook of market economics that has dominated this country throughout that period. [*Laughter.*] Conservative Members may laugh, but of course they may not be here after 1 May, anyway.

Yesterday afternoon, I had the great privilege of attending the Greater London Forum for the Elderly annual meeting. Members of Parliament from three parties were there: the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), a Conservative Member, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), a Liberal Democrat, and myself. We were joined later by my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), who gave a speech.

At the meeting, which was large and extremely representative of pensioner forums in every one of the 32 London boroughs, the forum put forward its manifesto for London's pensioners. Those people have given their working lives in all sorts of areas, including working at home caring for people, working in factories and administration. They are seriously concerned about the lot and plight of pensioners, so they argued for a new Greater London authority, which they thought would at least give some opportunity for promoting pensioners' interests. They argued specifically for the restoration of the link of the state pension with earnings, which I support, for the preservation of the state earnings-related pension scheme, and points relating to cold weather payments, zero rating of domestic fuel and concessionary television licences.

There was much discussion about the problems of community care, hospital services, travel permits, environmental planning, housing, leisure facilities, education and the need for pensioners to be able to lobby effectively to achieve their aims. Pensioners need to be able to put forward their case and demands.

What ran through the manifesto was a revulsion at the consensus among so many broadsheet newspapers and on television that all that matters is getting rid of the existing state pension scheme and bringing in a private scheme. The forum's voice was unreported yesterday, so I am using this opportunity to convey the sense of anger and outrage among older people about the way in which they have been treated—they the generation who brought in the welfare state.

Mr. Heald: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that he should not try to put forward a case which is not true—that the earnings link would be restored and SERPS rebuilt under Labour? He talks about people being liberated in May. That is not the policy of his Front-Bench team, is it?

Mr. Corbyn: I said that we would be liberated from the Tory Government on 1 May, and that we shall be. However, the Minister should be aware that the Labour party is committed to a process of statutory consultation with pensioner organisations, which the Government have never done. Indeed, I understand that they have often refused to meet the National Pensioners Convention or to have serious discussions with it. The idea of giving Jack Jones just 10 minutes in an office somewhere is outrageous.

Mr. Heald: I have met Jack Jones.

Mr. Corbyn: I am sure you have met him and I hope you learned something from it, or I hope the Minister learned something from it—I exclude you from that, Madam Speaker.

May I quote from figures produced by the Department of Social Security on pensioner poverty? In 1979, after housing costs, 21 per cent. of pensioner couples and 12 per cent. of single pensioner households had incomes that were less than half the UK average. In 1993, the comparable figures were 25 per cent. of pensioner couples and 33 per cent. of single pensioner households. Those figures are from the households below average income statistical analysis produced by the Minister's Department. They demonstrate what has happened in past years because of Government strategy.

In 1975, Labour Government legislation linked the state pension with earnings or prices, whichever rose the higher during each year, and every April an increase came through. The same legislation also brought in SERPS, which meant that everyone either was in an occupational pension scheme in work or had access to SERPS, which credited people who were in part-time work or whatever else. It meant that pensioners could look forward to some security in retirement and a share in any rising national prosperity, to the extent that, by 1980, the state pension was around 24 per cent. of average earnings. The SERPS formula meant that many others coming into retirement, then and later, would get some decency in retirement.

In 1980, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer broke the link with earnings and substituted instead the retail prices index. In his autobiography, he called that measure his greatest single achievement. I do not know how he measures his own achievements, but to call breaking the link with earnings an achievement is wrong. Had the link been kept, the current state pension would be £82.25 per week, or £21 per week more than at present.

The Government claim that their legislation has ensured that pensioners are better off. I sat through the miserable experience of the 1986 legislation, which was promoted by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), by the Prime Minister and the hon. Member for Selkirk and lots of other places.

Mr. Kirkwood: Roxburgh.

Mr. Corbyn: Sorry—Roxburgh and lots of other places.

Mr. Kirkwood: Berwickshire.

Mr. Corbyn: Indeed, and many more besides, I am sure.

The hon. Gentleman was also on that Committee, and he will remember two features about it. One was the highly questionable actuarial evidence that was put forward for reducing the value of SERPS. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who was leading for the Labour party, pointed out that that nonsense was being put forward to promote the private

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pension industry and that it would cost us all dear in the end. Many people have suffered from missold pensions as a result of that legislation. I would like them to hear the warnings that were given by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West and my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) during consideration of that legislation.

By reducing the value of SERPS, the Government have created a market for the private pension scheme and their policies have led to the misselling of pensions. We come therefore to the legislation that is being proposed—it is not legislation but a policy, because there is no opportunity for such legislation to be introduced. Indeed, come 1 May, I sincerely hope that the proposal from the Secretary of State for Social Security will be consigned to the dustbin of history. Someone doing a PhD in the next century might dredge up this debate and discover that someone actually proposed privatising the entire pension industry.

That concept has its origin in Jose Pinera, who was a Minister in the fascist Government in Chile, which privatised the national insurance system, and who now goes around the world making a great deal of money for himself addressing seminars on the promotion of the private pension industry. As my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham has said, private pension schemes, oversold and heavily sold, increasingly rely on heavy management costs, huge commissions for those that sell them and, above all, huge advertising budgets to compete with other pension schemes. Call that efficiency? Call that an effective use of resources? Call that a guarantee for the future? It is the opposite of that and Conservative Members know it.

Mr. Heald: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the Alexander Clay report that showed that 99 per cent. of those people are better off than in SERPS?

Mr. Corbyn: Some of those people may temporarily be better off in those schemes than in SERPS. The reason is that the Government devalued SERPS to create the market for such schemes in the first place. The Minister knows that and he knows that that actuarial evidence, put forward in 1986, was deeply flawed.

May I quote from an interesting letter that appeared in *The Guardian* on 7 March from Professor Peter Townsend of the university of Bristol? It said:

"According to a report on privatisation by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, there is little evidence that promises have been delivered"—

this is in relation to privatising pensions as proposed by the Adam Smith Institute.

"In Chile the privatisation of pensions has resulted in only 52 per cent. of the workforce being covered for benefits. And many of these 'will end up with acquired benefits less than the guaranteed minimum'."

There is heavy selling of the idea of privatising pensions throughout the world by the International Monetary Fund and the World bank. Many people will rue the day that they agreed to go down that road.

The arguments for the privatisation of pensions are fundamentally flawed. One is that the promotion of a private enterprise market solution to the so-called pensions problem creates security, prosperity and a beneficial society. The compulsion element in it means that, in effect, everyone becomes a compulsory shareholder in a lottery, rather than a payer of tax and national insurance, with a guarantee, through a properly run welfare state, of the elimination of poverty in retirement. Having created poverty among pensioners by devaluing SERPS and the state pension, the Government are forcing people to choose a market solution, in which they know there is no guarantee whatever of the elimination of the poverty that the Government themselves have created.

The argument that the welfare state and the pension system are no longer affordable has been exploded by many people. For example, the recent article by Malcolm Crawford, a consultant economist and former business editor of *The Sunday Times*, talked about the "big pensions lie". It points out that the demographic time bomb is not that huge or serious—that has been well documented by many people. Behind all that is something more sinister.

Mr. Flynn: I wonder whether my hon. Friend, in his wide reading, has read the book by the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). It is called "The Age of Entitlement". The hon. Member for Havant may need to be reminded that the book describes the vast exaggeration of the demographic time bomb by a Government who wish to change pensions policy and were taking advantage of it.

Mr. Corbyn: I do read very widely, but not that widely. I often visit the bookstalls at stations such as Waterloo or Euston, and I am always looking for remaindered copies. I am sure that it will not be long before there is a pile of that book selling for £1 along with non-pulped copies of Charles Dickens's novels. I will get both and see which is the most interesting.

To return to the cost of pensions, there is a moral argument. The generation that is now in receipt of the state pension or an occupational pension is the generation that campaigned for and achieved the principle of a universal welfare state in the post-war period. There was the Beveridge report, and the idea of full employment and the elimination of poverty. The people of that generation achieved perhaps the single most important landmark piece of legislation in this country when they introduced the National Assistance Act 1948. It essentially worked on the principle that society as a whole is responsible for the welfare of each and every one of the people in it.

There was the idea of universal benefits, a universal welfare state, a universal education system and the provision of housing to ensure that there was an end to homelessness. It was a brilliant concept and a fantastic achievement. People of that generation ask me and others of the age group of many hon. Members how we can allow those achievements to be destroyed on the altar of market economics.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman will recall that Beveridge proposed a funded system. Is his objection to a funded system, or to a privatised system? For example, would he accept a proposal from the Labour Front Bench to do away with the pay-as-you-go pension, which is not

providing adequate support for our pensioners, and to proceed to a properly funded system which is not run by private companies? Would he support that?

Mr. Corbyn: My objection is that we will all pay more for less security to promote the interests of private insurance companies, as has happened in Chile. That is the basis of the Government's proposals. We have a pay-as-you-go system in this country which it has been misclaimed is no longer sustainable or affordable. The work by John Hills of the London School of Economics and many others has pointed out that it is affordable if we are prepared to accept the moral issue, which is that we should pay for it.

Germany has a national pensions scheme, independent to some extent of central Government. As a result, pensions are much higher. Many other European countries have much higher pensions as a result of more enlightened social policies. We are heading for what I can describe only as the worst of all worlds. I do not believe that the present system is unsustainable. It is made unsustainable by the principle that one charges so little in taxation at a corporate level and to the richest in society that it becomes unaffordable. We are then blaming the poorest people for the lack of affordability of the pensions system. We should accept the principles surrounding the welfare state.

A number of themes run through social security debates. First, there is the applicability of benefits. This Government more than any other have gone against the principle of universal benefits and moved towards means-tested benefits. The state pension costs 1.1 per cent. of its value to administer. It is universally applied and universally payable and is welcomed by those who receive it—it should be considerably higher. Income support, which is means-tested, costs 10.2 per cent. of its value to administer. A funded pensions scheme costs at least 25 per cent. of its value to administer. I cannot give the figures for every private scheme, but they are all somewhere of that order.

The most ludicrous of all benefits is the social fund, which costs 61 per cent. of its value to administer. In other words, two thirds of its value is spent telling people that they cannot have anything from it. We should think seriously about the effectiveness of benefits such as pensions as well as the efficiency with which they are administered.

We are told that, in the proposed Valhalla of private pensions, we will end up with market efficiency in which a quarter of the entire value goes in commission and administrative charges.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was here earlier when I intervened on the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), but I said that one of the main advantages of basic pension plus is that the market will drive charges down. As I said earlier, I was with one of the main pension providers at lunchtime today. It estimates that it can provide pensions at 0.5 per cent. of the fund's value—nowhere near the 20 per cent. to which the hon. Gentleman referred. What is more, it estimates that the top-up element can be done for nothing.

Mr. Corbyn: In the interests of transparency in public debate, the hon. Gentleman should tell us with whom he had lunch, where he had lunch, who paid for it and what he ate, as well as any relationship he may have with that company in the future. There are serious concerns that Government policy is heavily influenced by the wishes of the private pensions lobby.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: I have no interest in the company whatsoever. It specifically said that it wanted to remain anonymous because a commercial interest is involved. The company does not wish its competitors to know who it is.

Mr. Corbyn: That sounds like a very anodyne and anonymous lunch. I should like to hear a little more about it because we need to know about the pressures being used.

Ms Abbott: Conservative Members talk about market pressures forcing charges down. Does my hon. Friend agree that does not apply to any other aspect of the financial services market? Market pressures have not forced down the cost of mortgages or any other such product. Is not that just wishful thinking on the part of the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton–Brown), or is it moonshine?

Mr. Corbyn: I think "moonshine" would be an appropriate description. There is no evidence that a plethora of pension companies competing with one another, with lots of people in little offices doing the same work, is an efficient use of human resources.

One of the colleagues of the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) once tried to tell me at a radio station that the most efficient thing that could happen to the Post Office would be the introduction of competition, so that, instead of one person delivering letters in a street, there would be two or three. I do not think that that is an efficient use of resources, any more than having dozens of pension companies. Surely it would be better to have a more rational system which would ensure that everybody gets a pension. What we have is a plethora of companies ensuring that not everybody gets a pension.

The arguments about the cost of pensions are set out in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report. Under the Government's current policy, with which I do not agree, pension expenditure in 1995 was 4.5 per cent. of GDP. By 2030 that would rise to only 5.5 per cent. If wage indexation was introduced, it would rise to 7.8 per cent. and only if there was later retirement would it fall to 3.4 per cent. Those are not particularly big increases when one looks at the social benefit of eliminating poverty among older people within our society as opposed to the ideology of the market.

Other countries have much higher pensions and will be spending more, but in Germany, with wage indexation, the percentage of GDP would rise from 11.1 per cent. to 16.5 per cent. I believe that the argument that there are huge unfunded pension liabilities all over Europe, which has been promoted by many people, is part of the promotion of the private pensions industry. It is heavily suggested by quasi-academic journals, which claim that the current welfare state is unaffordable because they all have a vested interest in proving that to be the case.

There are arguments across Europe over the welfare state. The Maastricht criteria on the single currency require public expenditure cuts and an attack on the

[Mr. Corbyn]

welfare state, and promote the type of privatisation policy that we have been debating today. Many people in the United Kingdom—such as those I was with yesterday, at the Greater London Forum for the Elderly—benefited from the principles of a universal welfare state, and they will not allow the issues to fade away or the welfare state to be destroyed.

Consider the disputes, demonstrations and opposition to cuts in Germany, Italy, Spain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Those demonstrators were in the generation that lived through the second world war and saw the d[illegible]ion it caused, and they wanted to ensure a secure s[illegible]uture—hence the development of the welfare state. They are now demonstrating and trying to defend that principle. If we go down the road of privatising pensions and other aspects of the welfare state, exactly the same debate will occur here, although much more keenly.

The public mood dictates that poverty should be eliminated among all our citizens. Many people find it offensive to see older people in supermarkets late on a Saturday afternoon waiting to buy cheap, out-of-date food. No one should have to live like that, but in modern Britain they do. It is wrong, and it is immoral. I for one am prepared to stand up for the principle of a universal welfare state.

7.20 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I do not think that anyone could argue that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) does not demonstrate a consistency and a coherency in his argument that are lacking in Opposition Front Benchers. However, I cannot agree with his faith in the virtues of monopoly provision or in the beneficence of the state's organisation of services, because the history of the United Kingdom and of comparable European countries has shown the folly of doing so.

In his peroration, the hon. Member overlooked the fact that people are out on the streets in Italy, Germany and elsewhere in western Europe because their Governments are, belatedly and with great difficulty, trying to grapple with the problems anticipated a decade ago by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and his colleagues in government. We are able to cope better than our European neighbours with the demographic and social trends we share with them, because my right hon. Friend and his colleagues were ready to take the difficult decisions then and did not try to postpone them, hoping that they would somehow go away and not have to be faced.

I agreed with the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) about the sense of betrayal felt by some elderly people. They feel that they have been contributing through their national insurance contributions for many years, but that the contract which they believed was in place is not being honoured. One of the chief arguments in favour of a shift towards a fully funded pension system, as advocated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, is that it would place pension funding on an honest basis for the first time since the second world war.

As the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said, both parties have led people to believe that they would receive something that was entirely dependent on the readiness of future Governments and generations of taxpayers to deliver. I do not think that Governments of either party have acted in a spirit of malice, but they did not anticipate future demographic trends or the attitudes of future generations of taxpayers. They also did not anticipate the rising expectations of generations of pensioners, who saw the higher living standards that their contemporaries at work gained through their earnings

Today, hon. Members on both sides of the House have said that, with such an important reform, it is critically important that we get it right, and that we do not rush to legislate before the ground has been carefully prepared. I agree, and I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State's announcement presaged a Green Paper later this year and full consultation of all interested parties before we move on to a White Paper and a Bill.

I hope that we can achieve the greatest possible cross-party agreement on any eventual legislation, as we did when passing the Pensions Act 1995, after the disaster of the Maxwell scandal. If such reform is to last for the length of time that we envisage it will, it is important to have that agreement among hon. Members, regardless of party affiliation.

The basic pension plus scheme is good, because it is an honest way of funding pensions. It is right for the Government to continue to guarantee the safety net of a minimum pension, and it is right to have an element of compulsion in saving.

I was sorry to hear the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) criticise the Government's statement that, under the scheme, there would be choice in pension providers. An element of competition will breed a desire to attract customers, and therefore to provide a better service—including lower charges, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said. In our history since the second world war, there have been too many examples of monopolies that have been established for very well-intentioned reasons but which have ultimately delivered fifth-rate services and been operated in the interests of the organisation itself rather than in the interests of those they were created to serve.

Whereas our European neighbours are still grappling with how to trim their pledges and to deal with their taxpayers' readiness to finance such pledges in future, we are attempting to ensure that future generations receive higher and more adequate retirement income levels than those currently provided under the basic state retirement pension.

Although I welcome the principle of the scheme announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I should like to raise a couple of issues that I hope will be addressed in the Green Paper and afterwards.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) raised the first issue, which is how we can ensure that both the current generation of workers and those who take part in the pension plus scheme save at levels that are adequate to ensure themselves a relatively comfortable retirement.

If we are not careful, there will be a risk that new entrants to the pension plus scheme who sign up in their 20s will complacently assume that that is all they have to do. They may assume that their compulsory contributions will be put to one side and invested on their behalf,

and will consequently guarantee sufficient retirement income to support the life style that they expect at the end of their working lives.

People taking part in pension plus will probably need to be encouraged to make additional provision for their retirement on top of what is invested on their behalf through the state scheme. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) and others that it would be helpful if we introduced a simplified tax treatment of long-term savings products so that people could be encouraged to make such provision, and in a way that best suited their circumstances throughout their working life. That might provide a solution which would assure the new members of the work force of the standard of living they would want.

The present generation of workers is going to have to pay twice. The hon. Member for Peckham said that in terms of horror, as if it was a wicked Government plot. In fact, it is a statement of the obvious. If we are to move towards a funded pension system, it is inevitable that at least one generation of workers will have to pay twice. If that key decision is taken, the political debate needs to focus on how we phase in the new arrangements and try to ensure that adequate provision is made for the current generation, who will, by definition, not be participating in the basic pension plus scheme.

The question-and-answer brief issued by the Department refers to the possibility that the basic pension plus scheme might be extended beyond the category of newcomers to the work force for whom it is intended. One question reads:

"Can I join this new scheme?"

The Department's answer is:

"Our plan is to phase the scheme in gradually so that it is affordable. However, it may prove possible, if finances and growth permit, to extend the scheme up the age range."

I would be interested in anything that the Under–Secretary of State can say later to throw greater light on that matter.

Above all, if we are to look after the current generation of workers, we need to make sure that we keep in place the tax incentives for saving, particularly for contributions towards occupational pension schemes to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield rightly drew the House's attention. I, too, was very disturbed to hear from the hon. Member for Peckham what I interpreted as an implicit threat that a putative Labour Government would seek to trim, or even withdraw altogether, existing tax incentives for pension contributions.

As many hon. Members have said, as well as trying to make sure that people save over and above what is provided by the compulsory element of the proposed new scheme, we need to look carefully at the quality of regulation and advice available. I have read the minutes of the evidence given recently by the Personal Investment Authority to the Treasury Select Committee. I found the PIA's performance and attitude unsatisfactory.

While it is certainly true that rules are in place to ensure that anyone who is proved to have been missold a personal pension is properly compensated, the PIA and other organisations with responsibilities in this sphere seem to have been going about their work far too sluggishly. I am therefore pleased that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary is now knocking heads together and trying to get action taken more speedily.

When the new system is set up, there will clearly need to be rules covering investments by approved organisations. We do not want to end up repeating the mistakes of the United States, where the Government's guarantee underwriting the savings and loans schemes led to silly, risky decisions being taken by some of those organisations because they knew that, at the end of the day, the taxpayer would step in and mop up the mess.

Some framework of regulation will clearly be needed. It could relate to the balance of portfolios held by the approved organisations. I am attracted by the proposal of the hon. Member for Birkenhead for a reserve fund, financed by the institutions, to guarantee against loss.

Perhaps we could also consider some guaranteed minimum level that would be promised to pensioners over and above the basic pension underwritten by the Government. Perhaps the institutions themselves could guarantee at least a minimum level of bonus pension, so that we could not only assure pensioners of a decent standard of living in retirement but protect taxpayers against too many people falling back on that ultimate Government safety net.

The quality of advice also needs to be improved. As a newly elected Member of Parliament in 1992, I was faced with many constituents who were victims of the Maxwell scandal. I vividly recall how difficult it was to explain to men and women in their 70s and 80s who were not accustomed to dealing with financial institutions how this disaster had come about, and what the Government and the various regulatory authorities were doing to try to recoup their pensions.

I shall give one example of the problems. Every month, the trustees of the pension funds would write to pensioners and, in accordance with their legal duty, say that, because of the uncertainties about the fate of the Maxwell empire, there could be no guarantee that they would be able to make further pension payments after that month. In fact, Members of Parliament who were talking to the trustees of the institutions knew that there was enough money in the bank to ensure that pensions could continue to be paid for a reasonable period, at least while things were sorted out, but the law insisted that such a statement was made by the trustees every month.

That placed elderly people under the most appalling stress. People came to see me who did not know how to cope with what they feared would be the removal, at the drop of a hat, of their chief source of income other than the basic state pension. We therefore need to ensure that people are given advice in language that they can easily understand, so that they can make well-informed decisions.

My final comment relates to Europe. I agree with every word that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk said. If there were to be a currency union in western Europe, which would imply common rules on borrowing and a single Union-wide rate of interest, the additional borrowings needed to cover the cost of unfunded pension liabilities on the continent would inevitably have consequences in this country, even if they were experienced only indirectly, in the form of higher interest and mortgage rates than would otherwise be the case. The Government need to consider that carefully and in detail.

7.38 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): We were delighted to hear what could well be a new Tory slogan for the forthcoming campaign—"Vote Tory and Pay Twice". That would be at least as effective as the lion with conjunctivitis and the handsome photographs of Labour's best asset—our leader—that the Conservatives are kindly putting on posters throughout London. Both pictures have the words "New Labour" above them. Most people conclude that both posters are paid for by the Labour party. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) has told us frankly that the Government's proposals mean that to vote Tory is to vote for paying twice.

I appreciate the reasonable nature of the debate, but it is extraordinary how rare it is for us to be debating pensions. Four of my hon. Friends and I put down a motion when we debated our salaries recently suggesting forging an unbreakable link between our pay and the level of the basic pension. It seems reasonable that the pay of the poorest in the land should be linked to the pay of those in this House, where I understand that there are 200 millionaires. If we had established that link, it would have been impossible to fund the unreasonable pay rises that the House voted itself recently, but it would have had the beneficial effect of concentrating the attention of the House on the level of the basic pension. If our income were tied to that of the poorest pensioners, instead of a debate caused by a death-bed move by the Government, we would have constant, lively interest in the issue.

It is difficult to take the Government's proposal seriously. The subject is enormously serious and we must tackle it, but the Government's proposal is another death-bed gasp from a Government who have had a lifetime of sin. We do not expect them to be experienced in virtue in their dying days. This incompetent proposal will shortly be forgotten. What can we expect of a guarantee from a party that will be in opposition for a long time?

I have an example of how hopelessly confused the proposal is. The Government are contradicting their own words, not over a period of years, months or even days, but in one day. The proposal hangs by the thread of the great promise headlined in many papers of a £175-a-week pension in 2040. A written answer appeared today from the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for North Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), making the basis of that figure clear to me and to my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). The Minister said that it would represent 26 per cent. of average earnings in 2040. A similar answer was printed in *Hansard* a few days ago.

I have collected my late mail in the past two hours and received a charming letter from the Minister, saying:

"I am sorry that, in the haste to answer the large number of Questions"—

poor man—

"you tabled . . . about the Government's proposed new scheme . . . one of my Written Answers . . . was not as clear as I would like it to have been."

That is a grand understatement. His answers were grossly misleading and the figures were untrue by a large amount. I do not want to burden the House with the full details unless hon. Members want to hear them, but the Minister confesses to having—inadvertently, of course—misled the House in recent days on the crucial issue of the sum that the Government were promising in 2040.

The Minister confesses in the letter that the amount will not be 26 per cent. of average earnings. It is almost impossible to believe, but in their answers, some of them printed alongside one another, the Government have used two different measures, one assuming a 1.5 per cent. increase in average earnings and one assuming a 2 per cent. increase. The final sentence in the letter is:

"Using 2 per cent. per annum real earnings growth, £175 represents 21 per cent. of average earnings in 2040."

That is a monumental mistake. After all the wonderful reforms of the marvellous new scheme praised by hon. and gullible Conservative Members, in 2040 a pensioner is likely to have a pension worth one fifth of average earnings. That is pitiful compared with what Governments of both parties have been able to pay for the greater part of the century. It is extraordinary that we are expected to believe that, although we could afford pensions worth one third or more of average earnings in the 1940s and 1950s, when the country was a great deal poorer, in future the best that we can manage is one fifth of average earnings.

The fact that the Government had still not got their sums right even two hours ago shows that the scheme has been cobbled together. We have heard several other extraordinary ideas recently and many of us are becoming seriously worried about the lean, mean electioneering machine that we have admired and been in awe of for so long. The Conservatives have come up with gimmicks such as the royal yacht, to be paid for by taxpayers, which was denounced by 75 per cent. of the population, the scheme for privatising the underground, which was denounced by 92 per cent. of the population and the extraordinary idea announced yesterday of privatising care, which has struck fear into the hearts of all those who might one day be in residential care—which is all of us. What the Government are offering goes against the reality that people know of private residential care, particularly where cost is the main factor. People know that services are often cut, diets become poorer, people share rooms and there is increasing degradation and indignity. The scheme has been produced by a Government who know the cost of everything and the quality of very little. Yesterday's stunt proves that and the people will rightly treat the privatised pensions scheme with the same suspicion.

This was a lively issue in the House back in the 1980s, before the hon. Member for Aylesbury was here. I commend to him Andrew Marr's book "Ruling Britannia", in which he goes through the speeches made on the Social Security Act 1986. The then hon. Member for Ashfield, Mr. Frank Haynes, made prophetic speeches about what would happen when the Conservatives decided to scrap SERPS. The Conservatives promised to get rid of SERPS. They did not fulfil that promise because of the might of the pensions lobby, which wanted it cut but not abolished. Insurance firms did not want the lower, poorer end of the market dumped on them. They preferred to keep the cream. That is why SERPS was not abolished, as promised before the 1986 Act.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury talked about consensus. Nothing will come from the nonsense before us tonight, but there will be major reform from a consensus among all parties. I remind Conservative Members that SERPS was set up by consensus. It had the agreement of all parties. The destruction of half of SERPS was fought tooth and nail by Labour.

The Government's excuse for abolishing the state pension is that by 2030 there will be three pensioners for every five working people. The book by the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) includes a chapter entitled, "The myth of the demographic timebomb", in which he describes how the Government deliberately exaggerated the effect of the demographic time bomb for their own ends. He justifies that because he is against SERPS anyway. It will be a time bomb, but not a series of time bombs that go on for ever—the baby boom generation will reach pensionable age in 10 to 13 years' time and the problem will then diminish. We know that because the people in that generation are alive now.

It is nonsense, therefore, to distort all our policies for that period. Whatever Government are in power, a larger proportion of our national wealth must be paid to pensioners during that period than before or after it, but that must not determine the shape of our policies.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) mentioned Beveridge, who wrote that the most inefficient aspect of pensions that he knew of was where men—they were usually men—went around collecting 1s 11d from one house and 2s 7d from a house in another street, mostly for industrial policies and insurance. It was a highly inefficient, wasteful system. Beveridge said that 50 per cent. of the premiums paid in those days were lost in commissions, administration and the inefficiency of the system. We replaced it with a system that has less than 2 per cent. administrative charges. It is an efficient system in that respect. We also avoided the main problem with money purchase schemes: they are a gamble. Few people have mentioned that.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury referred to the Maxwell case. Although it affected a relatively small number of people, it should not have happened and the system must be strengthened. I hope that the reforms will work.

What about the people in money purchase schemes, who took their pensions on the basis of annuity in 1994? They would have received 35 per cent. less than they would have had in 1990 because of changes in the value of the annuity rate between those years. Nobody expected or forecast that, but those whose scheme was with the Norwich Union saw the value of their pension drop by 35 per cent. For others, the drop was even greater. If we cannot work out what will happen to annuity values within the space of a few years, how can we say what they will be in the future? Naturally, money purchase schemes are popular with firms because they represent less risk.

The Government's proposed scheme is nonsense because only people now aged 20 or less will lose their state pension under it, and none of them will have reached pension age by 2040. At that point, the proposal's effect will be to reduce the income of the national insurance fund by some £15 billion a year—a figure contained in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham a few days ago—while leaving its expenditure unchanged. It is absurd, but that was the answer from the Government about their cobbled-together scheme. The full effect of the proposals will not be seen until 2070, when no one has the slightest idea what the demographic circumstances will be.

Whatever the proposal's purpose, it has nothing to do with demography but everything to do with presenting a plausible scheme that is transparently unworkable before the election. There is no room anywhere—in this House or in any party—for those with an ideological view on this matter. We shall soon move away from the politics of ideology to the politics of reason under a new Government—*[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for North Hertfordshire, is chuntering away on the Front Bench. He cannot get his figures right in the course of a single day, but has the cheek to have a go at me.

In 1989, I took Barclays bank and the Midland bank to the advertising authorities for misselling and misadvertising personal pensions. I went to one of the biggest pension providers in the country—one of the famous names with a good reputation—which assured me that it had never missold personal pensions. Almost every question that I asked Baroness Thatcher at Prime Minister's Question Time was about the misselling of personal pensions. Many people knew what was happening when that wicked misselling was going on. It was fuelled and encouraged by the Government through their ideology and belief that everything that is private has a halo around it and everything that is public bears the mark of the devil. We must escape from that ideological nonsense.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham said that there is a place for SERPS and that we should continue with it. People on average male earnings, who were on SERPS from its introduction in 1978, would now have been enjoying double the state pension—an extra £70—from that scheme, which is good value and has paid out some of the best pensions. Many people who joined other schemes in the private sector have lost out and have little hope of receiving compensation in their lifetime.

The scheme that I support is a reformed SERPS, which would be partially funded and run independently of the national insurance scheme so that no Government could get at it in future and raid it, as the Government did when they tried to get rid of SERPS and use the scheme as a bribe to get people out of it. I propose that the managers who run it should be independent of the state and free to invest on a wide scale. The scheme should be kept as free-standing from Parliament and politics as possible. A reformed SERPS, which would have the security of being a state scheme and of not seeking to make profits, would be a far better proposition for pensioners in the future.

All the parties in the House would agree to such a scheme. When we decide on the scheme, which will work for many years into the future, we shall have forgotten the cheap, opportunist nonsense of a scheme that we have before us tonight.

7.56 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am delighted to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's proposals for a pension plus scheme are extremely far reaching and visionary. As the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) pointed out, the first tranche of pensioners will, over a 40-year working lifetime, build up a substantial fund, but they may live for a further 40 years. The first tranche of pensioners under the scheme will therefore live until almost the 22nd century, so we are looking at a long time scale for this scheme.

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) that there must be a consensus in the House on how we proceed on pensions. Over such a long time scale it is essential, if the scheme is to last and prosper, that there should be all-party agreement on it.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has produced a complete plan to transform the state pension scheme over a long time scale. According to a leader comment in *The Economist*:

"The Tories have produced a plan that is workable, attractive and takes account of the undoubted difficulties that confront the project."

Last summer I wrote a paper entitled, "Privatising the State Pension: Secure Funded Provision for All", published by the Bow Group in November 1996. I am delighted that many of the proposals in that paper are similar to the Government's proposals.

Last week, The *Economist* commented:

"Reforming the welfare state is one of those nettles that politicians on all sides privately agree have to be grasped—so long as somebody else does the grasping."

For many of us, it was a complete surprise when the proposals were announced. The silence from the Opposition Benches at the end of last week spoke far louder than words. The best that the instant rebuttal unit could manage was that the plan represented "a chilling prospect"—so much for the desire of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) to think the unthinkable on welfare policies. Many of my constituents might reflect that the unlikely advent of a Labour Government would offer a really chilling prospect.

Before moving to the detail of the scheme, I should point out that we are able to consider fundamental reform of the system in a manageable and careful way only as a result of the work undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. The decision to equalise the state pension at the age of 65 and the work that has been done to contain the state earnings-related pension scheme will be a key factor in constraining the future cost of the state pension over the next 40 years or so as we move towards the new system. Those two measures combined are likely to save about £45 billion at their peak. Therefore, the proposals are very far reaching.

It is important to put the matter in the context of our very well-performing economy. From a study of pension systems throughout Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recently estimated that the United Kingdom should be able to pay off its national debt entirely by 2030—so much for the Labour party's continual carping about how we are increasing the national debt. In contrast, it is estimated that the national debts of France and Germany will double.

The key question in moving from an insecure funded system to a secure funded system has always been how to fund the transitional burden: how to meet new funded pension contributions while simultaneously meeting the burden of the pay-as-you-go liabilities. The breakthrough that my right hon. Friend has made in drawing up the scheme of reversing the tax treatment of pensions—abolishing the tax on contributions while at the same time allowing the trading status of the pension fund to be tax free—is an ingenious and workable solution, which means that the cost to current taxpayers in meeting not only their future pension but the pensions of existing pensioners is manageable. I have not seen similar proposals anywhere else that meet that problem in such an admirable way. I wholly agree with my right hon. Friend's proposals.

The Labour party has been particularly disingenuous about the fact that the new scheme will include credited contributions for everybody, including non-working mothers, disabled people and the unemployed, so that from about 2040 everyone will be able to retire with a properly funded pension. Much more fundamental and far reaching is that, if privately managed funds perform anything like the way they have over the past 10 years, everybody from 2040 will be able to retire on a substantially better income than they do at the present time, with the consequent improvements in the standard of living.

In criticising the proposals, the Labour party is absolutely bankrupt of ideas. All that it comes up with are pension funds managed collectively by the trade unions. The Singapore system, on which I gather the right hon. Member for Sedgefield was so keen, was simply a cheap way for the Government to borrow money. All pensioners got in that system was roughly a 2 per cent. real return. By contrast, in the Chilean system, on which much of the proposals are based, the return was roughly 13 per cent. Indeed, the returns from privately provided pensions in this country over the past 10 years have been about 10 per cent. Everyone therefore has the prospect of retiring on a pension that will provide a substantially better standard of living.

The new scheme will also eliminate the question of whether a person should opt out of SERPS. That has been a difficult problem with which the Government have had to grapple. By creating a funded pension for all, the charges will be low enough to allow even modest earners to gain from the initial earnings-related contributions being paid into funded schemes. I have already made the point twice that charges on pensions can be driven down greatly—unlike the problem regarding personal pensions. The benefit of that has not been brought out in the debate. The compounding effect of high charges over a person's working life of 40 years makes a substantial difference to the amount of pension that one gets at the end of the day.

Among the greatest benefits of moving to a personal funded system will be that it will focus the minds of our young people on thinking about retirement the moment that they start to work. As other hon. Members have said, that is an extension of the share revolution that we in the Conservative party have brought about over the past 18 years. Not only will young people's minds be focused on the need to save for their old age, but the fact that private providers will have to produce a statement of how the pension has performed each year will begin to get young people to think about investments, how they perform, whether their company is performing any better than another and whether they should switch to another company to get a better performance. That is an important step forward in the savings culture, and one that we need to encourage.

Under the Chilean system, for example, there will be not only an annual statement but the possibility of using the latest technology, such as video display unit terminals in supermarkets. Once all the security measures are in place—one will have a personal identification number on

a plastic card—one will be able on any day at any given time to find out what the pension is worth, how it has performed over the past year and how much one has contributed to it. More important, one will be able to ask questions such as, "What would happen if I retired two years early? How much extra contribution would I have to make for the same level of pension?"

Ms Abbott: Under such a wonderful new system with its smartcards, I wonder whether people will be able to see how much commission the salesman who sold the pension took and how much of their contributions are going on administrative charges.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Absolutely. That is part of the regulations of the Financial Services Act 1986. I cannot imagine that the Act would in any way need to be weakened by the scheme. In fact, we may have to strengthen, but simplify the regulations. I envisage that the pensions regulator will want to keep a very close eye indeed on private providers.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has made a very valuable point. In the Chilean scheme, which is not the same as that introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State but which the Social Security Committee looked at last year, all such things are completely transparent. One cannot possibly have transparency with an unfunded scheme—and we do not have it. From the details announced by my right hon. Friend, it is already clear that the scheme will be even more transparent than that in Chile.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for that very constructive intervention. He is absolutely right. The Chilean system has a very simple way of being able to portray to everybody exactly how their pension fund is performing, what the additional contributions are, and yes, what the initial and management charges are. I have always said, I shall repeat it and I will keep repeating it, that the compound effect over 40 years of even a small reduction in charges will make a huge difference to the total value of the fund.

I welcome the Government's proposal to make it possible to switch from one manager to another if they do not perform. The market will sharpen up management performance of all the funds that the Government allow to participate. I welcome the fact that the Government are to introduce a Green Paper so that all the detailed matters can be examined. The pensions regulator will need to look very carefully at the type and range of investments in which providers can invest. One thing that we want to be absolutely sure about is that, if we encourage huge numbers of young people to invest in a scheme—even though the Government are doing it on their behalf—none of the schemes goes bankrupt. As I suggested in my paper, we need to be very careful that the ownership of a scheme and the ownership of fund managers are kept totally separate.

We will also need to prescribe the range of investments, because we would not want people to invest in Peking bonds that would leave their pensions worth little in the end. We will need a wide range of investment instruments, so that pensioners can benefit from the performance of this country's economy and the worldwide economy. That will be one of the benefits of the scheme. In Chile, the economy almost doubled in six years because of the huge funds that were invested.

The Government will be able to implement imaginative ideas. For example, it may be possible for one of the financial instruments that I have mentioned to be invested in a Government private finance initiative fund. That would greatly extend the scope of the PFI. The fund would be a quasi-Government bond, as long as we could guarantee a realistic level of return.

I warmly welcome the scheme, and the fact that the Government Actuary has come up with figures that are similar to my own. A mere £9 a week, flat-rate contribution, plus a further 5 per cent. rebate from earnings below the national insurance ceiling, would produce a substantial fund. The Government's figures suggest that such a contribution would produce a pension, on a conservative estimate, of around £170 a week. That is more than double the current state pension. When I produced my paper, the media were intrigued by my figures and wondered whether they were correct. I welcome the fact that the Government Actuary has reached similar conclusions.

The scheme will encourage young people to think about investing for their old age at an early age, because they will own their schemes. As I said in my paper, they will "be forced to think about retirement income at the point when they first started work. Everybody would then learn the discipline of saving and how good the long-term return on those savings could be."

We may even be able to take a more radical approach. It may be possible, when the funds start to perform better than is currently envisaged—I am sure that will happen—to add bolt-ons, such as sickness and unemployment insurance. I have obtained some figures today that suggest that a one-year protection against unemployment would add just £4 a month per £100 of cover. Even more worth while, one-year cover against illness and accidents would cost a further £2 a month per £100 of cover. Somebody on average earnings of £300 a week would be able to cover himself fully against a year's unemployment and all sickness or accidents for about £24 a month for the rest of his life. To avoid selling a false prospectus, we would have to announce such schemes from the start. It would be unfair to bring youngsters into a scheme and then change the rules. If the scheme did not start with such insurance cover, we would have to introduce it for the next tranche of youngsters who entered the scheme.

Our proposals contrast sharply with the vacuum in the Opposition's thinking. They want something called a "flexible decade of retirement"—whatever that means. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has pointed out repeatedly that if people wanted to retire at 60 instead of 65, the state pension would have to be reduced by £20 a week. I do not know whether that figure is right, but the Government Actuary has checked it. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) should listen carefully, because I am about to make an important point. If the state pension is reduced and if people are to live on it, it will have to be topped up by income support. The hon. Lady has not told us how much that extra income support will cost. When she does her calculations, she will find that the cost will be substantial.

I welcome the Government's visionary proposals. Many details need resolving, but the scheme has many benefits. As my hon. Friends have pointed out, the scheme

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

would enable wealth to cascade down the generations. I also welcome the fact that everybody, from 2040 onwards, should be able to retire on a better income. That must be the right way forward, and I hope that my right hon. Friends will introduce the scheme as soon as possible, at least by the turn of the century.

8.15 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak about the Government's proposals. I wish to speak briefly on an aspect of the proposals that has not had enough attention in the debate—the implication of a privatised pension regime for financial services regulation. I shall also speak about the experience of pensions misselling and shall make three points: first, the size of the pensions misselling problem has been underestimated; secondly, we are nowhere near solving the problem; and, thirdly, we must recognise that pensions misselling is not merely a past aberration which must be cleaned up, but raises issues for financial services regulation in the future.

Figures on the number of people who might have been affected by pensions misselling have been bandied around. In any debate about increased privatisation of pensions, it is important to stress that more people have lost money than most people imagine. The issue first came to light in 1984, when KPMG, one of the leading City accountants, reviewed the files of a sample of 735 clients who had been sold private pensions. Only 9 per cent. of the files showed evidence of substantial compliance with the regulations. The firm classified 37 per cent. of the files as suspect.

In my view and that of many members of the Treasury Select Committee, the 500,000 people whose cases the Personal Investment Authority is reviewing are the tip of the iceberg. The problem arose not just with pension transfers; similar bad advice was given on opt-outs and to people who left SERPS. Of the 5.2 million who left SERPS, 200,000 were paid so little that they did not even qualify for a rebate. Leaving SERPS could have had no possible value or benefit to them.

The problem is greater than we believe. We may never know its full dimensions, because many tens of thousands of people may die before they receive any compensation. I understand, from the evidence given by the chief executive of the PIA to the Treasury Select Committee earlier this week, that the industry's letters to people asking them to come forward do not even mention compensation. People are getting letters from financial services providers, with other junk mail from the financial services industry, with nothing to suggest that it would be in their interest to respond. The problem goes wider and deeper than anyone on the Tory Benches will acknowledge.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Lady is making a serious and thoughtful contribution. Many of her hon. Friends have majored on pensions misselling this evening, but will she accept that the elimination of misselling in every circumstance would involve more regulation? In that context, what does she think of supermarkets selling pensions without giving any advice?

Ms Abbott: As a member of the Treasury Select Committee, I have studied all aspects of financial services regulation, from Lloyd's of London, to home income plans, to pensions misselling. What we need is not more regulation but more effective regulation—which may, in some circumstances, mean less form filling and less bureaucracy. We must get away from what I believe to be a system of regulatory catch-up by the institutions. The board of the PIA is dominated by people who are in the same institutions that are accused of misselling. We need regulation that has the confidence of the consumer, and current regulation does not have that.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Does the hon. Lady think that misselling is continuing on the same scale as during the period to which she referred? What proportion of those million or so cases would be eligible for compensation? In many cases, there might have been some technical non-compliance, but whether people finished up with the wrong product is another question. I see a smile on the hon. Lady's face, and I am genuinely interested in her answer.

Ms Abbott: I love the phrase "technical non-compliance", and the financial services industry and its lackeys are keen on this type of euphemism. What we had were salesmen, almost all of whose income came from commission, scouring local newspapers for information about firms going bankrupt or coal mines closing. They then targeted the former employees and coal miners and sold them pensions, although even someone like me—with no expertise in these products—would know that, once those people lost their employers' contributions and the guaranteed benefits of an occupational scheme, they had to be worse off with private pensions. It was not, as the industry insists, a technicality. Salesmen were driven by the bonus system and by commission knowingly to sell people products that could not have left them better off. The problem was not a past aberration, but one of structure.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Lady has not answered my questions.

Ms Abbott: I hope to answer them in the final section of my remarks. Tory Members have said that the problem is being dealt with, but I want to know who is dealing with it. The Treasury Select Committee took evidence from the PIA this week, and we have said over and over again that it has taken two and a half years to deal with 1 per cent. of cases. On that time scale, we will reach the millennium without clearing the backlog. We asked how long it would take to clear up the problem, but the PIA could not answer.

Pensions misselling is tragic; but, when the pensions misselling review was set up, the Government, the PIA and the other regulatory authorities set their face against finding out what had gone wrong, to what extent it was a technical problem and to what extent there had been real fraud. They sought co-operation from the industry to get the matter cleared up as quickly as possible, but the industry has been let off the hook and still has not co-operated. The biggest names in financial services—including the Prudential and Legal and General—are some of the worst offenders. There is no evidence or information from the relevant regulatory authorities to suggest that we are in sight of clearing up the problem.

I believe that many of the institutions are simply waiting for the grim reaper to do his work before they have to cough up compensation.

Some Tories have said that this was a technical problem, and asked whether misselling is still going on. The pensions misselling of the 1980s and 1990s goes to the heart of what is wrong with the financial services industry and the retail sale of its products. Far too many salesmen depend on commission for almost all their salary. When someone is commission-driven and has to pay his mortgage and pay for his shopping, it is only human nature for him to sell people products on the basis of how much commission he can earn rather than whether the product is what the customer needs.

I agree with the Consumers Association, which has said over and over again that we need to move towards a transparent system for independent financial advisers, and towards a fee-based system where people pay for genuine and clear advice, rather than having people posing as independent financial advisers. The implications of pensions misselling for financial regulation in the future are great, and we have to look at the commission and bonus system and at the continuing lack of transparency.

The industry has dragged its feet on this issue. People who try to buy financial services products will be deluged with paper that they do not want to read and that is unreadable, even if they try. The real information about commission, bonuses and administration charges is hard to winkle out.

As the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton–Brown) said, we may need to limit the types of investment that pension advisers can make. We do not want to go the way of the United States savings and loans companies, which attracted investment from millions of ordinary Americans and, free from serious regulation, were able to throw their investors' money away on junk bonds. It cost the American taxpayer billions of dollars to bail them out.

As the Consumers Association said in 1994,

> "It is very difficult to have confidence that every single individual who has been affected and has been given what we would class as bad advice is necessarily going to be identified let alone given full compensation".

The PIA has acted poorly on this issue. It is no coincidence that the chairman of the PIA, Joe Palmer, was previously the head of Legal and General, one of the companies most heavily implicated in pensions misselling. We have to get away from self-regulation of the financial services industry, as it means that the regulators are unwilling and slow to act against their friends and colleagues.

As we move to an era in which many of the benefits that would have been provided by a welfare state—pensions, unemployment benefit and sickness benefit—will be the province of the financial services industry, we need a different, clearer and tighter system of regulation. When I was a schoolgirl, many ordinary people did not have a bank account or a mortgage. Twenty or 30 years ago, a person had contact with the financial services industry because he or she chose to do so. We are now moving into an era when most of us—whether we choose to or not—will depend on the financial services industry for pensions, unemployment benefit and care for the elderly.

We do not need more bureaucracy, but we need a more effective system of financial services regulation than we have had hitherto. The speeches in the debate so far have glossed over the grave issue of misselling. Unless it is cleared up and unless the lessons are learned, nobody—neither my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench nor the Government—will carry any confidence with the public when trying to press on them private pensions as a way forward for security in old age.

8.27 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I declare an interest, in that I am a consultant for Pinnacle Insurance, which deals primarily with creditor insurance, not pensions. I am also a member of the Select Committee on Social Security. As such—and with some of my hon. Friends who are in the Chamber—I have taken a long-standing interest in this problem under the able leadership of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field).

The interesting thing to emerge from the debate is that something must be done. Some doubt has been thrown on the demographic time bomb, particularly by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), but nobody has denied that, when the welfare state was set up in 1945, there were five workers for every pensioner: there are now only 3.4 workers for every pensioner, and in 2030 there will be 2.4. When Beveridge considered this matter, people were, on average, living up to five years beyond retirement age: by 2030, people will, on average, be living 15 to 20 years beyond retirement age. We can argue the toss backwards and forwards and ask how serious the demographic time bomb is, but people on both sides of the argument accept that there is a problem. That is the first point.

Secondly, hon. Members on both sides of the House accept that we have broken the link between state pensions and earnings. The hon. Member for Islington, North lives in a socialist past or pantheon, a glorious age which probably never was, but those on the Front Benches have broken the link: if we rely solely on a state pension, the amount that will be available to us when we retire will be derisory. We must be honest and accept that. We can promise that we will keep the state pension and uprate it in line with inflation, but it will form an ever-declining proportion of average earnings. Something must be done.

The interesting feature of this debate, which others may not have noticed, is that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) seemed to accept that point. Of course, we are close to a general election and she must play party politics. We realise that she cannot accept what a Government propose a few weeks before a general election. I do not blame her for that; she has to criticise the scheme. She was a bit coy about what she proposed, but she seemed to accept that we had to create a new system. What she said was interesting—we have to create a system based on a partnership between the private and public sectors. I welcome that comment.

There was an even more interesting speech from the hon. Member for Birkenhead, who spoke immediately after the hon. Member for Peckham and who has acquired great knowledge of the subject over many years. He made it absolutely clear what those of us who sit on the Select Committee on Social Security know—that the present system is unsustainable, and that we must move towards a funded system.

Despite all the enjoyable partisan politics that we have naturally had across the Dispatch Box during the past three or four hours, both sides now accept that, to all

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

intents and purposes, the present system is dead for the next century and, in a spirit of consensus, we must move to create a new system. It has to be done in a spirit of consensus, for the obvious reason that creating any new system will take a long time.

It is said that bad ideas are not claimed by anybody and that good ideas have many fathers. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton–Brown) has written an interesting pamphlet and, three or four years ago, I wrote one on the same subject. The Chileans introduced a funded system in 1980. The truth is that many people in the Government think tanks, civil servants, politicians, pamphleteers and other Governments have been working on the problem for a long time. All their ideas revolve around something close to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security proposed.

The ideas that I put forward a few years ago were somewhat different. It is important that we accept that Britain has the most successful private pensions industry in Europe, with £650 billion in investments, and we must do nothing to put that at risk. I was thinking in terms of a kind of top-up scheme, so that people with occupational pensions remained in those schemes but, instead of paying a fixed amount in national insurance to a pay-as-you-go system, were required under a compulsory saving scheme to pay the money into a separate fund. Whether we talk of those ideas, or of what my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury talked about in his pamphlet, or of what the Chileans have done, we are all going in the same direction.

The only purpose of my brief remarks is to try to stress, through all the partisan politics that have gone on this afternoon, that we must find a way forward that both sides of the House can accept. We realise that the pay-as-you-go system is not sustainable into the next century and we want to create a funded system, but there is a basic philosophical divide between Conservative Members, who believe that a compulsory savings system should be based on private insurers, and the view held by the hon. Member for Birkenhead and, I suspect the hon. Member for Peckham, that private companies, influenced by the profit motive, should not be involved and that we should consider the building society and friendly society concepts, or perhaps the Singapore concept.

I should have thought that there was a simple way forward through the jungle. We must create a consensual point of view because, however confident the Labour party may be about winning the next general election, it surely is not confident that it will still be in government in 40 years' time. Surely we can give people a choice. After all, we are talking about whether the compulsory savings system should be based on private insurance companies or on friendly societies or building societies—that sort of concept. I do not see why people should not have that choice.

If we achieve a consensus on that basis, we shall be talking about something very exciting. Young people will be building up a large sum of money. It may be held in private companies, which will be highly regulated. Many of the comments that we have heard today have been misplaced. Those of us who, earlier this year, visited Chile with the Select Committee know that the private insurance companies enjoy little freedom in how they invest the money: they have to invest in Chilean companies; the competitive pressure is based not on the nature of those investments but on the efficiency with which they deal with administration; and they are highly regulated. Therefore, to quote the hon. Member for Peckham, the Chilean system is a partnership between the state and the private sector. It is a highly regulated state system.

Let us dismiss many of the false hares that we have seen running across the Chamber tonight—that people's savings will be at risk and that insurance companies will put that money in schemes that will lose their funds. If we consider what is going on in the world and the countries that have introduced such a scheme, we see that funds are highly regulated.

Let us assume that we have achieved such a consensus and that, at some time during the next five years, we move to a funded system. The next point which we must address is: for whom will the system operate? We must be honest—we are talking only about young workers. It is all very well to talk in glowing terms about Chile, but it has a remarkably different economy from our own. It has a much younger economy, and it has funded the changeover with privatisation receipts which are no longer available to us because most of the potential recruits for privatisation have already been privatised. Therefore, the changeover costs to a new system in our far more sophisticated economy, with a much older population, will be far greater in Britain than they were in Chile.

Having said that, Chile has achieved a remarkable consensus. All parties in Chile, across the political divide, including the Communists and the Christian Democrats—Chile now has a fully functioning parliamentary democracy—accept the principle of a funded system. It has achieved a remarkable renaissance in the Chilean economy because it has provided many new opportunities for funding Chilean industry. Those ideas are quite attractive, whether one is a socialist or a Conservative. Regardless of our position in the political debate, we all want to create a system some time in the next century that provides decent pensions. We want to create a system that allows young people to acquire a real stake in society. I thought that the Labour party believed in a stakeholder society, as I do. What greater stake in society is there than accruing a personal fund of £130,000? That is what the Government propose.

I do not know whether the Government scheme is perfect, but it is a very interesting idea. Instead of rubbishing it and reducing it to a footnote in an increasingly acrimonious general election campaign, we should congratulate the Government on coming up with bright new ideas after 18 years in power. Labour Members should say, "That is very interesting. We want to create a stakeholder society and we realise that you were forced to break the link between pensions and earnings. We realise that young people who are entering the labour market now will not be able to enjoy satisfactory pensions in 20, 30, 40 or 50 years. Let us therefore have a good debate about these ideas." We should not simply rubbish the ideas coming from both sides.

Whoever wins the next election should commission the Select Committee on Social Security, and others who have a particular interest in the subject, to conduct an in-depth study and produce a Green Paper on the subject. I predict that, whoever wins the general election, something very like the scheme that we are discussing will be introduced. Regardless of who becomes Secretary of State for Social

Security, I believe that people will look back and agree that the present Secretary of State deserves much credit for the careful way in which he has thought through the problems and come up with a bold and imaginative scheme, on which I congratulate him warmly.

8.40 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), as I agree with the tone and the content of his remarks.

One of the most interesting speeches today was by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I think that he deserves a prize for acrobatics. He did not want to criticise those on his Front Bench—we understand that, as there is an election coming up—so he tried not to say what he really thinks. He serpentined around the issues, but his views were clear to those of us who are familiar with them and who have read the excellent books and papers that he has published over the years. He recognises that this is precisely the way that we will go and that we must go, for the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle advanced.

I am certain that my hon. Friend's prediction will come to pass: regardless of who wins the next election and the one after that, this scheme—under whatever name and in whatever form—will be introduced. Why is that so? I refer again to the speech by the hon. Member for Birkenhead. He asked whether we could be any more knowledgeable about the future than those who took decisions following the publication of the Beveridge report. The answer is no; we are bound to do no better than they did. However, we know now that a funded pension scheme should have been introduced following the Beveridge report.

If that had occurred, this country's economy would be in a better state, and people would be stakeholders in society. They would have power over their lives and power over the methods, and perhaps the timing, of their retirement. We would not now be talking about the pain that the Government endured when we broke the link between incomes and pensions, or the pain that the Labour party is suffering—and no doubt will continue to suffer—now that it has made it explicitly clear that it does not intend to reinstate that link. That would be the correct decision for a Labour Government to take: a link between incomes and pensions simply does not make sense.

This scheme is right. It does not matter who is correct—whether it is the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) or Conservative Members who have spoken in the debate—about the demographic time bomb. Plainly, the demographics are going in the wrong direction, and schemes will become more expensive.

However, it is not a question of whether the scheme is affordable: if the political will is there, anything is affordable—within reason. We could afford to continue with a pay-as-you-go pension scheme. The question is: is it desirable? Most commentators who have examined my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's scheme and those who have spoken in this debate on both sides—apart from those who have adopted a purely party political approach—agree that it is undesirable to continue with the old scheme. I hope that we may have the sensible debate to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle referred.

I agreed with the tone of some of the remarks by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) about regulation. We should not look backwards—I think that the misselling of pensions is irrelevant to this debate. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take note of the pleas for tight regulation. We met the regulator of the AFPs in Chile, who is very powerful. He can tell the AFPs how to invest, he can direct their actions, and he can threaten them. He can close down schemes—which he has done—and require other schemes to take over their customers. We need someone to act in precisely the same way. There can be no scope for the wrong practices of the pension industry.

We must regulate the industry tightly enough to enable everyone to benefit from the marvellous achievements of our private pensions industry. People should not think that the only achievement of the pensions industry is the misselling of pensions. The industry has guaranteed incomes to a majority of pensioners that were beyond their wildest expectations. After a few years, many retirees receive income in excess of their salaried income.

People did not expect that. There has been expenditure of £600 billion. I am told that people cannot comprehend the difference between a million and a billion. As Ronald Reagan said, "A billion here, a billion there, and very soon you are talking real money."

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): Will the hon. Gentleman tell me where I can buy a policy that will allow me to retire on more than I earn?

Mr. Hughes: I was talking about the period under the last Labour Government, when they held down incomes, and pensions increased. Because of inflation proofing and the Labour party's dreadful record on inflation, retirees received more cash than when they were working.

Mr. Leigh: I can give a practical example. My late father was Clerk of the Privy Council, having succeeded the previous Clerk, Sir Godfrey Agnew. Three years after my father took over the Privy Council Office, he was earning less than the previous Clerk, who had retired on an index-linked civil service pension. That was the absurd situation in the mid to late 1970s.

Mr. Hughes: It bankrupted the Labour Government, and it nearly bankrupted this country. However, it did not bankrupt the remarkable pension schemes. We should pay tribute to them. We must recognise that some people do not benefit from the economy's vitality, and this scheme will put those people in touch with it so that they may share in its benefits.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement very warmly. It is a very good start. It embodies many of the characteristics that my right hon. Friend has always demonstrated: a cautious and detailed approach, testing the water as he goes. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) was correct when he said that there could be bolt-ons. Once the scheme is up and running, there may be scope for other groups to join it.

I return to the Labour party's position, and its proposal for a flexible decade of retirement. I shall be happy to give way to Labour spokesmen as I try to proceed point by point. It is common ground—I am sure that the

[Mr. Hughes]

hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) will correct me if I am wrong—that most people take their retirement pension immediately it is on offer. They do not defer payment, although everyone understands that there can be deferral so as to obtain a greater pension later. Nearly everyone, however—I think 98 per cent.—takes his or her pension immediately it is on offer.

Therefore, if we have a flexible decade of retirement, or at least an arrangement whereby people can retire early, the likelihood is that the retirement pension will be taken at the first opportunity that it is made available. I hope that I am still on common ground. If the hon. Member for Itchen disagrees, he can intervene. It seems to be accepted that those who retire will take their pension at the first opportunity that it is available to them.

It is also common ground, therefore, that first-opportunity retirement pension has a cost. Indeed, it is bound to have an extra funding cost, and it will be £15 billion. If the Labour party, if it is in government, is not to raise £15 billion in taxation—the spokesperson for the Labour party wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 30 August 1996, angrily making it clear that that was not Labour's intention—the only alternative is to seek the advice of the Government Actuary.

It seems, however, that Labour would say that it is anticipated that those who retired early would receive a lower level of basic state pension. Is that common ground? If Labour is not to raise the necessary money from taxation, there must be a lower state retirement pension.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: When we have a good point that we put directly to those who occupy the Opposition Front Bench, they always chat to one another and pretend not to be listening. When the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) replies, he probably will not respond to my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Hughes: I regret that my hon. Friend is right.

I am making an important point, and the Labour party has been caught out. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) blushed when she tried to deal with it. Indeed, she became terribly ratty when anyone sought to challenge what she was saying. We know that either expenditure of £15 billion must be raised by taxation or, as the Government Actuary has made clear, pensions will decrease by £20. The reason—*[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Itchen wish to intervene? I shall be happy to give way.

Mr. Denham: No.

Mr. Hughes: I bet that the hon. Gentleman does not. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would rather hope to find gin or whatever in the carafe on the Opposition Dispatch Box. I am sure that my argument is embarrassing to the Opposition. At least the hon. Gentleman is blushing.

There is a choice between increasing taxation and reducing pensions. As the hon. Member for Peckham has made it clear that a Labour Government would not increase public expenditure by £15 billion, pensions for newly retired pensioners, all taking their pension at the earliest possible opportunity, which is common ground between us, would decrease by £20. That becomes Labour party policy. It is clear—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) thinks that my remarks are funny. Those who are approaching retirement will not consider them amusing. If the hon. Gentleman would like to intervene to tell me that any of my facts are wrong, I shall be happy to give way.

I can only conclude from the giggling, schoolgirl attitude of the hon. Members for Itchen and for Tyne Bridge, who occupy the Opposition Front Bench, that we Conservatives are right, and that we have caught out the Opposition. It would seem that £20 off the state retirement pension is Labour party policy, and we must ensure that everyone knows it. The Labour party cannot deal with the basic point, which is the gap between what it says and the reality of its policies.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is not the reality that we shall probably see an increase in public expenditure and a decrease in state retirement pensions? As I made clear earlier, we are likely to see a reduction in the state pension. If, however, we are not to see people retiring in misery, there will have to be an income support top-up, which in itself would have a substantial extra cost.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend is correct. Doubtless the Labour party will huff and puff to try to explain what it is talking about during the election campaign.

The debate has been useful in clarifying the basic pension plus and in flushing out the Labour party's policies on state retirement. It has also been useful to discuss other dangerous Labour party policies. For example, the Labour party does not talk about contributions to a stakeholder pension. It does not wish to discuss by how much national insurance contributions would have to increase. It does not talk about whether there would be a new category of contributions. We hear not a word from the hon. Member for Peckham about how money would come in to pay for the extra pension.

We know, however, what the Labour party plans, and I shall quote from its handbook. It refers to the stakeholder pension as

"a new better-value-for-money framework for second pensions to redeem red tape and improve competition."

I do not know what "redeeming red tape" means. I assume that the meaning is the same as addressing problems. It is another term that has no meaning in the context in which it is used by the Labour party. At the same time, it is designed to sound quite good.

We know, however, that the Labour party's approach would allow political interference in pension funds rather than those funds being invested in the best interests of members. A BBC news release, which paraphrased what the BBC had been told by a previous Labour spokesman, read:

"Chris Smith was particularly interested in Australia's Industry-wide superannuation funds, which are administered jointly by employers and Trade Unions, giving the Unions power over how they are invested."

That is what we shall see in future if there is a Labour Government. The funds that are delivering such good occupational and private pensions would be put into the hands of trade union barons to invest. It is—*[Interruption.]* It is no good the hon. Member for

Itchen moaning from a sedentary position. He is entitled to intervene to explain how the previous Labour spokesman, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), was wrong. I suspect that he will not bother to do so.

The fact is that the Labour party would put people's pensions at risk. The 20 million who are members of private pension schemes would have their futures put at risk by the Labour party. The Labour party talks about side issues and uses electoral scares. It talks about privatising pensions rather than using private pension and personal pension funds. In so doing, it has done itself no service or credit this evening. Instead, the Labour party has revealed that its words are empty. At the same time, the threat of what it would do in government is real to every pensioner and potential pensioner.

8.56 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I am grateful to be called, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even towards the end of the debate. I regret that I had to leave the Chamber for an hour or so, and thus missed one or two speeches. It has obviously been a most interesting afternoon and evening.

I am grateful to be called after my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), who performed an excellent and deft demolition job on the Labour party's position. It is clear that Labour has become impaled on a number of its positions, which are either expensive or damaging to pensioners. It has failed to address fundamental pension problems.

I would, however, caution hon. Members about drawing too many parallels with Chile. I visited that country as a member of the Select Committee, and although some of us went there open-minded and enthusiastic about what the Chilean system might teach us, the differences between the systems were striking; the biggest being that the Chilean system is miles behind what we have established in this country—the very substantial pension funds for investment and for future pensions.

However, the rate at which Chile is catching up is staggering. On coverage and the standard of living of the majority of pensioners, Chile is miles behind. Indeed, it will face many of the problems—pensioner poverty of certain sections of the pensioner population—that provoked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to present these proposals to the House today.

I wish to address the comments of the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) about misselling. In an intervention, I asked her two relevant questions, the first being whether misselling is continuing on the same scale as that recorded in the earlier period. She failed to answer.

We are still able to advance the case for private and personal pensions, because the problem was one of transition and of market growth and immaturity. That problem has been dealt with. Of course the cases of misselling that have not yet been addressed must be cleared up. Even though this is not an interest that I am required to declare, I was a former employee and adviser of one of the major insurers. As someone who has a connection with the industry, I see that more evidently, perhaps, than many other hon. Members. For the credibility of the industry and for future schemes of this nature, the problem of misselling must be cleared up.

The second question that the hon. Lady would not answer was: in how many of the cases where non-compliance has been recorded has the client ended up at a financial disadvantage, with the wrong product? Until all the cases have been looked at, it is not possible to know. The evidence of the cases that have been looked at is that, although there may be not have been all the crossing of the t's and the dotting of the i's in the paperwork, and that information required by the regulator before contracts are signed may not have been exchanged, the client has not necessarily ended up with the wrong product.

I would guess that, in the majority of cases, there has not been a miscarriage of financial justice, only a failure on the part of people selling pensions to observe the proper regulatory requirements, but that does not excuse it. The problem has to be cleared up, and it should have been cleared up much more quickly. I clearly heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say that companies that still have that hanging over them will not be eligible to take part in what will be an opportunity for huge growth for the industry. That was a good warning shot to fire across their bows.

I would add that much of the problem, as the hon. Lady amplified, comes from fees and commissions. I agree that it is much better for advisers to charge fees rather than percentage commissions. As soon as the transparency of commissions was discussed, it was obvious that it was an issue that the pension salesman had lost from the outset.

Commissions should be declared in all cases. The industry is struggling with a tax problem: that it is possible to get tax relief on the commissions or fees charged if they are netted off from the investment being made. It is not possible for the client to get tax relief on the fees and commissions if they are added on. It is a problem of taxation, and perhaps one that the House should address.

The problem is also one of VAT. Fees netted off from the investment being made are not liable for VAT, but fees charged for advice over and above the investment made are, so it becomes instantly more expensive for the client.

An instructive lesson from Chile is that, as a matter of course, the fees are added on to the investment made, and are not chargeable for sales tax. When the client is looking for a provider to make his investment, it is obvious which one is offering the cheapest deal for the client. We should have a simple transparent system of that nature that is not open to abuse. We should not be taking people's tax-relieved money away from them in charges and fees, because it gives a false impression of how much they have saved if some of it has been taken away in that manner.

I agree with the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) that the exploration that pensions buffs enjoy to make in such debates sits ill alongside the party political battle. However, I cannot ignore the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and her usual tirade against anything to do with the private sector, although she paid homage to a mixed economy.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), in an article in *The Times*, made it clear that he wanted to keep SERPS. On the "Today" programme, the hon. Lady said that the Labour party had agreed

"that SERPS is not financially sustainable."

Such conflicts do not help the political debate.

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

The hon. Lady offered the idea of stakeholder pensions, which, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, originated in Singapore, where pensioners receive a 2 or 3 per cent. uplift over inflation, instead of the proper investment returns that they deserve. That is not because the Singapore Government are such bad investors, but because they cream off the profits from the central provident fund for their own purposes. That shows the danger of a state-controlled scheme rather than individually owned privately provided schemes.

The hon. Lady's speech denigrating the Government's proposals contrasted sharply with the comments that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield made in his article. He said that the proposals

"give whoever forms the next government the chance to conduct the debate more sensibly."

We certainly all agree with that. It implies that he does not think that his own party has conducted the debate very sensibly up until now, and he is learning fast from my right hon. Friend's proposals.

The key issue is the problem of pensioner poverty in middle England. The hon. Lady laid that at the Government's door, but we are dealing with people who retired before 1979, and before the huge growth in pensioner incomes. The problem is not that people in full-time work throughout their lives tend to finish up in pensioner poverty: that section of the population has done particularly well. Nor is there a problem with people who have dropped out of the system, because the safety net catches them, however unsatisfactory it may be to live at that level. The problem is with the people between the safety net and pensioner prosperity: the people who move in and out of work, carers, housewives and people on the edge of the job market in part-time work.

The modern flexible labour market that this country needs to be competitive is not conducive to traditional forms of employment, such as long periods of employment with one employer and an occupational pension scheme to see retired people into their old age. What is so clever about the Government's proposals is that they make far better use of the cash flows that are invested in the existing state scheme.

The return for the average United Kingdom pensioner from investing the cash flows under the present scheme, taking account of redistribution, is virtually negative. The basic pension plus scheme maintains the redistributive nature of those cash flows by handing out the £9 rebate, but by investing them privately gets a realistic commercial return, and ultimately provides a much better pension for the pensioner.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The current national insurance tax system is our biggest tax-free distributive system. During a working lifetime, a person on average earnings makes £95,000-worth of national insurance employers' and employees' contributions, whereas he receives a state pension value of about £25,000. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is an extremely negative return?

Mr. Jenkin: Obviously it is a negative return for someone in the circumstances described by my hon. Friend. Moreover, if we hypothecate an aggregate amount of national insurance income that is invested in the basic state pension and then eventually collected by pensioners, we find that the return is almost negative. That is because the national insurance system is not a funded scheme: national insurance is not invested in anything.

The appeal of the basic pension plus scheme is that it preserves the redistributive nature of the basic state pension, while replacing the unreliable promises of politicians, who are generally long gone by the time that those promises must be redeemed, with personal ownership of capital in proper investments. It is extraordinary—well, not extraordinary; in fact, entirely predictable—that the gut reaction of a party that opposed the sale of council houses, and at one stage thought that property ownership was evil, is to oppose our proposals.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West that Labour Members will eventually realise that this is a major reform that will be irreversible, and that letting the cat out of the bag and discussing it will in itself create a momentum that, even if the Labour party became the Government, it would have difficulty in stopping.

What we are achieving is not an extension of compulsion, which is what the stakeholder pensions proposed by the Labour party are about. They are based on the Australian model.

Mr. Denham: Singapore.

Mr. Jenkin: I refer to the model from Singapore, adjusted by Australia. We are substituting a compulsory savings scheme for taxation, and turning a confiscation into the building up of an asset. That is something that no one can take away.

What the Government must get right, however, is the nature of the vehicle through which people will be saving, and the simplicity of the regulatory regime that will oversee the providers of the new pensions. As I said in an intervention on my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), we do not need to go into all these insured products. It is a hangover from the way in which the insurance industry developed the pensions industry over 150 years that insurance plays such a huge part in personal pensions.

There is no difference between the risk to the man in the street posed by a personal equity plan provided by a major financial institution and the risk posed by a life assurance policy. The only difference is that the man in the street generally understands what a PEP or a TESSA—a tax-exempt special savings account—means, while he does not understand what a life assurance policy means.

Another of the lessons that we brought back from Chile was that the simplicity of the product hugely increases the attraction of the whole scheme for the individual. Why do life assurance policies require so much selling? Because they are not easily understood. PEPs and TESSAs have not required nearly so much selling, simply because they are easily understood.

It is important for us to create a separate product regime, a separate tax regime and a separate regulatory regime, so that we can keep things simple and insulate the new pensions system from the huge complication of the tax and regulatory regime that currently surrounds pensions. Few people realise, for example, that there are several different tax regimes even for occupational

pensions. It depends when they were set up or closed, or when people joined or left them. The system is very complicated, and that example refers to only a tiny proportion of it. Half the people are being taxed on what they put in and half on what they take out. The tax system limits what some people can put into their pensions, while others are limited in terms of what they can take out. It is an extraordinarily Byzantine structure.

The commencement of a completely new system, basic pension plus, gives us the opportunity to establish a completely fresh regime. New people entering the scheme need never become entangled in the mess of the present regime that has been created over hundreds of years.

A threat may be presented to the successful occupational schemes, but the great disadvantage of final salary occupational schemes is that it is difficult, even for actuaries, to decide a person's worth at any one time. One of the sources of the misselling misunderstandings is that it is almost impossible to give a fair assessment of an individual's rights in a final salary scheme because its terms, its uprating policy or its contributions may change. All sorts of alterations can make a huge difference to a person's rights, because the schemes are based upon final salary.

I agree with the hon. Member for Birkenhead that we are at the start of a much better savings structure for families. Members of a family should be able to talk about different schemes, and limits are not important. People should be allowed to pay as much as they want into a scheme, and by the time we have got rid of capital gains tax and inheritance tax, the distinction between being in a pension scheme and not being in one will be reduced. Instead of buying grandchildren premium bonds or lottery tickets, it would be marvellous if at Christmas granny's £5 could go into the child's pension scheme, which could have been established on the day the child was born.

I shall now deal with incentives and costs. Any funded scheme will cost more in absolute terms than the state scheme. Under our state scheme, quarterly statements of how much has been put in and how much the fund is worth are not required to be sent to clients. No investment uplift is provided on each quarterly return. Of course it is cheaper to collect tax than to provide an investment service. The issue is what that should cost. The Chilean lesson is instructive. Even with some problems, the Chilean costs as a percentage of the managed funds are competitive by any standard.

If people are allowed to choose whether to give their money to the Government or to put it in their own account where it can build up for the future, there is no doubt that they will adopt the latter course. Rather than welcoming the scheme, for a time Labour will continue to say that people like paying national insurance contributions, just as they said that people liked to live in rabbit hutches whose front doors were all the same colour, and which were owned and managed by councils.

9.18 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): We have had a thoughtful debate and I should like to continue in that mode. However, I will first deal with a contribution which did not meet that standard—that of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). The hon. Gentleman knows that there is no way in which the basic state pension will be cut by a Labour Government. No future pensioner and none of today's pensioners will be forced on to a basic state pension lower than the present one, whatever the future retirement age or upratings. There is a despicable campaign that is designed to scare the elderly into thinking that something might happen to the basic state pension, and that has lowered the tone of the debate.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: There is no need for the hon. Gentleman to get nasty just because he cannot answer the point, which is very simple. I am not making those allegations: his colleague the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) is. I did not write the letter in which she says:

"We would seek the advice of the Government Actuary, but we anticipate that those who retire early would receive a lower level of basic state pension."

The Government Actuary has been consulted and we know that the figure is £20. If that is wrong, instead of insulting me and my hon. Friends, why does the hon. Gentleman not simply tell us why it is wrong?

Mr. Denham: The Tory campaign throughout this country to frighten elderly voters into believing that their pension will be cut or that people will not be able to retire on the full basic state pension is disgraceful. If hon. Members cannot understand a simple letter, that is their problem, not mine.

The other claim, put forward as though it were fact—that Labour will put investment funds into the hands of trade union barons or, alternatively, into a Singapore-style fund—also exists entirely in the imagination of Conservative Members. I am under no illusion that merely pointing out the truth to them will change what they say, but it is useful to put it on the record.

Mr. Heald: What was the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) doing in Australia telling the BBC that he admired the Australian industry wide scheme and that he wanted it to be a template for Britain, with central or industry wide funds? He said that those funds would most likely be invested in a mix of the markets and job-creating schemes and would be administered jointly by employers and trade unions.

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend was doing what any sensible person would do in that job—learning from international experience, as we have done. He has been abroad and we have studied the schemes in many different countries to find out not how one picks up a model from another part of a world, but how to develop a system that will apply and work in Britain.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Denham: With respect, the hon. Gentleman spoke for a great deal of time and I should like to proceed with the summing up.

There is just one reason for this debate: the Conservative party's proposals, just before an election, to privatise the state pension system over the next generation. Conservative Members have had their debate; they have had their chance to set out their case and to put their big idea to Parliament. Let me summarise where we are now. Their case is already in a shambles.

[Mr. Denham]

As a result of the debate, despite Conservative Members' comments about occupational pensions, we know that the demise of occupational pension schemes will be brought about by these proposals. The best schemes in the past for providing pensions will no longer be with us if the Government proceed with the proposals.

It has been made clear, not just by Labour Members but by Conservative Members, that people will have to pay twice to fund the huge costs of privatising the state pension system. Despite calls from Conservative Members that more should be done for today's elderly poor, we now know that that means that nothing will be done for them because of the cost of privatising the pension system.

It is clear that the policy is the pursuit of dogma for the sake of dogma, but I do not reject it simply on that basis. Let us analyse it, take it apart and find out what it really means because, by and large, Conservative Members have not done that; their speeches have been about theoretical constructs, not what would really happen. Let us consider, therefore, what the policy will cost, where the money will come from, who will go without, who will pay out without any payback and whose needs will not be met because of the cost.

We are told that some people, some time, when my children's children are born, will benefit, so let us consider the benefits. How good are they? Are they so good that the case for the policy is overwhelming? Are the problems of the future so insurmountable that we are forced by events beyond our control to adopt such a policy?

We know that the scheme will cost £312 billion over the next 40 years before there is any reduction in public expenditure. The Government claim that half of that will come from higher taxes on people saving for their pensions over those 40 years. However, as we now know and as the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said, because the proposals strike at the heart of occupational pensions, the Government cannot be sure that they can raise their funds from those higher taxes. The people who contribute to pension schemes will not benefit from those higher taxes.

We do not know where the rest—£150 billion—will come from. We do not know who will pay or how much they will pay, but we do know that someone will have to pay. The Government say that they have taken those costs in their stride before, but we have had 22 tax increases since 1992 as they have taken those costs and others in their stride.

Who will pay now? Will it be today's pensioners when the Chancellor puts VAT on fuel up to 17.5 per cent or puts VAT on their food bills, or will it be the people in work today who do not have the pension scheme that they would like? What will they pay for no benefit? It is a high cost. There has to be an overwhelming case for spending such a huge amount before any returns can be gained.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) said that it is inevitable that today's working population will have to pay twice, but it is not inevitable that such a huge cost has to be paid in the way proposed by the Government. It comes about only if the Government choose to privatise the pensions system in this way, and the case for doing that has not been made.

We have an aging population. Enabling that population to enjoy a secure and active retirement and care in years of frailty will demand more of the country's resources. The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) said that we must act now. The pay-more, get-less policy makes the problem worse, not better, and no Conservative Member has addressed that issue. From 10.3 million today, the number of pensioners will rise to 12.4 million in 2010, 14.7 million in 2030 and 15.7 million in 2040. The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) said that today two pensioners are supported by five working people, but by the year 2030 three pensioners will be supported by five working people. That is when the crunch will come.

What are the Government proposing to do to make the problem worse? When those extra 5.5 million people retire they will want security and an active life and they will want to know who will care for them, but that is when the Government want to maximise the cost of privatising the pension scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said that the Government have to tackle the problem of the retiring baby boom generation before they can go ahead with the proposals. In the next 40 years, the Government plan to spend £312 billion on privatising the state pension system—about £11 billion a year between 2020 and 2040, which is when the number of pensioners will rise most sharply. That is twice what is spent by the Government today on residential care, and there is not a penny for pensioners or for long-term care over that time.

The message from the Government to today's pensioners and to those who are to retire in the future is clear: "There is nothing for you in this—go away and stop complaining." However, I heard the calls from the right hon. Member for South Norfolk and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) saying that something needs to be done for today's elderly poor. I heard the call from my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn); it is no surprise to hear it from him, but it is interesting to hear it from Conservative Members. Despite those calls, the Government's message is that nothing will be done for today's elderly because the Government's priority is to spend the money privatising the state earnings-related pension scheme and the basic pension system. There is no fairness in the plans—it is simply Conservative policy.

Are there any other reasons for the policy? Is the existing state pension scheme about to go bankrupt? According to the Secretary of State for Social Security, the answer to that question is no. In his Politeia lecture he said that SERPS was affordable, so that cannot be the reason. It is the pursuit of dogma without any care for the cost or the consequences.

Of course we must look to future generations. I must look to the interests of my children's children's children because if any benefits materialise, they will be born at the time when those benefits may arise. What sort of pensions will those generations enjoy? As my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) so clearly stated, under the Government's proposals, rising generations will receive pensions that are dramatically smaller relative to earnings than those enjoyed by today's pensioners. A man on average earnings who retires in 2040 will receive 18 per cent. of average earnings, and someone who was out of work for 10 years will retire on 15 per cent. of average earnings. Moreover, as we have heard in this

debate, there will be no occupational pension scheme to top up those amounts, because the Government's proposals would result in the demise of occupational pensions. It is a pay-more, get-less policy intended to privatise the pension system.

The Secretary of State held out the prospect of higher investment growth. I may be the only hon. Member in the Chamber to have been missold a personal pension, but even the man who sold me my pension did not try to pretend that investments only go up and never come down, as the Government have tried to tell us in the past week. The conduct of the Secretary of State and his colleagues is irresponsible and feeds the very type of behaviour that so blighted the financial industry—behaviour which the industry is now working so hard to put behind it.

In reality, at best the basic part of the Government's scheme will produce no more than the basic state pension; at worst, the taxpayer will pick up the bill. In short, the privatisation of the pension system offers the rising generation only a poor pension and a less certain or insecure future. They will pay more and get less in order to privatise the pension system for narrow ideological reasons.

The Government have had their chance today, but they have failed to make their case: their big idea is a bad idea. I say that more in sorrow than in anger because, as the hon. Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle and for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said, nothing would be better for the United Kingdom than a new consensus on pensions policy. A 20-year-old starting work today will vote in about 20 general elections before they have retired and ultimately no longer need their pension. Their pension planning cannot be chopped and changed every few years. However, one cannot build consensus by badly thought out pre-election stunts which have damaging consequences.

I shall repeat the features of a sound pensions policy—an affordable and sustainable policy—for the future. First, there are clear strengths in funded, invested pensions. Secondly, many people want their savings to be invested in cost-effective pension schemes. The trouble is that too many people who are in work today—not only those in the rising generation—cannot join a cost-effective pension scheme. There are millions of such people today, and they have been ignored for the past 10 years.

The most striking feature in the speech made by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) was his lack of shame over misselling. We have been told, "It just sort of happened like that—it was a problem of market growth." However, not the industry but the Government issued advertisements stating that

"soon employees will be able to choose their own Personal Pension scheme instead of staying in . . . an employer's pension scheme."

The Government issued that advertisement, which encouraged misselling and opting out of occupational pension schemes, and they should take responsibility for it.

Over the past 10 years, women involved in typical rebate-only personal pensions have had 30 per cent. or more of their savings eaten up in fees and charges. They have been ignored. What about all those people on low incomes who in the space of a few years gave up their personal pensions? Within the first five years or less, 2 million low-paid people stopped paying into their pension schemes. According to *Money Marketing*, someone on about £9,000 a year can lose between 50 per cent. and 87 per cent. of their savings if they keep their policy for only five years.

The Government have done nothing to meet the needs of people who would like to be in an approved value-for-money, cost-effective pension scheme which ensures that high minimum standards have been set. They would like a scheme that offers them flexibility so that they are not unfairly penalised if they are out of work for a time, and one that is operated in the interests of its members. They want a scheme that recognises the different types of working lives—with periods in and out of work, changes of job, self-employment—and the demands of balancing work, child care and looking after older members of the family.

Today many people lead lives which make such demands. That is why we have been working with the financial services industry to develop our plans for stakeholder pension schemes—to make value-for-money pensions available to people who cannot join them today, and to create new opportunities to establish individual savings.

I suppose that in one way we should be flattered because in launching basic pension plus the Government have been forced to acknowledge much of the truth of what we have been saying. They talk about controlling charges, approving providers and about benchmarks, but those are merely warm words for tomorrow: there is nothing for today and no one will trust a Government who have failed every test for the past 10 years.

The Government have failed to protect savers from high charges and from misselling, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said. More people who were missold personal pensions have died than have been compensated. The Government have failed to protect the taxpayer because the cost of opting out of SERPS has been far greater than the saving that will be made in coming years.

The right way forward lies in addressing in practical terms the real needs of people in work today, and that is to be found in Labour's approach. The way forward lies in developing value-for-money funded pension schemes and in encouraging savings, but also in retaining choice. The Secretary of State tells us that SERPS is affordable, so why remove that choice? It is still the choice of millions. Let us keep the benchmark that SERPS provides and against which alternatives can be judged.

Let us keep a sensible balance between state and private provision and a fair balance between the needs of today's pensioners and those of tomorrow, not an ideologically driven dogma which means privatising the pension system no matter what the cost and no matter who has to suffer and go without in the coming years. Nor, however, do we want an ideologically driven dogma according to which the state must pay for everything: we need a sensible, practical approach that balances the needs and demands of different generations and the strengths and weaknesses of different types of pension provision and which recognises the needs of today's pensioners who have been so hard hit by the Tories.

We should not be stealing from today in the hope of better things tomorrow, but defending the basic state pension and looking after the needs of the million pensioners who do not get the income support to which they are entitled. The hon. Member for Colchester,

[Mr. Denham]

North (Mr. Jenkin) said that the safety net catches people, but the problem is that it does not—1 million people are not caught, and we need to do something about that. The sensible approach lies in cutting the fuel bills of pensioners who are paying VAT at 8 per cent. and in helping them to have warm homes. That is Labour's approach.

We would seek consensus, but the Government's approach is not designed to generate consensus. We need a sustainable pensions policy. I do not know whether that is a big idea or merely a good idea, but I am sure that it is the way the people of Britain will want the next Government to govern—in the interests of the retired people of today and of future generations. In a few weeks' time, they will have the opportunity to decide.

9.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): This debate has provided a welcome opportunity to consider future pension policy. Parts of the debate have been extremely thoughtful and adorned, if I might say so, by the expertise and wisdom of my right hon. Friends the Members for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), both of whom speak with the benefit of having wrestled with these issues for many years. Likewise, my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) made a thoughtful contribution about which I shall say a little more in a moment.

We heard contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) and from my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who did so much in his pamphlet to influence the debate. There were also contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), all of whom are members of the Select Committee on Social Security, which spent many months considering the matter although its report is not now to be published.

The Opposition Members from whom we heard included the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who seemed to welcome much of what the Government are proposing, and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who gave our proposals a cautious welcome. The three musketeers of real Labour—the hon. Members for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott)—were predictable, but the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) was not as predictable as I thought he might be. In the past, he has tried to engage in a sensible and thoughtful debate on these matters, but he seems to have been taking lessons from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman).

I shall come to some of the hon. Gentleman's points in a moment. To suggest that nothing has been done to accommodate the costs of basic pension plus is nonsense. The Pensions Act 1995 makes savings rising to £13 billion a year. The cost of basic pension plus is a fraction of that. The hon. Gentleman need only think for a moment about the impact on the economy of a huge extra investment through basic pension plus to know that it must strengthen the economy and lead to growth.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield mentioned the Government's achievements over many years and the partnership between the private sector, the public sector and the individual that has been built on since 1979. We have enabled more people to contract out of SERPS to money purchase schemes through what are known as the Fowler reforms. Those reforms have led to this country having £650 billion invested in pensions assets. There has been a 60 per cent. rise in pensioners' average incomes.

It is easy to say that there has been nothing in the changes for the poorest pensioners, but that is not true. The bottom 20 per cent. of pensioners have had real-terms increases in their incomes of 28 per cent. In 1979, 31 per cent. of the bottom decile by income in Britain were pensioners. Now, just 7 per cent. of that group are pensioners. That is a tribute to the work of previous Secretaries of State, members of the Treasury team and my right hon. Friend the current Secretary of State, who outlined his plans earlier. Our step-by-step approach has put this country in a better position than almost any other country in the world—certainly far better than any other European country.

We must consider regulation and the advice available to people. An important part of the technical note that came out with basic pension plus highlights those issues in some detail and says that when the working group, made up of representatives of the industry and other concerned bodies, looks at the issues in detail, we must ensure that all aspects are carefully considered and properly regulated. All three members of the Select Committee who have spoken were right to point out that in other countries where a similar approach has been adopted, regulation has been a key feature. The Government are not shy in saying that there will have to be effective regulation and we shall have to consider the issue of proper advice.

Several hon. Members have spoken about misselling. Everybody has agreed that misselling should not have occurred, that it must and will be sorted out and that compensation must and will be paid. It is right that there should be a timetable for settling the issue. My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary is pressing for that. In her evidence to the Treasury Select Committee this week, Colette Bowe said that she is willing to give it quarterly progress reports. The issue is being pushed forward hard.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk pointed out that the hon. Member for Itchen was not prepared to address the issue of tax relief for occupational pensions, which is one of the factors that has enabled them to grow. Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to give the House a commitment that there will be no change in tax relief for occupational pensions? The hon. Gentleman does not seem keen to address that issue, although I should be happy to give way to him.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk also asked about compulsory annuity purchase schemes and whether those should continue into the future. The income withdrawal arrangements, which allow people to defer until the age of 75, were introduced in 1995. It is therefore right to see how those measures work because they are very much in their infancy. Once that is clear, the rules will have to be reviewed, at which stage we can better judge whether it is right to allow deferral to the age of 75 or whether something more imaginative might be possible. I shall certainly look at all the issues that my

right hon. Friend raised with great interest. He has been very much part of the debate on pensions, the future of funding and related issues. The pamphlet that he issued last year was well received by the industry and by all parties in the House as a major contribution to the debate.

The hon. Member for Newport, West said that a major weakness of money purchase schemes was that people were vulnerable to fluctuations in annuity rates. That is one reason why the income withdrawal arrangements are such an important measure, and why they were introduced. We have now extended those arrangements to money purchase schemes. They deal with many of the concerns that the hon. Gentleman raised.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said that this all seems precipitous. We have been working on the proposals for a year, going through the issues in detail to ensure that we could produce proposals—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Peckham is interrupting because she does not like to hear this. We worked solidly for a year, looking at all the issues and flagging up the main issues that needed to be addressed. If he has had an opportunity to read the detailed technical notes, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire will agree that most of the concerns, such as regulation, how the proposals can be funded, and so on, are addressed in detail. I agree with him that this is the starting point and that we need to work towards a Green Paper. We need a working party to work the proposals out so that they not only address the issues but address them correctly.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire asked how we could be certain that the scheme would lead to an increase in savings. One cannot be certain but, if there is a massive increase in the sums being invested, it is likely to lead to such an increase in savings. Many commentators would say that that was almost inevitable, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that it is not certain. He asked why charges would be lower. At present, the main elements of charges are acquisition costs, persuading people to save and fact finding to ensure that the product in question is better than another. Those exercises are not needed in basic pension plus because those comparisons are not to be made. The basic cost of the scheme will be that of managing the fund, so it is inevitable that the charges will be lower. If, for some reason, the industry was not prepared to volunteer the right levels of costing, the Government would not hesitate to cap the charges to ensure that the beneficiaries had a reasonable deal.

Much has been said today about the National Association of Pension Funds. Listening to Labour Members, one would never have thought that the first line of that body's parliamentary briefing says how much it welcomes those proposals.

Ms Harman: The Minister should turn over the page.

Mr. Heald: I do not need to turn over the page. I had a meeting with the association last night to discuss those issues. It wants to be involved in the consultation because it has thoughts about the tax arrangements. We welcome that. We had a long and constructive relationship with the NAPF during the passage of the Pensions Bill and before that, and we know that it can contribute to making the proposals work. We therefore welcome its input into the debate.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire also asked about better-off pensioners not paying tax. Contributions made at the beginning have been taxed. They are taxed at that end and, concerning the new proposals, that would be there. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Itchen may laugh, but it would be there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington raised an issue about how we help the wartime generation—the poorest pensioners in the oldest group. It is worth pointing out that many Opposition Members raise such issues but forget that older pensioners are in difficulty because of the high levels of inflation in the 1970s. People who had saved all their lives were suddenly subjected to average inflation of 15 per cent. a year. We often hear far too much from Opposition politicians about such issues.

The Government have a good record on the poorer pensioners. I cited some of the figures earlier. In addition, since 1988, it has been possible to target help on pensioners who are most in need—an extra £1.2 billion a year. The oldest pensioners receive premiums in income support, which for those aged over 80 and for couples is £38 a week. I shall obviously continue to debate the matter with my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington, who I know takes a different view. Targeting is a way of ensuring that those who really need the money get it.

Most of the points made by the three musketeers—the hon. Members for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington, for Islington, North and for Newport, West—have been well covered in the remarks that I have already made or in contributions from my hon. Friends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury asked whether it would be possible to extend basic pension plus up the age range. With the growth in the economy that could result from the extra investment, there could be scope for that. If finances allowed, the Government would like the scheme to operate up through the age range. Initially, however, it is right to propose something that is fixed, certain and covers a younger age group. Certainly over time, extending it could be possible.

Other hon. Friends made various points about regulation, and it is right to take that into account. We must have a proper regulatory regime. I certainly welcomed the news conveyed by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North, with his knowledge of the industry, that pension misselling is not now occurring. I agree with him that the matter is important. One of the benefits of funding is transparency, which is not otherwise available.

The strengths of basic pension plus are that the money is invested, there is a fund, it is a personalised account and there is a guarantee to it. It gives the opportunity to build pensions awareness for the future, with each individual being able to save on top of the basic pension to meet their own expectations of retirement.

Mr. Kirkwood: I appreciate the thoughtful way in which the Minister is replying to the debate, but I am still very nervous and sceptical about the position of part-time workers and the low-paid under the plans. Will he take a moment or two of the time left to address that?

Mr. Heald: The whole purpose of having the basic pension guarantee is to be able to reflect the sort of

[Mr. Heald]

national insurance credits that we have at the moment to help people who are out of work, disabled or are carers. The system of home responsibilities protection will also be replicated in the new scheme. Turning from the basic pension element of the package, the 5 per cent. of earnings-related contributions will also remain while people work and will build as a fund with a yield over the years. I would argue that that protects all the interests of the groups that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Nobody would be disadvantaged in any way. Indeed, many people in those groups may be considerably better off.

I will end with three points about Labour's plans. First, Labour will not guarantee to uprate the basic state pension in line with prices. Whatever the hon. Member for Peckham says, the shadow Chancellor has made it clear that it cannot be assumed that totals will be automatically adjusted upwards in line with inflation. Secondly, Labour would cut the basic pension by £20 a week. Its plan is to equalise the state pension at 60 with a reduced pension. The hon. Lady cannot get away with it. She used the words:

"we anticipate . . . a lower level of basic state pension."

She said that she would consult the Government Actuary about how much the cut would be. We did so, and it would be £20 a week. Thirdly, Labour's plans for pension entitlement would mean a means test for everybody before they received the state pension entitlement. Its plans would be a disincentive for saving, because the more people saved, the less state pension they would receive.

Those ideas may have come from Australia, because the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) visited that country to get some ideas. It is wrong to say that stakeholder pensions are no threat. What is a stakeholder? It is Labour code for a trade union. John Monks said so in *The Times* on 17 January 1996. He answered a criticism that stakeholding was about the unions, because it will help them to rebuild their positions, by saying yes. He went on:

"Independent unions are the means for individuals to . . . realise their stakes".

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) went to Singapore to examine its scheme, and the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury went to Australia. The schemes they praised were industrywide and operated by trade unions and employers. The investments were influenced by trade unions. Most people in this country would prefer British pensions to be run by the private sector providers, who have put £650 billion of assets aside, than by sticky-fingered trade union barons.

We have had a good debate. The Government's policies will continue to mean that pensioners in the future will have a better income in retirement and a better life.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Northern Ireland Business not later than one and a half hours after their commencement, such Questions including those on any amendments to the Motion which she may have selected which may then be moved; and the said Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

St. Cross Hospital, Rugby

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

9.57 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Rugby's St. Cross hospital has a catchment area of around 110,000 people. I wish to reassure immediately all those of my constituents who are watching and listening to this debate that St. Cross hospital will not close. Recently, however, serious concerns have surfaced about the quality of some of the clinical services. That has resulted in the board of the Rugby NHS trust, at its meeting on 3 February, recording that it

"agreed in principle to merge with Walsgrave Hospitals NHS Trust and the North Warwickshire NHS Trust."

Since then, the chairman and the chief executive of the Rugby NHS trust have resigned.

The West Midlands NHS executive was asked to chair a project team to review the provision of services. Given growing fears about clinical safety, some of the royal medical colleges were invited to visit St. Cross and some of their recommendations were highly critical and far reaching and had serious implications for certain services. For example, the Royal College of Surgeons said in its report:

"To provide comprehensive 24 hour cover, and develop site specialisation, a minimum of 4 consultant posts are necessary.

Rugby's catchment area is not large enough to provide either adequate clinical depth or sufficient opportunities for practice to enable clinicians to maintain skills.

College approval would not be forthcoming for four consultant general surgeon posts given the low work load and the lack of variety of work. By combining with Walsgrave, it would be possible to increase sub-specialities and to offer an improved service to both populations. A 5 day elective surgical service should be possible if merged with Walsgrave, providing an on-site resuscitation team and appropriate levels of post-registration junior doctors working in Rugby on an agreed rotational basis. A full accident and emergency service cannot continue without adequate support services particularly in intensive care and advanced imaging. Consideration could however be given to a casualty or minor injuries unit possibly on a GP-led basis."

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

Mr. Pawsey: I am able to confirm, following a meeting between my hon. Friend the Minister of State and the chairman of the West Midlands NHS trust, that a casualty and minor injuries unit will operate 24 hours a day.

It was interesting that the Royal College of Anaesthetists' report stated:

"Rugby NHS trust lost recognition for training in March 1995. There are currently no trainees in anaesthesia in Rugby. Since the time of derecognition, there has been a change in training patterns which requires modular anaesthetic experience in various surgical sub-specialities. These would not be available at Rugby.

The consultants service 19 out of 27 operating lists on the weekly schedule. The remainder, and cover for absences, are serviced by the 4 non-consultant career grade staff. There are, therefore, insufficient consultants for the routine operating and this situation will worsen due to retirements."

The report added that anaesthetists in Rugby are not core members of the cardiac arrest team, although they attend if they are not in theatre.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health commented:

"Children should not stay as in-patients overnight. Children requiring admission should be directed to Walsgrave and bypass Rugby. There should be a fully comprehensive children's daytime service to offer acute assessment and both general and specialist clinics. All consultants would work out of the Coventry and Warwickshire paediatric consortium on a rotational basis. There would need to be a back up consultant on call to cover out of hours calls in order to stabilise cases before transfer."

In addition to the visits made by the royal colleges, the regional postgraduate dean, Professor John Temple, visited the hospital on 20 February. He endorsed the comments made in the reports. That is a clear indication of the critical and developing position at the hospital of St. Cross.

Clearly, certain of the clinical—that is to say, surgical—services are unsafe. My hon. Friend the Minister will no doubt agree that it is the clear duty of the health service to provide treatment that is both safe and effective. Increasingly, it would seem that there is a move in the NHS towards increasing specialisation, and it would appear that treatments are being concentrated at a smaller number of sites. This is necessary to ensure that surgeons maintain clinical skills and that they see sufficient patients to prevent their skills from becoming outdated or rusty through limited use. In addition, those surgeons require effective support and back-up from junior doctors, skilled technicians and the high-tech equipment that is increasingly demanded by those in the medical world. It would appear that the day of the old general surgeon—the Sir Lancelot Spratt of mythology—is now coming towards an end. It would also seem that the day of the smaller—and local—hospital is fast changing. It is my view that what is currently taking place at St. Cross will, over the next few years, be repeated up and down the land, perhaps even, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in your constituency or one similar to it.

One has to ask how many smaller hospitals are even now in a similar position to St. Cross with services coming under scrutiny and with services likely to move to larger hospitals. That is an issue which should have a much greater public debate than has so far occurred.

An article in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* quotes a leading expert on health care organisation as saying that Rugby could become a role model for other small trusts facing similar difficult decisions. It continues by quoting Brian Edwards, professor of health care development at Sheffield university, as saying that Rugby could become a very interesting role model for the rest of the country in developing really imaginative first-class local services.

I am certain that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would agree with me that it is desirable to maintain services as close to the host community as possible. But at the end of the day, the paramount consideration must be the provision of a safe and effective service. We must provide patients with the greatest opportunity for recovery and extended life.

One of the areas which causes me particular concern and real anger is the threatened closure of the maternity unit. Five of my grandchildren were born there, so I know it well. But unfortunately that unit sees fewer than 1,000 births each year. It is argued that the minimum number for a consultant-led service is about 2,500.

[Mr. Pawsey]

However, I must say to my hon. Friend the Minister, who is listening, as I can see, intently to the debate, that we still undertake births at home where there is no consultant and where conditions will clearly be much worse than, or certainly not as good as, those in a maternity unit. In the maternity unit there will be other midwives able to provide help and advice. That is all obviously lacking with a home birth. If it is considered safe to deliver some women at home, why is it considered unsafe to deliver the same women in a purpose-built maternity unit when other staff are on call and able positively to assist?

I recognise that there may be some difficulties with legal liability should mistakes occur. But women are seen by consultants before the birth. The consultants should, therefore, clearly know which births are likely to be difficult and should be handled by a consultant-led team, so enabling ordinary births to take place in the surroundings with which women have become reasonably familiar.

My hon. Friend will recall that at the last meeting that I had with him I specifically asked whether the maternity unit could remain open for at least a period of consultation, and that was readily agreed by the chairman of the West Midlands NHS executive. That was a helpful gesture. However, I should be grateful to hear my hon. Friend's comments on the substantive point that I have raised regarding the maternity unit itself.

Another area that causes me concern is the accident and emergency department mentioned by the Royal College of Surgeons. It is proposed that the A and E be closed and replaced by a minor injuries and casualty department supervised by a staff grade doctor. I am happy to confirm to the House and to my constituents that that department will remain open for 24 hours a day. However, to pursue one of the points made by the Royal College of Surgeons, I believe that we need the additional high-tech equipment that would facilitate the treatment of those who are brought to the casualty department.

I welcome the assurance that the chief executive of the combined trusts, Mr. David Loughton, has given that 90 per cent. to 95 per cent. of services will remain at St. Cross, and that certain services may be enhanced. I am advised that some elective surgery that is currently undertaken at Walsgrave may be transferred to St. Cross. That is welcome news. It confirms that the hospital will not close, and will continue to serve my constituents. I also welcome the statement by Mr. Loughton that there will be no redundancies at St. Cross—a fact that will reassure both staff and public alike.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister, who will respond to the debate, for the five meetings that we have had so far about the hospital. That is a clear indication that he understands my anger and that of my constituents about events at my local hospital. I have also met members of the St. Cross board, the chairman of Warwickshire health authority, and many others involved in this matter. In addition, I shall lead a delegation, comprising the leaders of the Conservative and Labour groups on Rugby borough council, to see the Minister next Wednesday.

However, something has gone wrong at St. Cross, and it would be helpful to know precisely what has gone wrong and why—if only to prevent other hospitals from making the same mistakes, as mistakes have clearly occurred. I want to know what might be done now to sort out matters. I want assurances that St. Cross will continue to provide high-quality care for my constituents. I want assurances that that high-quality care will be available for the foreseeable future, and not simply for two years. I want assurances that there will be no further downgrading of our hospital. I want an assurance that resources are not a problem and that adequate funding for St. Cross will continue.

My hon. Friend will be aware that I have referred the issue to the Health Service Commissioner because I believe that there are some powerful lessons to be learnt from this affair. I am genuinely angry about what has taken place. My constituents are angry too, and some of them—particularly the elderly—are afraid. It is dreadful when the elderly are worried about where they will receive treatment. I urge my hon. Friend to assure me that my constituents and all those who use the services at St. Cross will continue to receive the best and the safest service available.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to thank the St. Cross hospital staff for their work and for their dedication. There will be no redundancies and they will, therefore, be able to continue caring for patients in the future, as they have done for so long in the past.

10.13 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) has secured the opportunity of an Adjournment debate on a vital issue in his constituency. First, I set on the record my thanks to him for all that he has done so far. Since problems with the trust first emerged he has, as he has said, had five meetings with me apart from all the other meetings that I know that he has had in his constituency on a continuing basis with all those concerned as matters have developed. As he also said, he will lead a local delegation to meet me next week. I look forward to welcoming the members of that delegation.

At an early stage, my hon. Friend asked that he be involved in events as they unfolded. I have been happy to respond, I hope, in a fulsome way. I repeat my pledge to him that his leading role in what is bound to be a lengthy process to secure the best-quality patient care for his constituents, delivered where possible from their local hospital, will be sustained by immediate access to Ministers should he require it. In short, my door will always be open to him as he represents the interests of patients in Rugby—in other words, his constituents.

It might be helpful if I, too, turn to recent events. At the beginning of the year, the trust realised that, with the forthcoming loss of its last general surgeon in April, steps to secure the best possible services for local people, which had already been discussed with others, would need to be taken within a short time frame.

On 3 February the trust board concluded that it would not be possible to continue alone and sought to reach agreements with other hospitals, principally Walsgrave in Coventry and the North Warwickshire National Health Service trust, with a view to merging services. As my hon. Friend has said, a project team was established, which invited expert clinical advisers from the royal colleges to visit St. Cross and advise on the way forward.

The royal colleges were set short-term and long-term agendas. The short-term agenda was to assess the immediate state of clinical services being provided. My hon. Friend has rightly set out the concerns that existed about that extremely important matter. He and all those who had been involved have rightly sought to represent the great interest of ensuring that the safety of clinical services was considered to be paramount in what has taken place. The long-term agenda will be to consider options for future delivery of services. That issue, too, has been considered.

The five royal colleges covered the specialties of surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, anaesthesia and paediatrics and child health. My hon. Friend is well aware of the series of recommendations that were made. Indeed, he quoted them in some detail this evening. The recommendations were required to underpin essentially the quality of clinical services being delivered at St. Cross. It was not only the colleges that were involved. The results were endorsed by the regional postgraduate dean, Professor John Temple.

Much of what was happening in the hospital was associated with the ability to provide teaching facilities there. That is something that always underpins the delivery of high-quality clinical services. I use this opportunity to thank both the royal colleges and Professor John Temple for their rapid and thorough work, which has illuminated certain issues. Although many of them are unwelcome, I know that at the end of the day my hon. Friend, who understands these matters extremely well, would far rather they had been illuminated at a stage when steps could be taken to address them in the interests of his constituents than they had not been addressed at all.

Following the recommendations, immediate arrangements were put in place to ensure that they were implemented. Some of the recommendations have been uncomfortable for many who have been involved, but they have been taken on board and put in place extremely quickly, again with the primary purpose of securing a quality of clinical services for those who use St. Cross hospital.

Warwickshire health authority has announced that, as rapid changes have had to be made to secure clinical safety, a full retrospective public consultation on changes that have been made immediately on grounds of clinical viability will begin on 8 May and conclude on 4 September.

The health authority and local general practitioners will also, as purchasers of services for Rugby residents, look closely at the longer-term plans for the development—I stress the word "development", as my hon. Friend sought assurance on that point—of services. Again, there will be full and formal consultation with the public on any changes that would have a significant impact on the people of Rugby. The second consultation will begin on 4 September and report on 8 January 1998. I anticipate that my hon. Friend will play a leading role in both consultation processes. I remind him that, in the event of a failure to resolve matters locally in a satisfactory way, decisions, ultimately, come to Ministers to be made.

I now deal with some of the specific concerns raised by my hon. Friend. He referred to the long term. Let me refer, as he did, to the comments of the new acting chief executive, who expects to see some 90 per cent. of the services that local people have come to expect at St. Cross continue under the new arrangements for clinical supervision and to be available locally in Rugby.

In view of some of the doom-laden reports that appear in the press at difficult times such as this—I have read some of the irresponsible things that have been written about the future of St. Cross—I can tell my hon. Friend that the agenda set out by the acting chief executive sounds very much like a firm basis on which to build a flourishing hospital that will enjoy a long-term future.

Let me say a word of thanks to all who have been involved locally in a series of difficult and complex decisions. I include, among others, those at St. Cross hospital—my hon. Friend referred to the fact that those who are there can be assured that there is no immediate prospect of redundancy—those at Walsgrave hospital and also members of the national health service executive, who have worked tirelessly to secure benefits for patients in Rugby. In short, the actions that they have taken mean that the future of the hospital in Rugby is secured.

My hon. Friend asked for an assurance about adequate funding. I am happy to be able to tell the House that I can give him that assurance tonight. Let me remind the House that, in this case, funding is not the issue; it is the ability to provide quality clinical services. That is the issue that confronts those delivering services in Rugby. It is being dealt with.

I am happy to go further than that. My hon. Friend referred to the fact that perhaps there needed to be some change to provide some of the services. He alluded in particular to what would happen to the reshaped accident and emergency service now envisaged. I am happy to tell him that I have listened carefully to all that he has said, particularly at the last formal meeting that we had on this matter, and understand that securing needed change sometimes requires investment. For example, new technology, to which he alluded, can often support an improved quality and range of care that could not properly be provided before. Should such opportunities emerge, I expect those responsible locally to do all in their power to secure them for the benefit of people in Rugby. If my hon. Friend feels at any moment that that is not taking place, I expect him not to hesitate and to knock at my door again.

My hon. Friend referred to maternity services. As Minister for Health, I travel across the country looking at the ways in which services are delivered in a range of contexts. He was right to point out the Government's policy, which was set out in "Changing Childbirth". People can have their children in an appropriate setting where proper clinical attention can be given. We must remember that childbirth is not an illness; it is a natural process. Should people wish it, they should be encouraged to have their children in a setting of their choice. The underpinning of maternity services, for which my hon. Friend expressed gratitude, is a step in the right direction. The document "Changing Childbirth" and the associated developments in maternity services must be borne in mind by those who commission services for people in Rugby.

Faced with such a problem, which touches the lives of all our constituents, hon. Members have two choices: the cheap and easy shot, or the tougher choice of taking the

[Mr. Gerald Malone]

difficult high ground. I say to my hon. Friend and to the House in all sincerity that he has chosen the difficult high ground. He has battled from the start to secure the long-term future of his local hospital, which I believe is in prospect, while also supporting difficult decisions required to safeguard the standards of care that his constituents expect.

It is all too easy to take the simple way out and join the madding crowd, who see more in these developments than meets the eye, and who presage disaster when no disaster is to be seen. My hon. Friend has not taken that course. He has understood his responsibility to his constituents, which, particularly in this period, is primarily to secure for them a safe clinical service. I congratulate him on that.

I hope that those who listen to or read these words will understand the major contribution that my hon. Friend has made to securing progress so far. His continuing contribution will be crucial for his hospital and for the local constituency that he represents in the months and years to come.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 17 March 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Unemployment

1. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on current trends in the level of unemployment in Wales. [18861]

9. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about unemployment in Wales. [18836]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): Unemployment is falling fast in Wales. It has fallen by 9,200 in the past three months.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. I extend my hearty congratulations on his recent engagement. I know that we all wish him the very best for the future. His announcement coincides with the excellent unemployment figures. Is he aware that, at 7 per cent., unemployment in Wales is far lower than unemployment in the European countries, such as France, Germany and Italy, and in Spain, where it is 22 per cent? That is because those countries have been saddled with the social chapter and the minimum wage. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the people of Wales would be cruelly cheated if this country should ever support a Labour Government, who would cost them their jobs and their livelihoods?

Mr. Hague: I am grateful to my hon. Friend: she is correct about unemployment in Wales. The Government have brought new jobs to Wales in record numbers in recent years. Week after week, there have been new announcements of additional employment. This weekend, Optical Fibres—an extremely high-technology company based in north Wales—announced that it has a thriving order book and that it expects its output to quadruple by 2001, and announced 200 new jobs in north Wales. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will no doubt welcome that announcement, but only Conservative Members are prepared to pursue the policies that will keep such announcements coming.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend join me, as a regular visitor to Welsh questions, in welcoming the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) to his first Welsh Question Time? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the improvement in the Welsh economy is due to the fact that we have modern industrial relations and low corporate taxes and have not signed the social chapter? Does he also agree that a party that is in hock to the trade unions would destroy our industrial relations, and that a party whose Chief Whip says that it wants to refine the tax system would soon deal with corporate taxes too?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is right. The Opposition want to pursue, in Wales and in the rest of the United Kingdom, policies that have thrown millions of people out of work in continental Europe. Unemployment in Wales has fallen by more than 9,000 in the past three months, while unemployment in Germany and France has reached post-war highs. The Opposition propose that other countries should decide our social and labour rules and regulations.

It would be churlish of me not to welcome the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) to Welsh questions—although heaven knows what the people of Newport, East will think that they are being asked to vote for in the election, or which party the hon. Gentleman will end up in by the end of the next Parliament. Nevertheless, I hope that he will join me in welcoming a 19 per cent. fall in unemployment last year in the constituency that he seeks to represent.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the people of Newport will vote for a Labour Government because they know that a Labour Government will give steady and reliable support to higher and further education. Does he accept that it is crucial to the employment prospects of the people of Newport and to the success of inward investment in Wales that we should have full-hearted support for education? Does he share my grave concern at the closure of the engineering course at the university of Wales institute in Newport?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman is right: education is extremely important to future job creation in Wales. I hope that he will join me in welcoming a newspaper headline of two weeks ago which said that south-east Wales will be the best place in the United Kingdom to get a job for several years to come—perhaps it sent him off in that direction. It is important to invest in education and training. That is why much of the assistance that we are giving to the LG project, which will benefit the Newport area, is in the form of help with training. We shall continue such support.

Mr. Ron Davies: I also extend my welcome to my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) on his first attendance at Question Time on Welsh affairs, and offer him my congratulations on winning the nomination for his new constituency of Newport, East. I am sure that it will be the last for a long time while sitting on the Opposition Benches.

Any fall in unemployment is obviously to be welcomed, but why does not the Secretary of State present the more rounded picture of the Welsh economy? Will he confirm that we now have 200,000 fewer people in Wales in employment than we did when the present Prime Minister took office? As the low pay unit showed last Friday, in addition to Wales having the highest proportion

of full-timers earning less than that represented by the European decency threshold, the pay gap between Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom is widening.

Now that the election is upon us, the choice for the people is clear. The Labour party offers hope for the future with plans for the young and long-term unemployed, improvements to training and education, the establishment of the university for industry, investment incentives and infrastructure investment, along with welfare-to-work programmes, partnership with the private sector and a revitalised Welsh Development Agency.

How proud is the Secretary of State that, after 18 years in office, all that his Government have to offer is a divided party, a weak leader and excuses for past failures?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman says that any fall in unemployment is obviously welcome. That has become a routine comment for Opposition Members because a fall in unemployment has become routine. It would not be a routine thing if we were to follow the Labour party's policies. Adoption of the social chapter and a minimum wage would price tens of thousands out of their jobs along with hundreds of thousands throughout the rest of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) asked whether I am proud of what we have done in Wales. I am proud of what we have done in building a stronger economy, investing in infrastructure and delivering the best prospects in the lifetime of my generation in Wales and in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Welsh economy needs the hon. Gentleman presiding over it as it needs a hole in the head.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I, too, extend my felicitations to my right hon. Friend on his engagement.

Is not one of the reasons for the favourable disparity between the 7 per cent. unemployment rate in Wales and the 12.5 per cent. in Germany, with 12.4 per cent. in France, the fact that we have cut public expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product? Is it not becoming clear that, were the Labour Opposition to return to government, that policy would be abandoned, causing a devastating rise in unemployment in the longer term?

Mr. Hague: I thank my right hon. Friend for his personal remarks. As I do not have any briefing on those, I do not think that it falls within my ministerial responsibilities more fully to respond. My right hon. Friend has asked what must be the last question that he will be asking at Welsh Question Time during a long career in the House. I am sure that the entire House would wish to pay tribute to him and to the work that he has done for Wales and his constituents over so many years.

My right hon. Friend is right about expenditure, and he is right about the Labour party's policies. Labour says that it would not spend any more money in Wales over the next two years than that which is set out in our plans. It says also that it wants to give more money to local authorities and to the Welsh Development Agency. At the same time, it will have to finance a Welsh Assembly. The people know that that does not add up. The Labour party will be rumbled.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

2. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the board of Cardiff Bay development corporation. [18828]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with the chairman and my right hon. Friend last met the board in May 1996.

Mr. Touhig: Is the Minister aware of the remarks made by his right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who recently described quangos as being logo manufacturers and gatherers of knighthoods? I cannot think in what context that comment would apply in Cardiff bay. Does the Minister agree with the Secretary of State that decisions are best taken by people elected to office and not by people appointed to quangos who meet in secret behind closed doors?

Mr. Jones: From his time in the Welsh Office and since, I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and I share similar approaches towards quangos. I find the hon. Gentleman's remarks somewhat odd as he is a Johnny-come-lately into Welsh politics who has been saddled with trying to breathe life into the corpse of a Welsh Assembly. He is the proponent of the arch quango.

Sir Irvine Patnick: Does my hon. Friend agree that all development corporations have brought investment and work into their areas? Is not the Cardiff Bay development corporation an example of the good things that the Conservatives have done, despite opposition from the Labour party?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is right; he points to the reality of the situation. We have lame acceptances from Labour Members that any fall in unemployment is welcome. We get equally lame acceptances of any new announcement. The Cardiff bay redevelopment is confidently expected to generate 29,000 jobs in the capital city of Wales and throughout south Wales. Who were the stoutest opponents of the scheme? They were Welsh Members sitting on the Labour Front Bench.

Manufacturing Skills

3. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has recently been taken to raise the level of manufacturing skills in Wales. [18830]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jonathan Evans): A great deal of action is being taken. That includes provision for a further 4,800 young people to start modern apprenticeships in 1997-98; increased funding for adult technician training; and initiatives to meet the need for skills in the electronics and semi-conductor sectors.

Mr. Fabricant: We take for granted falls in unemployment and we are beginning to take for granted the fact that Wales is becoming the silicon valley of Europe. Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to liquid manufacturers, such as Ty Nant, the water manufacturers

in Lampeter? Will he also pay tribute to Swy y Mor, the Welsh whisky manufacturer, whose product is available throughout the known world? What would be the effect on those manufacturers of the imposition of European employment law?

Mr. Evans: I happily respond to my hon. Friend's invitation in relation to the Welsh whisky company because it is based in my constituency. I have noted my hon. Friend's welcome for the great success of Ty Nant water. A number of water companies within the Principality have managed to develop a high international profile. My hon. Friend is right to say that that does not just happen, as Labour Members believe. It is the product of investment in the skills of the people who work in those businesses. The difference between us and Labour Members is that we understand that, whereas they do not.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Is not the true answer to the question that little has been done to raise manufacturing skills in Wales? Is that not the reason why the average wage in Wales is the lowest in the United Kingdom, with some workers getting as little as £1.61 an hour? Is not the low pay unit report a fitting epitaph for this Government? On 1 May, the people of Wales and of Great Britain as a whole will say that enough is enough.

Mr. Evans: I preface my remarks by saying that I anticipate that that question will be one of the last contributions made by the hon. Gentleman. Whatever political differences there have been between us, he well knows that I very much respect him. I find it rather strange, however, to see him sitting with the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). What an incongruous threesome they make. The hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) used to understand that introducing a minimum wage was a way in which to destroy jobs. It is rather sad that he is singing a different tune now.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Would my hon. Friend care to speculate on the effect on jobs in Wales, particularly in the telecommunications industry, were BT to lose £2 billion or £3 billion in a windfall tax and the money that supports those jobs were transferred to make-work schemes and training schemes that have no jobs at the end of them?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why the Labour party says so little about the implications of the windfall tax. Many people who work for the privatised utilities in Wales have good cause to take on board the points raised by my hon. Friend and, furthermore, the effect on jobs of the introduction of the social chapter—a matter that has been raised not only by my hon. Friends. I had the opportunity of visiting one of our biggest mid-Wales businesses and the first point raised with me expressed concern about Labour's policy in that respect.

Mr. Wigley: If this is indeed the hon. Gentleman's last Welsh Question Time, may we wish him well in his future incarnation? May I press him on the point that the most relevant investment in manufacturing industry is often in higher and further education, which provide the necessary skills. In that context, is the Minister happy, after receiving representations from the university of Wales and other colleges concerning the reduction in the funding available for education and research? Is he aware that we shall lose considerable input into the Welsh economy unless the shortfall is found? The Secretary of State says that the money is not available for higher education because it has gone into LG, but surely we need to find money for both if we are to invest in the future.

Mr. Evans: There has been a significant expansion over the years in investment in higher and further education in Wales, as the hon. Gentleman is aware. His point relates to this year's provision in respect of further education, which has increased to some £162.5 million. Against the background of some of the representations from the sector, last year there was clear recognition that the settlement for Wales was higher than that for England.

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Minister gives a rather belated example of conversion to sensible policies on training when it was a Conservative Government who slaughtered apprenticeship schemes in the 1980s. While we welcome his new conversion to modern apprenticeships and the additional money provided for technicians this year, is it not true that there have been cuts in the budgets of the further and higher education funding councils and in the overall employment and training budget? Manufacturers throughout south Wales remain concerned about the shortage of training skills and the Government's own target for training and skills is still woefully behind what is really needed. Will it not be a real blessing when, in May this year, we have a Government who will truly concentrate on improving skills and education in Wales?

Mr. Evans: All that I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that the Council of Welsh Training and Enterprise Councils recently published an action plan for manufacturing. The hon. Gentleman tells us that he has read it, so perhaps he will have read the response from a range of agencies—the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales, the Further Education Funding Council for Wales and the Confederation of British Industry—and from their paymasters, the Trades Union Congress. They all welcomed the approach in that document and I urge Opposition Members to do so as well.

Quangos

4. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about appointment to quangos in Wales during 1996. [18831]

Mr. Hague: My Department has received several representations.

Mr. Jones: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that one of the most miserable and disreputable aspects of the Conservative Government in the past 18 years has been the way in which they have appointed their friends to run quangos in Wales? What could be more damaging to the cause of democracy than for Members of Parliament rejected by the electorate to be appointed to run the health service and represent the interests of consumers in Wales? With one or two notable exceptions,

does he not realise that all he and his friends have done is further the cause of the Conservative party in Wales? We deserve a far better system of government and we shall vote for it on 1 May.

Mr. Hague: After the question by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) earlier, I thought that it was impossible to hear more rubbish in one question time. However, we have now heard more from the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) who says that we have filled boards with political friends of the Conservative party. Lord Elis-Thomas does a good job for the Welsh Language Board and he was appointed by the Conservative Government. I have recently appointed to the WDA board Councillor Noel Crowley of Neath and Port Talbot, who is a leading member of the Labour party in Wales. There is also George Wright, who is a leading representative of the trade unions in Wales. Those people sit on those bodies because we select people for them on merit—and that is how it should be.

Mr. Hanson: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the recent group of people that he appointed to monitor appointments to quangos were themselves appointed without any advertisements being placed—on his say-so only? Is it satisfactory to have a quango monitoring appointments to quangos? Would it not be far better to have an elected assembly monitoring the performance of quangos?

Mr. Hague: What we have under the new arrangements is an independent element in the selection of people for public office. If the hon. Gentleman or anybody else suggests people for those lists, they would of course be considered. The idea that better appointments would be made because there was a room full of people in an assembly arguing about it, and claiming a fat expense account for doing so, is absolutely ludicrous.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I invite my right hon. Friend to reflect on the irony that many Opposition Members who campaigned vigorously against quangos want to hand their country over to the ultimate quango—the European Commission in Brussels.

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. It is the Labour party's policy to sign away—no doubt it would do it at the Amsterdam summit if it had the chance—and get rid of the British veto on social policy, regional policy, industrial policy and environmental policy. That is not a policy that will win the support of the British people.

Job Insecurity

5. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent assessment he has made of job insecurity in Wales. [18832]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In spring 1996, according to the labour force survey, 8.3 per cent. of Welsh employees were in temporary employment.

Mr. Hain: Has the Minister had any discussions with Lucas Industries Ltd. over the closure of its Neath factory and the transfer of 170 jobs to Poland? Why does he keep denying that job insecurity in Wales is rife, when the number of temporary workers has increased since the last election by more than a quarter, and in his own backyard in the Welsh Office, it has increased by a half? He will soon understand a great deal more about job insecurity when the voters of Wales sack all the Conservative Members on 1 May.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman would do better not to prejudge the outcome of the election. As he is interested in international comparisons, let me point out that the number of people who are engaged in temporary employment is higher in France, Germany and Spain than in Wales. Furthermore, if he is concerned about the exportation of jobs, it is rather odd that he should be spending his time arguing in favour of a national minimum wage and the social chapter, which will destroy jobs in Wales.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend confirm that job insecurity is a function of unemployment—the higher the unemployment, the more insecure people feel about their jobs? The policies that lead to higher unemployment are those that the socialists would introduce, such as the minimum wage and the social chapter; policies that would see the expansion of the Welsh Assembly, which would deter inward investment to Wales, destroy Welsh jobs and increase job insecurity.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Every week, we hear of new inward investment projects in Wales and of jobs going to the Principality. The United Kingdom stands at the top of the tree of performance in Europe in attracting new inward investment, and Wales is taking more than its proportional share of that. Wales has been pursuing that success under a Conservative Government—success that would come to an end if there were to be a change on 1 May.

Mr. Rowlands: The Secretary of State said a few minutes ago that he was proud of the employment record under his Government. Is he proud of the fact that 40 per cent. of men aged between 50 and 64 are economically inactive? That is the highest percentage of any region or nation in the United Kingdom. Is he proud of the fact that, despite many representations, he and his predecessor have done nothing about one of the most serious social and economic problems that has faced our communities?

Mr. Evans: The Secretary of State and I are proud of all of the efforts that are being made to attract new job opportunities to Wales and, especially, to the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Significant investment has been made in the road network and in new job opportunities in his constituency. His constituents would not have had those opportunities under a Labour Government.

Mr. Garnier: Would not one of the best ways to increase job insecurity in Wales be to introduce some of the working practices of mainland Europe? For example, is my hon. Friend aware that it is illegal to work more than 80 hours a year overtime in Spain; it is illegal to work any overtime at all in Luxembourg without informing the authorities; and it is illegal to work overtime in Belgium without the express permission of the authorities? Are not those the policies of the European social model that is warmly advocated by the Labour party?

Mr. Evans: That is why industrialists and those who are running businesses in Wales have expressed their concerns to us about the proposal to sign the social chapter. The Labour party advocates an idea that would destroy jobs in Wales. We must not, and we will not, go down that route.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Secretary of State agree that he could reduce job insecurity in Wales by approving the Eurofreight terminal at Wentlloog between Cardiff and Newport? Unconscionable delays have been caused by his inability to make a decision, and thousands of jobs have been destroyed. Before the Secretary of State leaves Wales in his private plane to join the Tory leadership contest, will he undertake today to announce the decision on the Eurofreight terminal before the end of this Parliament? His uncertainty on the issue makes Prince Hamlet of Denmark look like General Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf.

Mr. Evans: It is my understanding that the Secretary of State is awaiting a report from the Welsh Development Agency on that matter. *[Interruption.]* I recall that the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), who is making such a noise from a sedentary position, said some months ago that it was the most important decision to be made in south Wales. He made that statement two weeks before the Secretary of State announced the biggest inward investment project in Europe by LG. That shows how in touch the hon. Gentleman is.

District General Hospitals (Dyfed Powys)

6. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about funding for district general hospitals within the Dyfed Powys health authority area. [18833]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: For 1997-98, we have announced a cash increase of £6 million for Dyfed Powys health authority.

Mr. Dafis: The Secretary of State has recognised already the need to reconsider funding for health care in Dyfed Powys to take account of rurality. He must know also that some trusts in the area are heading for significant deficits this time next year, because of the present funding arrangements. Does he accept that that will lead to serious problems for some district general hospitals, especially Bronglais hospital, which serves a wide area? To prevent that immediate crisis from developing, additional funding is urgent and necessary. Will the Secretary of State commit himself or his successor to provide that additional funding?

Mr. Jones: I have already announced additional funding for Dyfed Powys health authority of £6 million. I have the strangest sense of déjà vu, because the first time that the hon. Gentleman raised the matter in the Chamber he started the scaremongering about Bronglais general hospital. Now that the scare over the community hospitals, which was so wickedly whipped up by certain people—not those on the Conservative Benches—has been resolved, scares are being raised about the general hospitals. That is a contemptible way to approach health care in west Wales.

Mr. Ainger: Given his answer to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), has the Minister read the report produced by Dyfed Powys health authority, entitled "Effective Care and Healthy People", in which it offers three options to cope with the financial crisis? The first is to close all community hospitals in the area; the second is to close two out of four of the district general hospitals; and the third is to close some of the community hospitals and cut some of the district general hospitals. Opposition Members are not scaremongering: the health authorities are telling the truth, but the Welsh Office refuses to listen.

Mr. Jones: The new Dyfed Powys health authority, which has inherited an overspending tendency, is conducting a review. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State stated his regard for community hospitals during the Welsh affairs debate on 27 February, and added that he wanted them to continue their role. When he considers any proposals, he will have strong regard for local views about local health needs, and will not adopt the scaremongering approach advocated by the Opposition.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Minister give a clear undertaking that there is no risk of closing any of the valuable community hospitals in Powys?

Mr. Jones: There is no need to say any more because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made the position clear on 27 February. I say simply to the hon. and learned Gentleman—before he flits off to pursue his more prosperous legal practices—that neither my right hon. Friend nor I is in the business of closing necessary hospitals anywhere in Wales. We are certainly not in the business of cutting the NHS. We are committed to expanding it—a commitment that the Labour party markedly refuses to match.

Mr. Ron Davies: Is it not disgraceful that the Under-Secretary seeks to avoid responsibility for this serious matter by claiming that the health authority has "inherited" the relevant responsibilities? I remind him that he created the health authorities and appointed the people to run them. They are directly his creation. Is it not clear that something is fundamentally wrong with the funding of Dyfed Powys health authority? I make it clear that the Labour party supports the campaign now being waged to conduct a fundamental review of the funding formula. Is not the Under-Secretary's opposition to the closure of community hospitals by the health authority both hypocritical and dishonest, as he is directly and personally responsible for that funding crisis? In addition, all his words this afternoon have not changed the fact that that crisis remains. Is that not typical of the Government, who practise deception and evasion and advocate the fraudulent making of policies today which they have no intention of honouring tomorrow? Is it any wonder that they have lost the trust of the people?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman clearly is not aware of the circumstances. I have moved to assist Dyfed Powys health authority by extending one loan and providing another, and I am ready to assist it with transitional cash flow. It is the hon. Gentleman who is clearly ducking, as he will not make a promise—perhaps because he knows that he cannot honour it—to match our commitment to continue the real increases in spending for the health service each and every year in the next Parliament.

Relocation (Minimum Wage)

7. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will establish how many jobs have been relocated from Wales to countries that have the minimum wage in each of the past five years. [18834]

Mr. Hague: There are no data readily available to perform such an analysis.

Mr. Flynn: Is not Newport doubly fortunate, as it can look forward to the LG semi-conductor jobs and to being represented in the future, as in the past, by splendid Members of Parliament? Is it not extraordinary that the Government can count the number of incoming jobs and announce the figures again and again, but cannot say how many jobs have left this country to relocate in countries with both the minimum wage and the social chapter? Is it not extraordinary that when LG is up and running, it will be competing for semi-conductor jobs that used to be based in Newport but are now located in France and Germany? Why does a country such as Britain, which has won 74 Nobel prizes for science, have to buy scientific jobs from a country that has never won such a prize?

Mr. Hague: We all commend the hon. Gentleman on his becoming modesty in describing himself as a splendid Member of Parliament. I certainly hope that Newport will be represented by two splendid Members in the coming Parliament, but not necessarily the current ones. The hon. Gentleman should not presume about the outcome of elections.

If Labour Members are so in favour of the minimum wage, why cannot they say at what level they would set it? It is because it would be either so low as to be utterly irrelevant or so high that it would price people out of work. They will have to own up to that in the coming weeks.

Mr. Llew Smith: Is the Secretary of State aware that in Blaenau Gwent we have some of the lowest wages in the United Kingdom? Would he be willing to work for £2 or £3 an hour? What advice would he give to families who have to bring up children on that kind of money?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that wages cannot be raised by Government diktat. Wages and living standards are raised by having an enterprise economy, by the promotion of employment and by businesses doing well and having to compete to employ people. That is happening increasingly in many parts of Wales. We have already made south-east Wales the best place in Britain to get a job, and I want that to be the case in the whole of Wales. That will deliver rising living standards all round.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Is it not a fact that the company referred to by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) is a French nationalised company, Thomson SLG? Is it therefore surprising that it should behave in such an extraordinary way?

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend has a point—apart from having asked another question after I had paid tribute to him on his previous question. He could also have mentioned the fact that unemployment in France stands at 12.5 per cent. and has risen in the past year, whereas unemployment in Wales is about 8 per cent.—depending on which definition one uses—and has fallen dramatically in the past year.

Inward Investment

8. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has been taken to encourage more inward investment in Wales outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors. [18835]

Mr. Hague: I have recently set the Welsh Development Agency new and more demanding targets to encourage more inward investment outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors. I have also asked it to give more assistance to companies locating in those areas than to equivalent projects elsewhere.

Mr. Richards: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his announcement of new targets for investment outside the M4 and A55 corridors and in rural Wales? What measures does he propose to enhance the quality of life throughout rural Wales following the publication of the rural White Paper last year?

Mr. Hague: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome for the new targets that have been set for the Welsh Development Agency. The rural White Paper published last year demonstrated the importance that we attach to the future of rural areas of Wales. I shall today publish the 1997 review of the White Paper, which is an important step in the process of building a prosperous countryside and a healthy environment for rural Wales. That will include such matters as a further round of the schools technology initiative, broadening the coverage of the rural transport innovation grant, a new native woodland challenge scheme and new advice on encouraging village shops and other services in rural areas.

Mr. Alan Williams: Does the Secretary of State recall the constructive meeting that he had with a deputation of south-west Wales Members two months ago? Does he remember that we made it clear that we in no way regret that so much industrial development is going to south-east Wales but that we are living in the shadow of Cardiff and Newport and fear for the fact that little or no development is occurring beyond Bridgend? Does he remember giving us certain assurances in relation to his use of discretionary power? What action has he taken in the intervening two months to implement that agreement?

Mr. Hague: Yes, I well remember the meeting with the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues. As he said—I hope that other hon. Members were listening—a great deal of industrial development has taken place in south-east Wales. It is time to ensure that that success is spread right across Wales, including to the areas that the right hon. Gentleman has represented. That is why I have set the Welsh Development Agency a new target of 50 per cent. of the new investment and jobs that it attracts to Wales in the coming financial year being outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors. That is a major increase in the targets for those areas. I have also asked the agency

to pay more for projects going to the areas that have not yet been the principal beneficiaries of inward investment than for equivalent projects elsewhere.

Mr. Llwyd: I have heard the Secretary of State congratulating himself so many times this afternoon that it is rather disturbing—one wonders whether he is serious about all this. I welcome his difference of emphasis on investment and job creation outside the M4 corridor and north-east Wales. May I ask him a serious question? What is he doing about youth unemployment? Does he know, for example, that north Wales has pockets of youth unemployment as high as 33 per cent? What on earth is being done to tackle that extreme problem?

Mr. Hague: What I am doing about youth unemployment in Wales is to bring more jobs to Wales than we have seen in modern times. That has an impact on youth unemployment as well as on unemployment generally. Of course, it is important to ensure that the benefits of that are shared throughout Wales. To tackle youth unemployment, in the coming year I am also increasing by £12 million—nearly doubling it—the budget for modern apprenticeships in Wales, so that young people will have the skills to take up those jobs.

ATTORNEY–GENERAL

Young Offenders

25. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Attorney–General what steps he is taking to reduce delays in dealing with young offenders. [18851]

The Attorney–General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): The Crown Prosecution Service has well-established teams of specialist prosecutors to handle youth cases, which are working closely with the other agencies to develop methods of speeding up those cases. Those include the introduction of pilot schemes for lawyers in police stations, which enable police officers to obtain immediate advice on the charging of youth offenders.

Mr. Sweeney: Will my right hon. and learned Friend take on board the fact that there is widespread concern in the Vale of Glamorgan about young offenders who commit fresh offences while waiting to be dealt with by the courts? Those offenders also tend to forget why they are in court if there is any significant delay. Does he agree that the CPS and all the other agencies involved in the criminal justice system have an important role to play in avoiding unnecessary adjournments and speeding up justice?

The Attorney–General: My hon. Friend has great practical knowledge of both prosecution and defence and he will know from that how important it is to bring offenders promptly before the courts before they continue a spree of offending. The CPS, the Home Office and others are working together closely to tackle the issue.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Attorney-General agree that it is not just the problem of delay that is creating difficulties with youth crime, but the system itself? Does he agree that there is scope for considering, for example, the introduction of an equivalent to the Scottish children's panel system, which has proved much more effective than youth courts in preventing young people from committing additional crimes? Does he not think that we should now take a root-and-branch look at the way in which youth crime is dealt with and not merely tinker with issues such as delay?

The Attorney–General: I agree to the extent that there are a number of ways in which one can approach youth crime. The police and the CPS are already making strides with interesting initiatives, one of which I saw last Thursday in Aylesbury. There is a broad spectrum of possibilities and the problem can be tackled in many effective ways, not only through the courts.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Home Office and his Department are working vigorously to try to speed up the prosecution of young offenders, but that we are being delayed by Opposition Members, who talk tough on crime and promptly delay the passage of some of our crime laws? Is it not absolutely clear that the only way in which we will tackle the problem properly is to have another five years of Conservative government?

The Attorney–General: My hon. Friend puts his finger on the curious and muddled policy of the Opposition, which will be tested carefully over the next six weeks and about which they can think further in opposition over the next five years, after which they may come up with something better. My hon. Friend and I realise that there is a small hard core of young offenders who need to be dealt with rapidly and effectively and on whom the Government are targeting their efforts.

Mr. John Morris: Will the Attorney-General take account of the fact that while youth crime has risen by 35 per cent. in the past decade, the number of young offenders dealt with by the courts has fallen by the same proportion? Reducing delay is important, especially for persistent young offenders, but it is only part of the problem. What consideration has he given to the criticism of youth justice by the Audit Commission and others? Does he not consider it extraordinary that there were no proposals to reform youth courts in the recent Government consultative paper? What are his views, given his remit and drawing on his experience, on responsibility for the Crown Prosecution Service?

The Attorney–General: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is not wholly correct. Several proposals put forward recently by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary have particular application to youth courts, as well as to courts generally. However, there are also specialist aspects that deserve further attention, which they will receive. The right hon. and learned Gentleman must remember that the problem with youth crime is the comparatively small number of multiple offenders—also a symptom of adult crime—who must be brought rapidly before the courts and, if necessary, put out of circulation with swift custodial penalties.

Stephen Lawrence

26. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Attorney–General what discussions he has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions regarding the murder of Stephen Lawrence. [18853]

The Solicitor–General (Sir Derek Spencer): My right hon. and learned Friend and I meet the Director of Public Prosecutions frequently to discuss matters of departmental interest, and I have been kept informed about the case.

Mr. Winnick: Is this not a case where, so far, evil has triumphed over justice? Is it not a matter of deep regret that no one has yet been brought to justice for a racially motivated crime of murder that was committed nearly four years ago, despite the fact that a newspaper has named the people whom it considers responsible for that terrible crime? What will the authorities do to try to ensure that those who put Stephen Lawrence to death will at long last be brought to justice?

The Solicitor–General: The hon. Gentleman is quite right that it is a great injustice that those responsible for the killing have not been brought to justice. However, he might like to bear in mind the words of Mr. Justice Curtis, who heard evidence on the voir dire at the Old Bailey from a person who said that he had witnessed the killing. Having heard the only witness on whom the private prosecution relied, the judge said:

"Where recognition or identification is concerned, he simply does not know in ordinary parlance whether he is on his head or his heels."

In directing that the evidence should not go to the jury—and I commend these words to the House—the judge added:

"To do so would amount to an injustice. Adding one injustice to another does not cure the first injustice done to the Lawrence family."

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it does not impugn the sincerity of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) to remind him that if the qualification to the right to silence had been in operation when the murder occurred, the outcome might have been very different? Perhaps he would remind the House, and the public at large, that Labour voted against that reform.

The Solicitor–General: As my hon. Friend said, Conservative Members do not find it easy to forget that, in contradistinction to Opposition Members. He knows from his discussions with people who practise in the courts that the modification of the right to silence that we introduced in the teeth of protest and opposition from the Labour party is bringing great benefits. People answer questions more freely in the police station, and they go into the witness box in court.

Mr. MacShane: Will the Solicitor-General join me in congratulating the *Daily Mail* on ensuring that the issue does not escape the public gaze? Will he also join me in praising the Prime Minister on the remarkable rebuke that he gave last week at Prime Minister's Question Time to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South–West (Mr. Budgen), who tried to make race an issue? Will he condemn the Conservative Members of Parliament in the west midlands who are meeting in a conspiracy to seek, once again, to make race an election issue in British politics—something that British people of all colours will utterly reject?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's question is well away from the substantive question.

The Solicitor–General: As a former Member of Parliament for Leicester, South, which had about 19,000 Asian constituents, I do not need lessons on the importance of race and the vileness of racial crimes from the hon. Gentleman or any of his hon. Friends. We have been in the vanguard in tightening up the law to ensure that a wider range of incidents involving racial misconduct are treated as criminal offences. As for the *Daily Mail*, we live in a free society with a free press. The hon. Gentleman might not be quite so supportive of that paper's actions if evidence comes to light relating to those against whom charges were dismissed in the magistrates court and a prosecution is brought against them. I say that because, unfortunately, the likelihood of an abuse-of-process argument succeeding on the grounds of prejudice has been increased by such publicity.

Information Technology (Serious Fraud Office)

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney–General if he will make a statement about the use of information technology in the Serious Fraud Office. [18856]

The Solicitor–General: The Serious Fraud Office makes significant use of information technology, both to support its investigations and to present complex material at court.

Mr. Marshall: I welcome the publication today of figures recording the fourth annual reduction in crime—an historic first for this country—and congratulate Mrs. Wright on her appointment as head of the SFO. But will my hon. and learned Friend look at Mrs. Wright's comments on the sophistication of juries? Does he not believe that we should revisit the views of the Roskill report and decide that serious fraud is too serious a matter to be considered by unsophisticated jurors?

The Solicitor–General: My hon. Friend is quite right about the crime figures. It is a great pity that we have not had more support from the Labour party for our campaign on law and order in the past five years—perhaps we shall hear a little more from it in the next few weeks. I am sure that my hon. Friend will want to join me in congratulating Mrs. Wright on her appointment as the new director. She is experienced in prosecuting and regulation, and I am sure that the House will wish her well. As for my hon. Friend's last point about jury trials, as he knows the Government are considering alternatives to jury trial in serious and complex fraud cases.

Fraud

28. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Attorney–General what measures the Serious Fraud Office has recently taken to reduce fraud. [18857]

The Attorney–General: The Serious Fraud Office continues to enhance its ability to investigate and detect, and thus deter, serious and complex fraud, including by the ever more sophisticated use of information technology, both to marshal and analyse documentation and to present cases to the jury.

Mr. Banks: How can anyone take seriously a Government who talk about restricting and dealing with serious fraud yet who allowed Asil Nadir to escape from this country? We are still waiting to know what they are going to do to get him back. He gave £400,000 of stolen money to the Conservative party. What about Mr. Octav Botnar, who gave stolen money to the Conservative party? When can we expect to see that money returned? And what about the Greek fascist, Mr. Latsis? How can the Attorney-General talk about serious fraud when all his party is a fraud; the Conservative party is funded by fascists and crooks.

The Attorney–General: The hon. Gentleman is, once again, more interested in ranting than in facts. First, he might remember that the SFO stands ready to prosecute Mr. Asil Nadir as soon as he returns to this country from Northern Cyprus, with which we have no extradition treaty, and his duty is to return as soon as possible. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman might remember that, during its eight and a half years of existence, the SFO has prosecuted almost 160 very large frauds. It has achieved the conviction of more than 62 per cent. of all defendants, but—even more important—in more than 75 per cent. of cases it has obtained the conviction of at least one person and, when only one person has been convicted, that has almost always been the chief architect of the fraud.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the participation of ordinary members of the public in the criminal justice system through sitting on juries—even on juries in fraud trials—is one of the reasons why the criminal justice system can reassure people about its fairness, and is also the surest protection of the liberty of the individual?

The Attorney–General: The importance of the jury system has motivated and governed the actions of the Government for more than 18 years. In some recent cases it has proved difficult adequately to prosecute the full ambit of fraud against an individual, which is why the Government have indicated that they will look again at that issue. However, my hon. and learned Friend raises an important point, of which we shall not lose sight.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a short business statement.

In the light of the announcement made earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the business for the rest of this week will be rearranged. The House will also wish to know that Parliament will be prorogued on Friday 21 March.

I shall be tabling a motion later today, which will be set down for the commencement of business tomorrow. That will enable the House to conclude the remainder of its business in an orderly manner, which I trust will be for the convenience of the whole House.

Following discussions through the usual channels, which are already under way, I shall make a business statement later today setting out the detailed business for the remainder of the week.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Leader of the House for that statement—it is good to have my predictions from last Thursday's business questions confirmed as being correct. We are, of course, co-operating through the usual channels to deal with outstanding business as effectively as possible and we look forward to receiving further details from the right hon. Gentleman later.

In the meantime, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that Question Time will operate as usual up to and including Thursday this week? So that Members of Parliament are as fully in the picture as possible at this stage, will he confirm that, when the House prorogues on Friday 21 March, it will not meet again and that Dissolution will be through proclamation?

Finally, needless to say, Labour Members are very glad that the campaign has come for real at last.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady will recall that I refrained from announcing any recess dates last Thursday and, indeed, from commenting on her predictions or speculation, which I would not then have been in a position to confirm. I can confirm that it would be my expectation that questions will proceed as normal. Those are probably the only points in her remarks on which I need to comment.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Will the Leader of the House confirm that his announcement has two effects: first, that some 28 Bills will have to be either passed through the House in the next few days or dropped altogether, which hardly seems to be the best way of concluding legislation; and, secondly, that, coupled with the press statement from No. 10 Downing street, he has announced the longest election campaign in this century, with three weeks of phoney war before Dissolution and three weeks of real campaigning afterwards? Should he not come to the Dispatch Box and apologise to the House on behalf of the Government for being, in the words of Charles II, such "an unconscionable time dying"?

Mr. Newton: I see no reason whatever to apologise to the House, either on my own behalf or on that of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It remains to be seen how phoney the war will be. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that my party will be fighting vigorously throughout the period in question.

As for the Bills on which proceedings have not been completed, I can of course confirm that there are a significant number of them. Precisely how they will be dealt with is what is under consideration via the usual channels and will be the subject of the business statement that I hope to make later today.

Sir James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Will the Leader of the House prevail on the usual channels to ensure that the Northern Ireland business set down for Wednesday will not entirely disappear? I assure him that we shall do all in our power to facilitate an easy passage for those vital matters.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I shall certainly try to reciprocate by being as helpful as I can.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Questions have been put to the Leader of the House about his statement, and he has been good enough to say that he will come to the House later today with a substantive statement. This one is very narrow, telling us what many of us already know—but I thank hon. Members for coming in to hear it anyway. Meanwhile, we look forward to hearing from the Leader of the House again later this afternoon.

Orders of the Day

Building Societies Bill

Considered in Committee.

[SIR GEOFFREY LOFTHOUSE *in the Chair*]

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

MEMBERSHIP AND LIABILITY OF MEMBERS

3.36 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 20, after second 'member', insert

'of two years' standing or more.'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 21, after 'member', insert

'of two years' standing or more.'.

Mr. Pike: In view of the announcement made a few moments ago by the Leader of the House, it must be doubtful that the Bill can now make progress. It has not yet been to the other House, and it would be extremely unusual to force through a Bill at this stage and to gain the approval of the other place in such a short time—before proroguing on Friday of this week.

In last week's Second Reading debate, I mentioned that the Bill was defective, which is why I tabled the amendments, which would require two years' membership before anyone could share in any windfall payments that accrued to the members of a building society as a result of its conversion to plc or bank status.

I recognise that the amendments are not necessarily the best way of achieving that; indeed, I am sure that the Minister will say that they are defective. The Minister was challenged last week about whether the Bill would be able to make progress. I know that she has been committed to it in good faith from the outset, although there has been some doubt about the Government's commitment. I know that the Minister has done all that she can to ensure that the Bill makes progress. I also know that she shared the disappointment of many when it did not feature in the Queen's Speech last autumn.

The amendments would stop people deliberately joining societies with only one view in mind: to qualify for payments in the way that I have described. That is not what conversion is about.

People are entitled to hold differing views as to whether conversion is good or bad. People know that I very much want mutuality to continue. The assets and the value of a society have been built by generations of its investors and borrowing members, over 100 years or so, and on conversion what has been built up on a mutual basis is handed out to those who happen to have become new members. It is wrong for people to choose to become a member only to qualify for a handout on the society's conversion.

I am sure that the Minister is aware that the amendments are defective. I had hoped that the Government would table an amendment, or that a Labour Front Bencher would see to it, because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) agrees with the principle behind what I am arguing for. However, we all realise that, if we want the Bill to complete its passage, we might have to do some compromising. I now have grave doubts on whether it is feasible or possible for the Bill to be passed, as it has not even gone to the other place, but we shall have to note what the usual channels do and the contents of the business statement. We have no alternative now but to debate the Bill, in the hope that it makes progress.

I echo what the Nationwide building society said in a letter to several hon. Members last week. It supports the two-year concept, but if that cannot be included in the Bill, it would prefer the Bill to pass rather than to fall because of a flaw. That is also the view of the Building Societies Association.

If the Bill is to complete its passage, we must compromise and accept that the amendments will not be passed because of the difficulties that they would encounter—I presume that the other place would argue more about this. There would be no progress if there were great issues of debate on this matter and on the other matter of contention, the five-year issue, which we shall debate later. Those were the two main issues. The Government have also tabled some drafting amendments.

Although I strongly believe that such a move would be in the best interests of the Bill and of the building society movement, if we are told that, without the amendments, the Bill stands a better chance of progressing and receiving Royal Assent before Parliament dissolves, I shall be prepared not to press my amendments to the vote.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I support the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). As you will be aware, Sir Geoffrey, I raised this issue on Second Reading and I have a great deal of sympathy for the sentiments that he expressed.

We have all found unedifying the spectacle of carpetbaggers moving small sums round the country, from building society to building society, in the hope of making a quick profit on demutualisation, and I believe that there is broad agreement across the Committee that it would be desirable to do something effective to prevent that happening. I, too, appreciate that there are problems in achieving that object, but it seems wrong that short-term speculators can put their money into a building society, build up a head of steam in speculation about how it might be taken over and bring pressure to bear for a takeover to take place, in the expectation that they will make a pile of cash.

Many of those people have no interest in the community in which, very often, the building society originated. Many have no interest in the building society or in the well-being of other depositors or of borrowers. They are motivated purely by greed, and if it were possible to have a mechanism that prevented such speculation, that would be good.

My hon. Friend the Minister has examined that in some detail and is of the view that there is no way by which speculation can effectively be prevented, except that

[Mr. John Butterfill]

building societies can make rules as to how depositors may be treated: for example, that they may not immediately acquire rights, and that they may be required to make a larger deposit than usual. However, such rules are unsatisfactory, especially the requirement that investors make a larger deposit, because that would rule out the small depositor, for whom building societies were first set up.

It is extremely important that there remains a savings vehicle that is appropriate to small investors—where small investors do not carry a lot of risk; where no huge costs are involved when they invest their money and save; and where they can receive an excellent and personal service. Raising the threshold is not the answer to that. Nor would the problem be solved if the building society changed its rules, because no society would be protected from an aggressive, hostile bid by a predator offering shares to building society members and thereby overcoming all the other mechanisms that can be put in place to prevent speculation.

3.45 pm

I very much share the views of the hon. Member for Burnley and want the Bill to succeed, as does the Building Societies Association. If there were a mechanism by which we could prevent speculators from engaging in their nefarious activities, I should be the first to support it.

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): I have much sympathy with the views expressed by the hon. Members for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). Many of us who spoke on Second Reading are concerned about small depositors, the local nature of building societies and the important place that they have in local communities. When societies move to plc status, we have seen people with no particular interest in the society, which has built up its assets over a number of years, rush in, desperate to get money. It is its long-standing members who have provided those assets.

I have sympathy with the amendments but fear that, as the hon. Member for Burnley said, they do not do exactly what we should all like. I am particularly concerned that if they were passed, some members would be excluded from some of the rights of membership, for example, taking part in annual general meetings, voting for directors, nominating candidates to stand as directors, and so on.

Mr. Pike: I assure the hon. Lady that that is one reason why I would not wish to press the amendments to a vote; I recognise that they would, as she rightly says, bar people from doing many of the things that we would like them to do.

Mrs. Maddock: I think that we all agree that, up against the time scale of a general election, and however much we would like to get this right, we shall barely be able to get the Bill on the statute book. Although I agree with the principles behind the amendments, we are not in a position to get them right today. Therefore, I cannot support the amendments as drafted.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I declare a mild interest, in that a building society in which I am involved is converting and I expect to make a minor gain.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): How much?

Mr. Bottomley: It depends on the price of the shares.

We should be aware that if the Bill survives the discussions between the usual channels and becomes an Act by the end of this Parliament, it will have to have gone through another place as well. If there is merit in the arguments and if those who advise my hon. Friend the Minister, whom we welcome to the Front Bench for the debate, are able to take a more positive way forward, that would be greatly welcomed.

There is general agreement that something might be done, although there is not yet agreement on what should or could be done. We should be aware that the amendments are being discussed in the context of the possible raid on the Co-operative Wholesale Society and the co-operative retail societies. The issues that have been developed and the pressures of the people who want to carry out what might appear to be a smash-and-grab operation are worthy of discussion. It should not be a party political issue, and I am glad that this debate has not been conducted in those terms. It may be a good start to the prospective general election campaign.

We should realise that of the societies that are converting, some will survive as banks and general retailers of financial services, and possibly as wholesalers as well, and some will be taken over. People know that. We must avoid pressures that would not allow people the choice of keeping the mutual building societies going. That is what is behind these amendments and other possible amendments.

Twenty years ago, the insurance companies came under pressure for many of them to drop their mutual status. Fortunately, some did not drop their mutual status. Companies such as Equitable Life and Norwich Union, which is now converting, and others over the past 20 years have helped to protect the customers of insurance services and to give them a broader choice. They were willing to look to the long-term interest and to go in for long-term investments, rather than always going in for short-term performance.

Without criticising those that have been receiving attention in the business pages and sometimes the front page of newspapers because of enormous bonuses, I think that the building society movement and the mutual insurance companies in the United Kingdom, including those in Scotland, have done a great deal of good. They have enabled ordinary people to do ordinary things, and they have achieved extraordinary results in terms of building up wealth and home ownership. I believe that their future will not be exactly the same as the present. It is more likely to take in the other end of the life cycle. Many of the elderly, who may be asset rich but housing poor, deserve ways of turning a capital asset into an income and a secure home in good condition, but that is not a subject to be pursued in the debate on the amendments.

Many societies have converted, and more will. We should recognise that the people whom I perhaps exaggeratedly described as smash-and-grab merchants are taking from the pockets and purses of the long-term savers

and investors. There will always be a degree of rough justice, because many people who have saved with the building societies—for every borrower, there are between six and 10 genuine savers and investors—have had current accounts, and have been excluded anyway by the terms of conversion. They are willing to accept that, but those who have been long-term investors may not want to share what would become theirs on a conversion with people who have come in for the sole purpose of putting in a relatively small sum, to get a pretty large return from it.

There could be large sums swilling around the financial system. It is destabilising if a building society suddenly gets a great rush of money that it cannot use, and it is destabilising if those who joined become organised and start applying pressure through votes at members' meetings to change the nature of the society, when most of the existing members do not want that.

Mr. Butterfill: It has been suggested that one reason why we should not tolerate the amendments is that they would prevent people from voting at annual general meetings. Does my hon. Friend agree that that might not be a bad thing, if people were attending only to vote for demutualisation, to line their pockets?

Mr. Bottomley: I remember one of our colleagues saying after the elections in what was then Southern Rhodesia that one cannot always predict the result of a vote. We should be careful about saying that people should be allowed to vote only if they vote the way that we want. Developments that have taken place in this country over the past few centuries have resulted in people being allowed to make their own mistakes. I hope that in building society votes and in general elections, they will not do so.

In summary, we face a dilemma. It is generally agreed that the principle behind the amendments is sensible—although we do not know whether they will achieve precisely the desired objectives. On the presumption that the Bill could become an Act in the next two or three days, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider whether there is some way of fulfilling the purpose of the amendments. If there is not, I suspect that we shall have to do what many in the building society movement have done and say that this Bill is better than none at all.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I support wholeheartedly the comments of the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). I apologise for not being here to move the amendment, but I did not expect that the business statement would be so short and that our investment in timetabling next week would disappear. It was a little like "The War of the Worlds", when people climbed the platform of the spacecraft and found that the invader from Mars was dead and that everything had vanished. I was similarly amazed today.

If we were considering the legislation in the normal manner, I would press the amendments to a vote and seek a statement of principle. It is an important principle, and an important defence of the mutual principle for building societies. However, we are not in a normal situation. I wish I knew exactly what situation we were in—perhaps the Minister will tell us. I hope that we are not wasting time this afternoon finalising legislation that cannot pass through the House of Lords because of the way in which the Government have junked their timetable, in their desperate desire to suppress my proposed hairdressing Bill that was due to be considered next week. Obviously, the Government dared not meet the challenge posed by my Bill and the defeat that they would almost certainly suffer, so they have scuttled business and cut and run.

If the Minister cannot assure us that the legislation will pass through the House of Lords—it has not yet passed through the House of Commons—we are legislating in a messy manner. We do not know whether our actions will have any effect. We must discuss the Bill because it provides a chance to make necessary changes within the building society movement. It is a comprehensive measure, so we should try to make it as good as possible. I resent being told, "Drop this," or "Don't vote on that," or "Let this go," simply in order to ensure that the Bill is passed. It will be a long time before an incoming Government can consider the legislation again. We should not be in that situation in a dying Parliament. That is my dilemma, and I hope that you are as upset as I am, Sir Geoffrey.

I now move to the substance of the amendments, which are quite simple and straightforward. They seek to erect a defence of the mutual principle. Too many people have learnt their ethics from the privatisation procedures in this country and there has developed a species of what I would call the monetary ram raider. Such people rush to put money in building society accounts on the advice of columnists in the financial pages of newspapers, who urge, "Put your money in the Snurple building society, because it is going to demutualise and you will have a big gain." That causes a rush of new members and of new money. It also creates a brute voting force in favour of demutualisation, which may not be in the interests—I think that it is certainly not in the interests—of the long-term members of the society. The new members wish to get a quick result because, as I said last week, their ethics are the same as those of Wilfred Pickles and the Halifax building society: "Give us the money, Barney." It does not matter about principle or the abdication of 100 years of toil, sweat and endeavour.

The amendments seek to erect a barrier against such activities. It is right that building societies should have that barrier, because they are driven to all sorts of expediencies in an effort to maintain continuity and to control the rush of new members. Some have said that people may open new accounts only if they invest a minimum of £1,000. Other societies have tried to devise their own rules governing the voting rights of new members. The amendments take care of both issues: the time scale beyond which people may vote on the affairs of the building society, and beyond which they may benefit from the redistributions that they may have joined the building society specifically to receive.

It is a matter of basic principle. I hope that the Minister will come to the Dispatch Box and tell us that, because of our courtesy, charm and consideration, she will not force further debate and will accept the principle behind the amendments before the legislation goes to another place.

4 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): Discussions on the progress of the Bill may well be taking place as we speak. There will be a further business statement later

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

in the day. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) need not be too despondent. There is reason for hope yet. We, the Opposition, are actively supporting the Bill. I retain the hope that it will become law.

I declare an interest before speaking to the amendments. I have an account with one of the converting building societies. I would not be surprised if it were the one not too far from the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). It is, in fact, the Woolwich.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) said, there are strong arguments for a two-year rule. During consideration of what became the Building Societies Act 1986, the Government were strongly in favour of a two-year rule. Why have the Government changed their mind on that ground given the strong arguments that were advanced by Lord Brabazon of Tara in another place in July 1986? He said:

"It is important that the conversion provisions work to prevent speculative flows between societies on rumours of an impending conversion. I gather that is what happened in America in certain situations, and that is what we seek to avoid happening in this sort of situation."

He added:

"It is clearly important that"

there should be some legislation in relation to transfers of societies. He explained:

"Otherwise, for example, a society could tempt investors into it in order to vote in favour of a conversion with the promise of an immediate cash bonus; or just such speculative flows as I just mentioned might be started if it seemed a society might transfer to an existing company."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 10 July 1986; Vol. 478, c. 539.]

Those were the reasons why the Government, at that stage, were strongly in favour of a two-year provision whereby those who were members of building societies would not receive benefits unless they had been members for two years.

The Labour party has said that it sees strong arguments for that. We have, however, discussed the issue of the two-year provision at some length with various mutuals. On balance, the Building Societies Association and other mutuals, although they would prefer a two-year clause, are concerned that nothing should be done to jeopardise the Bill. In the present circumstances it is important that we should press on with the Bill.

I have been persuaded that the BSA wants to see the Bill through Parliament as a priority. It regards the measure as essential. It has asked that Labour takes no steps that might jeopardise the Bill by way of introducing a substantial amendment. I have listened carefully to those representations and have decided to accept them.

We want to see the Bill become law as soon as possible. It is right, however, that Parliament should be able to express its views, especially on a two-year clause. Before I ask the Minister some questions about such a provision, I acknowledge that my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) has agreed to withdraw the amendment. At the same time, my hon. Friend the Member for Grimsby has strong concerns. It is right, therefore, briefly to mention technical deficiencies.

I am concerned that the amendment would not achieve the end that my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley seeks. The intention appears to be to ensure that only those who have been members for two years on completion would benefit. That is not precisely the effect of the amendment. It is unsatisfactory, therefore, from a drafting point of view. The amendment states, in effect, that someone can be a member of a society only if he has been a member for two years. Presumably the aim is to deny benefit, but the amendment appears to deny membership itself. Furthermore, the phrase "two years' standing" is rather vague. It presumably means two years from opening an account, but it does not say that. On drafting grounds alone, the amendment is questionable.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): It is odd to me—I have been here only a short time—to hear hon. Friends on the Front Bench talking about drafting. I should have thought that as we are the Opposition, we would be concerned about the principle. I have listened with great care to my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) saying that we must not accept any substantive change because we would otherwise lose the Bill. I ask him to think seriously about what he is saying. Is he saying that even though there may be substantial difficulties with the legislation, we would prefer it to go ahead?

Mr. O'Brien: We are saying that the Bill is essential to safeguard the future of mutuals. It may be desirable to have a two-year provision; that is a point that hon. Members are quite properly discussing and I intend to return to the principle in a moment. We have, however, to bear reality in mind in view of the announcement made today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) will know that as a result of that announcement, there is enormous pressure on the timetable. As we want the Bill to go through, maximum agreement is needed between Opposition Front-Bench Members and Ministers. I hope that the Bill also has the support of the House as a whole. Getting the Bill through is our objective, which has an effect on the way in which we are dealing with the two-year provision and later amendments.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: We are in a negotiating situation. In those circumstances, it seems rather misguided to give away our hand before we are told the Government's position. The Minister may accept the two-year principle; there is still time for her to do that. Whatever deficiencies the best drafting brains in the House of Commons—I refer to the Clerks and not to me—have left in the amendment, the principle is important. If we accepted the amendment this afternoon, the Bill would not be delayed seriously unless the Government chose to make an issue of it and to dredge up their troops, thus wasting the time of the House. We should not think that we have a weak hand.

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend's views will be taken on board by those of us who are dealing with the Bill. We want the Bill to go through, however, and the sooner the better for the sake of the mutuals and building societies as a whole.

I now turn to the issue of principle. In 1986, the Government supported a two-year rule. It was the bad drafting of the 1986 Act, however, with which we are now dealing, that meant that during the Halifax merger with the Leeds, the decision was made that the normal

two-year qualifying rule could be circumvented if the distribution was made in shares and structured in a certain way.

It is clear that in 1986, Ministers intended that a two-year rule should be effective, but legal judgments in the early conversions and takeovers widened the interpretation of the statute to allow changes of status based on offering pay-outs to members on a scale and in a manner that were not intended in the 1986 legislation. That has encouraged mere speculators—so-called carpetbaggers—to open many accounts.

The building societies' response has been to raise the threshold for new accounts, but that has prejudiced, as has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), the interests of many low-income people who want to open an account for a non-speculative, bona fide reason. Do the Government consider that speculation desirable? Will they now explain why they have changed their mind and oppose a two-year clause? Do they intend to allow the queues of speculators and the high thresholds to remain? Do they consider that building societies' assets that were built up over generations belong to the members who have an interest in the long-term future of those building societies? At the moment, they are often expended to those who have little claim to building societies' assets. Do the Government find that satisfactory?

In other cases, the Government have accepted qualified membership, for example in terms of calling emergency general meetings and, in clause 37, for obtaining particular information. Why was that justified, yet the Government have changed their mind and now say that qualified membership under a two-year rule is no longer right in respect of benefits?

Speculation is still an enormously serious issue. The head of corporate relations at the Birmingham Midshires building society wrote to me recently as follows:

"We opened some 80,000 speculator accounts in 1996 and, year-to-date since January, we are opening three times normal levels per week compared to the pre-speculation days of 20 months ago. In addition, to counter those who think it has peaked, it is worth noting that around £145 billion of savers' cash has been locked up with the converters for the past two years or so. This will now become unlocked, creating a new wave of speculators given that distribution plans have now been unveiled by the converting societies."

There is clearly an issue for the Minister to address.

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that some building societies, such as the Portman, have found it possible to deal with speculators not by raising the minimum deposits on their account, but by welcoming anyone who wishes to open an account on the basis that the society is firmly committed to mutuality and no speculation will yield any benefit to the speculator?

Mr. O'Brien: I am aware that a number of building societies are using sometimes ingenious ways of addressing the issue, but the hon. Gentleman makes the point that it is clearly a matter of concern to many building societies, including the Portman. We need to know the Government's view.

The only real explanation for the absence of the two-year clause that the Minister has offered so far is that building societies themselves can devise a scheme to ensure that investors obtain no benefit from conversion. That is possible in theory. However, a conversion or takeover scheme that is influenced by a hostile predator might mean that the society would be unable to enforce such a restriction. A society is not in a position to deter speculative inflows by its own two-year clause, as those contemplating a speculative bet would simply reason that the building society would be unable to uphold the rule when confronted by a hostile bid.

The Minister also deployed the argument that those expecting a bonus in future should be on the same footing as those who have received a bonus in the past. If defective legislation were passed, as it was in the 1986 Act, and if Parliament's will and intention in the 1986 Act are frustrated because of inadequate drafting, are the Government saying that there should be no attempt to alter the Bill because someone has benefited by frustrating Parliament's will in the past?

Neither of the arguments deployed so far seems to hold a great deal of weight. However, in her reply to the debate the Minister may supply us with other arguments that address the issue. Obviously, we are anxious for the Bill to become law and we do not want to frustrate its course, but we also want to be sure, as hon. Members have a duty and a responsibility to do, that we discuss the issues fully and ultimately make good law.

Mr. Tim Smith: I have considerable sympathy with what the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) had to say about the amendment. First, I agree that it is not a satisfactory way in which to legislate. The Bill comprises 47 clauses and nine schedules, all of which are being taken on the Floor of the House and will not receive the detailed consideration that they deserve and would have received in Standing Committee. I understand that the Bill was subject to very wide consultation with interests outside the House, which is obviously welcome, but it is not some substitute for parliamentary consideration. It is right that we should put forward the views of our constituents—many of whom will be members of building societies—on the Bill's detailed provisions. I do not really understand why the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, is in such a hurry to get the Bill through.

It seems that the Bill is designed to protect mutual building societies, which is good. It is clearly in the public's interest that many such societies should continue because they will offer a better deal to depositors and lenders than commercial banks will ever be able to offer.

Mr. Butterfill: My hon. Friend is suggesting that the Bill is designed to protect mutual building societies, but sadly, as we have just heard, it fails to do precisely that. It allows them to do rather more than they have been previously permitted to do under the Building Societies Acts 1962 and 1986, but it does not protect them in any realistic way apart from making them a little more financially viable and a more attractive target.

Mr. Smith: That was what I meant when I used the word "protect". It is because such building societies will have greater commercial freedom that they may be less tempted to go down the public limited company route. I recognise my hon. Friend's point. Against that we must balance the apparent proposal to drop the two-year rule

[Mr. Smith]

that Parliament clearly wanted to impose in 1986—even though it turns out that, as the legislation was defective, the rule did not work properly. What is the balance of arguments concerning such matters and mutuality?

What worries me is very simple. It is understandable that, when a substantial financial carrot is placed in front of people, they should take it and consume it immediately. I am, however, concerned about the long term. Will people who want to borrow money for house purchase get a better deal in the long term if mutual building societies wither and die? Surely it is very much in the interest of the consumer that there should be as diverse provision as possible. I hope that the Bill will encourage societies to retain their mutual status. The question is: what is the benefit of that compared with the damage that may be done if we do not keep the two-year rule?

4.15 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): I have considerable sympathy with many of the points that have been raised. I know that all hon. Members present have a real concern about mutual building societies, which I share.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) mentioned two points in opening the debate on this amendment. He was concerned about the Bill's further progress. I can confirm that the issue of what happens after we have finished our proceedings today is being discussed at this moment. I sincerely hope that the decisions that are reached elsewhere will result in the Bill becoming law because the mutual building societies want that. His second procedural point was whether it was conceivable that such a Bill could go through very quickly. All stages of the Friendly Societies Act 1992 went through on the nod. There is therefore a precedent—one that we are not trying to emulate since we shall be giving good consideration to the Bill—of such a Bill going through very quickly due to announcements such as the one made today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) and the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) both said that they were members of a building society. I am not sure whether I am or not. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave me my present job, I was told that one of its requirements was that I am not allowed to touch anything financial whatever. Such affairs are dealt with by a power of attorney. I pay the bill, but have no knowledge about what is happening—and will not have until I no longer hold the job. The important point is that many people, including hon. Members, are involved in a building society in some way. The northern savings ethic means that many people who live in the midlands and the north are involved in building societies.

Mr. Butterfill: I represent a southern seat—one cannot get much further south than Bournemouth—so I must contradict my hon. Friend. Saving is equally prevalent in the south, and there are more building society branches in Bournemouth than almost anywhere else. We are also honoured to have the headquarters of the Portman building society in the area.

Mrs. Knight: I had no intention of excluding Bournemouth from the proceedings, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those points.

The debate has two components. First, there is a technical aspect and, secondly, there is the general concern behind the amendments. I will explain the technical aspects and then deal with the other matters. I understand the concerns that have been raised, especially about speculation, and the belief that the restoration of the two-year rule could deter speculation.

The amendments would restrict all the long-established rights of membership, as well as the new rights that the Bill will introduce, to those who had been savers and borrowers for two years or more. One effect of that would be to rule out share distributions to anyone who is not a two-year saver, effectively reviving the two-year rule. However, the amendments would go further and, potentially, would damage the building societies' constitutions. All savers are full members with an equal right to a say in the running of their society by voting. The amendment would introduce a category of savers who have no membership rights, but elsewhere in the Bill we try to ensure that members will not be disfranchised. All of us have, no doubt, received letters from constituents who have deposit accounts that they thought made them full members of the society. The amendments would increase that anomaly substantially.

The link between saving and membership is crucial for mutual societies. Therefore, narrowing the membership would vest control in a privileged subset of longer-established savers and would deny millions of people an equal say, even if only for a set period. Those people, for right and genuine reasons, are members of their society.

It may help if I give some specific examples. The amendments, as they are drawn, would result in the eligibility to nominate a director being vested in individuals who have been with the society for more than four years. At the moment, people have to have been members for two years. The amendments would also mean that an individual would have to be a member for four years to propose and circulate resolutions at an annual general meeting. That provision would also apply to a special general meeting on members' requisition. The amendments would deny rights to members who, for right and proper reasons, are members of their society.

Mr. Tim Smith: Is my hon. Friend saying that there are already two classes of saver, in the case of certain resolutions, such as electing directors and calling special general meetings? If there is already a distinction, why cannot we build on it?

Mrs. Knight: The distinction is that, in many instances, it is up to the society itself to choose, and I believe that it should be up to a society to make as many decisions as possible relating to its own business. One such decision is a society choosing to convert to a bank, as it sees that its future would be better as a plc than as a mutual society. How the society effects that change—especially as far as distribution is concerned—is not something that government should dictate.

Mr. Butterfill: I remind my hon. Friend of a point that time constraints prevented her from answering during the Second Reading debate. We all accept what she has outlined, but how could a mutual society protect itself against a hostile takeover in which shares were used as the consideration? Until she can answer that question, many of us will not be satisfied.

Mrs. Knight: I remind my hon. Friend that the only people who can put a resolution to members for a takeover or a conversion are the directors, and they can prevent or propose such a change in status. If he waits a moment, I will return to that point. It is very important to address the other aspect of the debate, which is the spirit behind the amendments. I am sure that we all agree that we do not like speculation and we do not feel that speculators should somehow be able to force a society to take a decision that is not in its best interests.

We have all read stories in the newspapers, which are correct, in which societies have said that they are suffering from speculation. One aspect of the matter is that people reading an article stating that a society might convert has resulted in speculation. In any event, under normal circumstances a considerable number of new accounts will be opened annually both by savers and by borrowers. About 10 per cent. of all new savings accounts are turned over in an average year. If that is the average, it means that, over a four-year period, something like a third of all savers with a society would be new savers. That is not as a result of speculation, but of natural turnover. Therefore, considerable changes are taking place as part of the normal business of societies.

Undoubtedly, there will be an influx of new accounts once the converting societies have converted. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said on Second Reading—with complete honesty—that once he received whatever his windfall might be from his converting society, he would take his money and open an account with a mutual down the road. Good for him—that is his choice, and I suspect that it will be the choice of a considerable number of members of those societies. That will result in an increased number of accounts being opened with mutual societies.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I do not wish to promote further the names of the societies being punished and rewarded in this fashion, but I shall be taking my money from the Halifax—as soon as I get the distribution—to the Bradford and Bingley because it is to stay a mutual. I shall be doing that to support the mutual principle. The amendment deals with money that is washing around and undermining the mutual principle by being put into a society to grab a quick profit.

Mrs. Knight: My point was that there has been a considerable increase in the number of people opening accounts with mutual societies because their sentiments coincide exactly with those of the hon. Gentleman. The articles referred to earlier show that the mutual sector is performing well for its members, in terms of both savings and mortgages. The key point is that not all the new accounts that are being opened are speculators' accounts: a significant number are genuine accounts opened by genuine people for genuine reasons. I do not want those people to be disfranchised because of a small group of speculators. We need to deal with that small group.

There has been much concern, especially about disabled people but also about the wider issue of underlying beneficiaries who have been disfranchised as a consequence of the current conversion process. The private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) has rectified that problem, and I do not want to accept amendments, or even the sentiment behind amendments, which would result in the exclusion of many more people, because exclusion of a particular group has been a real problem.

4.30 pm

It would be extremely difficult if we changed the two-year rule so that no member of less than two years' standing could receive anything if a society converted. At the moment many people receive something, so if we intervened the Government of the day would be inundated with requests for a change back to the situation that existed when the Halifax, the Woolwich, the Alliance and Leicester and the Northern Rock converted.

The two-year rule exists as a result of court cases brought by the societies. Whatever our views might be on that, to change back would build up a huge pressure for the future.

Mr. Butterfill: I must take issue with my hon. Friend on that point. If we were to make the amendment, which I support, future investors would know full well when they made their investment that they would not be entitled to windfall profits from a takeover or demutualisation unless they had been members for two years. They would understand that, and they would of course be entitled to receive interest on their money in the normal way. If they understand that clearly when they make their investment, I do not see what the problem is.

Mrs. Knight: It has been noticeable in the past 18 months or two years that people simply do not understand what their status is with a mutual building society and what the various accounts are. I agree that more people have that knowledge today than 18 months or two years ago, but that is certainly not true of everyone: indeed, I would suggest that more than half do not know. If my hon. Friend saw my mailbag he would realise that there is huge concern among many people who feel that the system has done them down and want the Government to change the rules.

I believe that we can withstand that pressure at the moment, because although there have been anomalies—my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester sorted out another anomaly in an earlier Bill—the consequence, not far down the road, of making the changes in the substance behind the opening remarks of the hon. Member for Burnley would be that a greater number of people would feel discriminated against by the change in the rules and would blame the Government. Whoever the Government of the day might be, the pressure to change the law back would, I suspect, not be resistible.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I support the two-year rule. Is it not a fact that when the Halifax building society decided to become a public limited company, it took on new investors and borrowers on the understanding that they would be associate members? They were notified at the very beginning that they would

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not qualify for the share-out, whenever it came, because of the two-year rule. The parliamentary all-party group on building societies has been advised by the chief executive of the Halifax building society that no one who has not been a member for two years will receive any bonus. It would appear that it works and it could work if the spirit were there for it to do so.

Mrs. Knight: The hon. Gentleman has given us a good example of how a building society, when left to its own devices, can use existing law to ensure that it gets an equitable result for its members. I am concerned to leave building societies the ability to do just that—to make their own decisions as they see fit—and for their members to have the opportunity to vote accordingly.

The object of the amendment is to try to help with speculation and carpet bagging—things with which none of us has any sympathy. At present and under the Bill, only the board of a society can put a conversion or takeover proposal to members for approval. The board also has a fiduciary duty to consider the long-term interests of present and future members of the society. No outside company faced with a board's rejection can put a proposal direct to members, as happens with a public limited company.

Forcing conversion, or takeover, on a board that opposed it would take a long time. If an initiative came from outside a society, the sequence of events would work as follows. A predator would have to make an offer, which was either confidential or non-confidential, to the building society board, which would consider it. We will presume that it decided that the offer was not in the interests of the society or its members. Under the terms of the Bill, the society would disclose that a non-confidential offer was made and say by whom in time for the next annual general meeting.

The board is not required to pass on any other information and may take the opportunity to set out why it considers that the proposed takeover is not in the best interests of the society. The bidder could, for example, use the media to make the terms of its offer known to members. It would be a predator and as such would need to persuade enough members to requisition a special general meeting to consider a resolution calling on the board to pursue the proposal. The resolution could not force the directors to put a transfer proposal to a vote. If the members were persistent, they could also seek to nominate a new board of directors who were in favour of the takeover—the new directors would have to meet the fitness and properness requirements of the Building Societies Commission. They could be elected only at an annual general meeting and would need the support of the majority of the other members who voted to achieve that. Directors retire and offer themselves for re-election on a three-yearly basis. As one can see from that list, therefore, it would be a long-winded process for a predator—the initiative coming from outside the society—to try to shift a board of directors to make it put such a proposal to the rest of the society's members. It is difficult to say how long the process would take, but on any reasoned assessment, it would take more than two years.

The alternative involves the initiative coming from members. In some respects, this matter has caused the most concern. It is perceived as the Trojan horse of speculators who have joined the society and who want to persuade the society's board of directors to get it to convert. The sequence of events would be as follows. First, there would need to be sufficient members to requisition a special general meeting. The members could not table a transfer resolution. The motion at the special general meeting could do no more than recommend that the board considers options for conversion or takeover. The board would have ample opportunity to tell the wider membership precisely what it thought of such activists. The board's consideration would have to be undertaken with regard to its fiduciary duties to members, including potential future members. It could easily conclude that conversion was unwise or that an offer was inadequate. If members did not accept that, they would have to replace the board and negotiate the last two hurdles that I described earlier. Again, it is a long process.

It beggars belief that a board would sit back and do nothing. While all this was happening, the board would be telling members about the advantages of remaining mutual. Some mutual building societies, I am glad to say, are doing just that in advance, to ensure that their members are well aware that mutual status has considerable benefits for them.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend accept that some mergers and takeovers that have nominally taken place on an agreed basis have in fact been the result of considerable pressure by one society on another? Does she not realise that these things are a little more subtle than she suggests?

Mrs. Knight: Yes, I am aware of that. That is one reason why the Bill is in its current form. It ensures that building societies, while remaining mutual, can offer more services and so become more competitive in the mutual sector, thereby making them stronger. That will help them to flourish. Secondly, it makes changes relating to other aspects so that converted building societies, about which the mutuals are concerned, cannot become predators on the mutual sector in the way that many people have feared. Undoubtedly, the ability to compete is one key to ensuring that the mutual sector flourishes, as we all want.

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) asked whether speculation was advisable; the answer is no. Why have the Government changed their mind since 1986? The world has changed since 1986, and I have explained what is behind our thinking; we cannot turn back the clock on the two-year rule. He asked whether societies belonged to members; of course they do. He suggested that there might be many more speculators after societies have converted. I honestly do not think that there will be more speculators; there will be more account openers looking for a mutual home for their savings. Many mutual societies are making that attractive and targeting that sector to ensure that such people become members.

We have achieved a compromise that ensures that both societies and their members are treated fairly. On technical grounds, I ask the Committee to reject the amendments. However, I also ask it to reject the spirit behind them, not because I believe that it is wrong but because the proposed changes could bring with them much more hardship to many more people and not deal with speculation, about which we are all concerned and which we do not want to continue.

4.45 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I confess disappointment with the Minister's reply. That it was so long suggests the depth of her difficulties. So long a reply at this stage of a Bill that, we are told, has to be rushed through, shows a defensive attitude. She never took up the basic issue of whether we want such a defence against speculation. Is it right or wrong? She went through a series of quibbles and excuses for not doing anything but as a Minister in control of drafting and, she told us, in control of the procedures of the House, she has the power to do something if she wants.

It is disappointing that she has not accepted the view of both Government and Opposition Members. I am disappointed with the positions of both Front-Bench teams but especially with her position because she has the power to enact the principle of the amendments. We have been reduced to Back Benchers, who are deeply interested in the building society movement and especially in the principle of mutuality, being against Front Benchers.

The Minister told us that the Bill will become law. I am a little doubtful about whether she can guarantee that, but that means that it is all the more important that we should perfect it and make it the best Bill that we can in the time available. It would be simple to introduce the provision, perhaps better written or better defined to get rid of all the quibbles that she raised. It would be a better Bill. If there is time, we should do it.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I thank the hon. Member for the ghastly tie for giving way. While I basically support the principle of his amendment, my hon. Friend the Minister pointed out that in practice, it would be two years or more before ram raiders could get through. If we are talking about protection for two years, the practical point may be as important as the principle. We need to get a balance between fairness to small savers—and for that matter to not so small savers—and ensure that large numbers of small savers cannot join to try to do what most existing mutual members do not want. I am not sure that we have found a way forward. The Minister's comments are relevant, though the principle is also important.

Mr. Mitchell: The signals were clear. The Minister rightly said that there is normally a churning, a turnover, of people taking money in and out of building societies. However, when there is a flood of new applications, it is possible to discern what is going on and realise that the flood is part of a speculative bubble that has to be pricked. If the will is there, it is possible to define a basic principle and to make it operate practically. The Minister was making excuses for not doing it rather than mounting a defence against the principle that I advanced.

If there were a two-year rule, it would be an incentive for people to keep money in societies for longer, rather than for churning it in the way that the Minister described. I wish that she had accepted the principle and said, "While the hon. Members for Burnley and for Great Grimsby are most accommodating and amiable, they are not the best draftsmen in the House. It is inadequate, but my draftsmen will produce a tailor-made amendment to achieve what they want and which can go in even at this late stage." It could have been done. The building societies, Back Benchers and opinion outside want it, but we cannot have it because of the rush.

That puts me and my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) in a dilemma because, being new Labour, we are honest, moderate chaps and we do not want to make a disturbance or put difficulties in anyone's way; we are amiable—that is the essence of our breed. We want to be accommodating, but there is an issue of principle.

We have been placed under duress by our Front Bench. If my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) had taken a firmer line he could have coerced concessions from the Government, which would have put the Minister in an embarrassing situation, so that she might well have had to give way to us. That is what we should have done: if someone is negotiating, he plays his hand strongly, he is not diffident and does not say, "That won't work; we can't do that." Instead, we should say, "Go for it and you'll often get it." I hope that that can become the slogan of new Labour in power, but it has not worked in this case. If we had coerced the Minister, we might have got more than we did. I am sorry, but I feel that that puts us under duress.

The proposed provision is right in principle: Back Benchers and building societies want it, but we cannot have it because the Prime Minister has opted for felo de se as a system of Government. Owing to the Prime Minister's suicidal inclinations and the junking of so much of the legislative timetable because of his terror and his inability to face up to the defeat that my hairdressing Bill next week would inflict on the Government, we are now being asked to rush through the Building Societies Bill in an unacceptable way. I regret that. The Bill would be better if it contained the two-year provision. It would have been better if we had insisted on that—I am sorry that we did not, and there is still time to do so. Under such duress I would have no alternative but to give in.

Mrs. Maddock: Would the Minister clarify the position a little? She has given many practical reasons why it would be difficult to accept the amendments to introduce the two-year rule. Will she tell us the view of the Building Societies Association when she discussed the matter with it? Although that society is anxious for the Bill to become an Act, it is concerned about the two-year rule and I wonder if she could give us some information.

Mr. William O'Brien: I want to firm up a point that I made in an intervention about the Halifax building society and its acceptance of the principle of the two-year rule. As the Minister said, that is an indication of how the principle should be left as a matter for the building societies. We are discussing legislation and we have an opportunity to firm up the principle set by those in the business—building societies, the Building Societies Association—and Members of Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has outlined the case without forcing a Division, which is commendable of both him and my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

We should not waste this opportunity to try to build something into the legislation that will give the assurance that we seek and underline the principle as set out by those in the business. Before we reject outright the amendments, we should look for a compromise whereby

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we can underline the principle. If one were to question hon. Members who have listened to and participated in the debate, more of them would say that the Bill should include provisions to firm up the two-year rule than would reject that proposal. Therefore, the Minister should reconsider the matter to see whether a compromise can be reached that will satisfy all parties.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I wish to pick up on one point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill): the difference between the Halifax building society and most of the others. If the Halifax decided that it did not want to recommend conversion or use its ability to change its procedures to stop the two-year rule, there would be few businesses big enough to make a hostile bid for it. In practice, we would have to rely on the directors putting forward a proposal. That would not be the case with middle-sized and smaller societies.

It would be interesting to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister or from a future Parliament whether we need to help to protect diversity. Existing building society members should have their interests protected: there are many more building society lenders and investors than either borrowers or speculators. Can we have a diversity of financial institutions? We would not have had anything like the same level of home ownership, individual wealth accumulation or ability to move house if the mutual principle, the forefathers of the building society movement and the co-operative societies in insurance, retail and wholesaling had not existed. The question of how to protect the opportunity for diversity is important.

Mrs. Angela Knight: I am in something of a dilemma. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) accused me of speaking for too long when I tried to answer everyone's points; I have now been asked to speak again, so I am not sure what to do. I found the hon. Gentleman's contribution entertaining, not least because he professed himself to be new Labour. Here we are on the first day of a different order—my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister having made his statement—and all of a sudden, Labour Back Benchers do not want to be led by their Front Benchers. I am not sure which of the two—the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, the Back Bencher, or the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), the Front Bencher—had something vibrate in his pocket indicating a message from Mandelson Towers, but there is clearly a big difference opening up between them.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) asked me about the views of the Building Societies Association. I can assure her that I have had many negotiations, not just with the Building Societies Association, but with individual building societies. It is obviously important that their views are known on this subject and on a wide variety of other matters relating to the Bill. The Bill exists because the mutual sector wanted it, not because the Government have decided to introduce it.

Mrs. Maddock: The Minister told us of the practical details. Did the building societies agree with the Minister?

Mrs. Knight: If the hon. Lady would hold her horses, I was coming to that point. The latest communication from the Building Societies Association states that

"the Association's overriding priority is for the Bill to be enacted as soon as possible. The Association is more than content for the Bill to go forward unamended (other than in respect of amendments making technical and drafting corrections)"—

the three amendments to clause 10. Describing amendments Nos. 1 and 2 to clause 2, the association states:

"These amendments appear to be defective."

That probably gives at least half the answer. The other half of the answer is that building societies are in two minds over the issue because they believe that changing the two-year rule could be beneficial, but they also accept that there would be a problem if it were changed because they recognise that their sector is a moving one. They recognise that the future is not likely to be the same as the past, which is true of every part of life. They recognise that there would be significant difficulties should such a change be made.

There is therefore no easy answer to this question. If we make changes—either exactly as set out in the amendments or in the spirit of the amendments—a future conversion by or takeover of a society where that society was willing for those events to take place could lead to several million people finding themselves unable to receive anything as a consequence of those events. We can easily imagine the huge problems that would arise from that.

A further aspect is that it must be for societies to choose their future, as it is for any other industry or financial institution. It is not for Government to dictate; it is for Government to enable societies to make the future that they want for themselves. The thrust behind the legislation is to move from the existing prescriptive legal framework to one that is permissive—not to dictate, but to enable societies to achieve the future they want.

5 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) mentioned the Halifax procedures. He is correct in saying that, in its conversion, the Halifax has taken longer than any of the other converting societies, not least because it has undertaken two takeovers en route. The result is that no one in the position that we have just discussed will find themselves disadvantaged because they are short-time members. The question behind his comments was that the Halifax is a big society, but what happens to smaller societies? A big society, like any big company, can weather storms and, indeed, changes rather better than smaller organisations. My answer is that, in mutual societies, the only people who can put a proposal to members are the board. Therefore, unlike companies with other structures, mutual societies have the ability of the board to make decisions on what is or is not put to members.

Although I have not mentioned specifically the points made by the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), I believe that I have answered them and the other points raised. I repeat that it would cause more problems to the future of the movement to make the changes proposed in the amendments or to make changes in accordance with the sentiments behind the amendments than to leave the arrangements as they stand.

Mr. Pike: I thank the Minister for her comments at the start of her first speech in the debate. I welcome her

indication that she is hopeful about the outcome of negotiations to enable the Bill to make progress. I am not quite as confident as she is—that does not mean that I disbelieve what she says, but she is more optimistic than I am. Both she and I and all those who support the concept of mutuality will be disappointed if the Bill fails to go through. However, I hope that she is right and I am wrong and that the Bill completes all its stages before the end of the week.

I should have declared an interest in that I am a member of the Halifax. I shall receive the smallest amount possible, both as a shareholder and as a borrower. I did not, however, choose to be a member of the Halifax—I was a member of the Leeds, but was forced to become a member of the Halifax as a result of the takeover.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: A detainee.

Mr. Pike: Exactly. We choose which institution to be customers of, but sometimes choices are made for us that we would not make ourselves.

The Minister was correct in saying that the reason why the Halifax has taken longer to convert than other societies is the takeovers, especially that of the Leeds. It was first announced in November 1994—which is therefore the first of the three qualifying dates to be a borrower or an investor—and the first stage was the takeover of the Leeds. That was followed by the massive task of marrying the two sets of records; there were overlapping memberships and several other problems to be ironed out before the records were in a fit state to enable the society to proceed to the next stage of the conversion process. That is why the two-year rule would not have had an effect in that instance.

The Minister seems to be in an optimistic mood—I do not know why, because the Conservatives will do badly in the general election. She was also optimistic in respect of predator bids. An example of that—

Mrs. Angela Knight *rose—*

Mr. Pike: I will give way in a moment.

An example of that was the takeover by the Abbey National of the National and Provincial.

Mrs. Knight: I was only going to say that I am optimistic because we have got the Bill this far.

Mr. Pike: I accept that.

The National and Provincial had stated its commitment to mutuality and had gone through an elaborate exercise of sending to all its members literature emphasising that commitment. The literature outlined how a member who received one thing from the society could go for another and described bonuses and other bits and pieces. The society put in a great deal of work on the promotion and publicised it widely.

Suddenly, out of the blue, the Abbey National announced publicly that it was making a bid for the National and Provincial. The National and Provincial rejected that bid and after a meeting invited other bids, but, ultimately, the Abbey National took it over. All that happened relatively speedily. There was certainly a considerable change of heart on the part of the directors—they had been solidly committed to the concept of mutuality, but they quickly changed their minds. Similarly, no one would have believed a few years ago that the Halifax would convert. This point is also the subject of later amendments. Directors' views can change and a predator can take over an unwilling society simply by convincing the board. They are the people who decide whether to present proposals to the membership who, in turn, vote on them.

I was slightly disappointed with the Minister's remarks about the principle behind the amendments, although I accept her arguments about the technical nature of the provision. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and I looked at the Bill and tabled an amendment that allowed the issue to be debated because it needed to be debated. We hoped that either the Government or Labour Front Benchers would table an amendment that did the job more effectively and so might be acceptable for inclusion in the Bill, but that was not to be. I accept the Minister's opinion that the amendments are defective, that in some ways they go beyond what we intended and that they are open to misinterpretation.

Nevertheless, the Minister spent some time addressing the principle of the amendments and I was disappointed by her arguments because they did not really hang together. She said that many people would protest about the change, but each society that has converted has used different rules and regulations. Although people have complained about the disabled or second-named people who have not qualified, no one has written to me saying that it is wrong that the Northern Rock paid a single sum to all its members, as did the Alliance and Leicester, but that the Woolwich and the Halifax are handing out varying amounts. I do know that members of each of those societies felt strongly that things were done in the wrong way. People will always feel aggrieved if some rule goes against them or if they think that they would have done better under another rule—that is only human nature. I for one would have done better if the Halifax had offered a flat rate sum instead of a sliding scale: as it is, I shall receive only the minimum.

I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Great Grimsby and for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) that these issues should be debated. Even at this stage I hope that some thought will be given to the principle behind the amendments. All hon. Members, apart from the Minister, who have spoken in the debate have clearly believed that a two-year rule would be fairer. As the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) said, people joining a society would know that, if they did not have two years of membership and conversion suddenly came up, they would not qualify. They would therefore join in the full knowledge of their situation.

I hope that Ministers and my Front-Bench colleagues will get together and find a way of recognising the view of the overwhelming majority. These amendments may not be the best way of doing that, so let us find another way that offers the necessary protection and stops the carpetbaggers and speculators. They should not be able to join the gravy train and get their hand-outs.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 10

RESTRICTIONS ON CERTAIN TRANSACTIONS

Amendments made: No. 6, in page 16, line 14, after '(2)', insert 'or (3)'.

No. 7, in page 16, line 19, after '(2)', insert 'or (3)'.

No. 8, in page 17, line 11, after '(2)', insert or (3)'.—*[Mrs. Angela Knight.]*

Clause 10, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 11 to 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 27

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: GENERAL

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Although my amendment to the clause—amendment No. 3—has not been selected, I believe that the clause could still be strengthened by modification. The problem is that directors are being appointed to mutual building societies even though their interests go rather wider than the building society movement. Furthermore, they do not always come from the areas in which the societies are rooted. In effect, building societies are being white-anted by these people.

With the Halifax, more and more impossibly dignified and important people, mainly from London and the financial sector of the economy, have been appointed directors. These people do not have the interests of mutuality or of the building society at heart; they are much more concerned with the wider financial markets. It would therefore be better to include in the clause—it sets out the qualifications and election procedures for directors—some way of securing these people's testimony to their devotion to the principle of mutuality and to the building society of which they are being appointed director.

The clause deals purely with the mechanics, whereas our concern is with the principle of mutuality. Thus while defining those mechanics it would have been useful to take the opportunity to require directors to show their commitment to that principle—indeed to show that they are as committed to it as those who make up the society and those who have kept it going.

I have no desire to stand in the way of the clause, but I thought that the issue should be aired before we proceed.

5.15 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight: I rather agree with the hon. Gentleman that directors should be prepared to stand up for mutuality. After all, they will be directors of a mutual society so they need to be committed to the concept. But what concerns me about the hon. Gentleman's sentiments is that if the Bill states that someone standing for director has to commit himself to mutuality, how will we know that that is true? Surely the best way to ensure someone's commitment to mutuality is for him or her to choose of their own volition to state that mutuality is a concept that they believe to be correct. That should be included in the statement that they put to members asking them to vote. If someone does not include that in the statement being sent out to members, I suspect that those members will draw their own conclusions. That is why I propose to leave matters as they stand.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 27 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 28 to 40 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 41

PROTECTIVE PROVISIONS FOR SPECIALLY FORMED SUCCESSORS

Mr. Butterfill: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 58, line 5, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

'(a) the company or a subsidiary undertaking of the company acquires the whole or substantially the whole, of the business of a mutual financial institution;'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 5, in page 59, line 5, at end insert—

'"mutual financial institution" means a financial institution—

(a) the objects of which do not include the making of profit for any persons other than the members of the institution (however described) on whose behalf the funds of the institution are held or invested; and

(b) as respects which, on the institution being wound up or otherwise ceasing to exist, any surplus assets, after providing for all liabilities and the costs of liquidation, must be distributed among such members;'.

Mr. Butterfill: The amendments deal with the principle of what is known as the five-year rule, imposed by the Building Societies Act 1986 to afford some measure of protection to converting societies.

Before 1986, the activities in which building societies could engage were severely limited. The 1986 Act was the first realistic attempt by the House to allow societies to engage in a greater number of activities. It was envisaged by that Act that, for some societies, the desire to offer an ever greater range of services might ultimately lead to their deciding to demutualise and become banks.

It was also recognised by the 1986 Act, however, that although a greater range of activities would be permitted under the Act, their number was still severely restricted. So it would not be possible for converting societies to have knowledge and experience of all the activities that banks could undertake. It was therefore felt that converting societies might be more vulnerable to predatory takeovers by the big banks, which might want to prevent competition by taking over the societies immediately they had converted. It was felt by Members on both sides of the House, therefore, that some protection should be given for a period of five years.

I suggest that, although certain things have changed since 1986—the world has moved on and many societies have become much more sophisticated, engaging in a wider range of activities than hitherto—the position has not changed completely. Societies still cannot engage in very many activities, and even under the Bill some activities will continue to be prohibited to those who call themselves building societies. It is appropriate, therefore, that some transitional protection remains.

It has been suggested that it would be wrong for converting societies to be protected yet be able to be predators. I have some sympathy with that view because

we should retain diversity of lending. If we are not careful, mortgage lending in the United Kingdom may be dominated by a handful of major institutions—predominantly banks. That is a grave danger, because it would restrain competition and choice for the consumer and, ultimately, act against the national interest and the interests of depositors and borrowers. I am anxious, therefore, that we have as diverse a range of lending organisations as possible.

There should be three types of lending and deposit-taking institutions. The first tranche would consist of the big banks, which are very large, are established and are secure in their present activities. The second tranche would consist of several converted societies, competing with the banks. Few hon. Members would disagree that some banks need fresh competition, because for a long time they have had things far too much their own way. A little healthy competition would not go amiss and would improve their service. The converted societies would compete with the banks in their range of activities but retain some of the essential elements of service to the community that they had initially as mutual societies.

A third tranche would consist of the remaining mutual societies that it would be in the public interest to retain to a large extent. That is the purpose of the amendments tabled in my name and those of the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and others. There is widespread agreement in the Committee, at least on the Back Benches, that transitional protection is required for converting societies.

I accept that it would be wrong if the converting societies were enabled to be untrammelled predators on the mutual building societies. Indeed, my amendments seek to protect not only mutual building societies but all mutual institutions.

Mutuality is a very important concept. It is an almost uniquely British one. It is extremely valuable, and the Committee would be foolish if it were to enact legislation that would diminish it. I therefore propose effective protection for friendly societies and mutual insurance companies. All mutual financial institutions would be protected because, if a converting society bid for a mutual, it would lose the protection that it enjoyed under the five-year rule.

I know that the banks would say, "That is unfair because converting societies can bid and they receive some protection from predation, but we don't." I am not sure that I agree that the banks need such protection. They are big, grown-up boys and have been playing the game for a long time. They do not need the protection that the converting societies need and deserve.

Banks will say that converting societies could do all sorts of other things without losing protection. They could buy mortgage books—I am sure that many of the large banks would like to get rid of some of their duff mortgage books, following unwise lending—or chains of estate agents. All sorts of financial institutions were unwise in their acquisition of chains of estate agents and would dearly like to unload them on some of the converting societies. With respect, however, we want not that type of competition but competition in the key areas of banking and customer service, which the converting societies will seek to offer. Therefore I put it to my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary that there is a case for retaining a much greater measure of protection than she proposes under the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary says that we are giving those societies protection; in fact, we are giving them nothing. The Bill removes the protection that they enjoy under the 1986 Act without giving any reasons for doing so, other than the fact that times have changed. No other reason is given for the draconian removal of almost all the protection that the House—members of the Conservative party and of the Opposition—considered appropriate in 1986.

I ask my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to think again because it would be tragic if, in pursuing such a course, we diminished the number of organisations that offer a service to the public.

Mr. Pike: Is not one of the best examples of the workings of competition in the financial sector the fact that the banks have extended their hours as a result of competition from building societies? Almost certainly, banks would still open from 10 o'clock to 3 o'clock and not open on Saturdays, were it not for their fear of competition from building societies.

Mr. Butterfill: As he so often does, the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) has hit the nail on the head: only by encouraging such competition have we achieved as great an improvement in service as we have in recent years. I want that improvement to go much further. The big banks have great influence on Treasury officials; they have had a semi-incestuous relationship for decades. The big banks should not get their way on this matter; the Committee should ensure that true competition is retained.

I understand that it has been suggested in certain quarters that my amendments are defective—that they do not precisely achieve the object that I seek. If that is true, I should be very happy if, by agreement between the two Front-Bench teams, they were amended slightly, perhaps in another place, and brought back for notional approval in this place. However, I believe that what I suggest is desirable and is in the interests of the building society movement, the converting societies and society in general, so I hope that I shall receive a favourable response from my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary.

Mr. William O'Brien: Clause 41 is entitled "Protective provisions for specially formed successors." The spirit of the amendments is to offer some protection for the successors of takeovers and mergers of mutual societies. During public consultation on the Bill, the five-year protection period was one of the most important subjects of debate. People who were involved in the consultation envisaged that there might be problems if the Bill did not afford protection.

Under the provisions of the Building Societies Act 1986, societies that convert to banks are protected from external takeover for five years after conversion. That protection was designed to protect those that converted from takeovers during the early years in what people in the business refer to as the stock exchange jungle. The organisations that converted to plc status had that protection. In an increasingly competitive environment, that protection gives a converting society a significant advantage.

During the Bill's consultation period, a strong body of opinion emerged that organisations that wanted the advantages of a stock market listing should also accept

[Mr. William O'Brien]

the disadvantages, such as the threat of a takeover. It is unacceptable to the continuing mutual societies that a plc bank that was once a building society should be able to mount hostile bids for other institutions—including mutual societies—and yet remain immune from takeover for five years. One can readily see that there is an imbalance: an organisation that converts to plc status is protected but the 70 mutual societies that remain are not.

The amendments would offer some protection not just to building societies but to mutual societies, and would apply to all mutual organisations. The Government accepted that point. The protection will be removed if a converting building society acquires another financial institution during the five-year period. That is the significant point of the amendments, and they would protect existing mutual building societies.

As the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) pointed out, there may be anomalies in the drafting of the amendments, but the principle and spirit behind them are correct. I appeal to the Minister and other hon. Members to support them, because they would correct an existing imbalance. There is nothing wrong with the amendments; they are constructive and are designed to add strength to the Bill. I hope that the Minister will appreciate the sincerity and spirit behind the amendments and accept them.

5.30 pm

Mrs. Maddock: Most hon. Members will agree with the spirit of the amendments. Many of us recognise that, since the 1986 Act, things have changed and that the societies that converted had a significant advantage over others. That was a key fact during consultation on the Bill. We all agree that organisations that wanted the advantages of a stock market listing should have to take on board other responsibilities as well. We have had most discussion about that requirement—so much so that the Halifax building society has accepted that argument and given up its protection. However, I am advised that the amendments, as drafted, may not do what we would all like them to do.

I think that every hon. Member in the Chamber nodded in agreement with the spirit of the amendments, but I hope that the Minister will look carefully to see whether there is any way in which she can deal with the problem of unfairness. Although I am with her in spirit in trying to get the Bill through, I pointed out on Second Reading that there would be a problem if we had to consider the Bill in Committee on the Floor of the House and then, without any time in between, had to complete its final stages. I hope that we can reach agreement on how we can deal with this despite the pressure that we are all under to try to ensure that mutual building societies get a fairer deal in the financial world.

Mr. French: I should like to take this opportunity to declare an interest, in that I have accounts with several building societies.

I suspect that I may be in a minority in fundamentally disagreeing with the proposition of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). One always feels a little uncomfortable disagreeing with my hon. Friend, because he is normally so sensible, but on this occasion I have great difficulty in accepting the arguments that he put before the Committee.

Under clause 41 as drafted, a society that converted to a bank would lose its immunity from takeover if it sought to take over any other financial institution. Under my hon. Friend's amendment, as I understand it, the loss of immunity would be triggered only if the takeover was of a mutual institution, thereby leaving the new bank—the newly converted society—able to take over any other type of organisation without triggering the loss of its immunity.

As I made clear on Second Reading, I am very doubtful about the general principle of protection, because it would create two classes of public limited company: those that enjoyed protection because of the route that they followed—as a building society converting to a bank—and those that did not have the immunity, and could not because they had been a bank or some other institution for a considerable time. Therefore, a seriously uneven playing field would be created: between the newly converted society and the other banks with which it was competing, and also between the new bank that was formerly a society and the society that had not converted. We should not seek to enshrine that unevenness in legislation.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend accept that there is already an unevenness? The converting societies have been restrained from engaging in a range of activities for the whole of their existence, whereas the organisations for which they may be bidding have not been subject to those constraints. Converting societies start off uneven. The purpose of the transitional relief is to give them a period within which they can come up to speed and be on equal terms with those that are already plcs and engaged in those activities.

Mr. French: I do not agree with that argument. My hon. Friend is looking at the matter from the perspective of the 1986 Act. He is not taking into account the new powers that the Bill confers on the building societies. In the course of time, the building societies will have been able to avail themselves of the additional powers that the Bill provides. Having done that, they will not be at a disadvantage compared with organisations that have been operating under the Banking Act 1987 for a long time. They will have operated under the new building societies legislation that we are discussing. That will give them the greater powers that they require and, having had those powers for as long as they consider necessary, they will be able to make the decision to convert.

Mr. Butterfill: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way again. I am sure that he has read the Bill. Under part I, there will still be considerable constraints on the activities in which the converting societies can engage.

Mr. French: I do not accept that, either. The restrictions that the Bill still places on building societies relate to activity which it would be best that they did not engage in. I do not believe that there is a popular view, for example, that building societies should engage in the derivatives market, which is known to be extremely risky. If the Bill provides, as it does, that in future building societies should still stay out of the derivatives market, it is showing sound judgment. That is what ought to happen.

I do not accept the thrust of my hon. Friend's arguments. I believe that a society that decides to convert and to become a bank should do so in the full knowledge that it is moving from the context of the building societies

legislation into the context of the Banking Act 1987. Before it takes that fundamental step, it must be sure that it can manage in the new world in which it proposes to operate. If it considers that it cannot do that or if, as my hon. Friend would say, it considers that it has not had long enough to gain experience of indulging in the other activities that the 1987 Act permits, it has not yet reached the stage where it should be taking that decision.

If ever protection were afforded to mutual status, and the advantages and benefits of mutual status were recognised, that argument brings home the fact that such status should not be lightly abandoned.

My hon. Friend said that it had not been possible for societies to develop the range of activities that they believe they will need in order to be on an equal footing with banks. For that reason, I emphasise again that the Bill will give them the opportunity to develop their expertise in the areas from which they have up to now been excluded. Having developed that expertise, in a few years they will be able to convert to banks if they so choose, and there will be no need for any artificial protection such as that in the Bill or especially that in my hon. Friend's amendment.

5.45 pm

Mr. Butterfill: My hon. Friend is extremely generous in giving way once more. Can he name a bank that would be subject to the constraints imposed by clause 4, under which it would have to keep 75 per cent. of its total assets secured in loans on residential property? That is what the societies are required to do under the Bill. It is nonsense to suggest that a bank that had experience in loans in a range of commercial activities would be constrained in that way.

Mr. French: If the society is of the view that the requirement to maintain 75 per cent. of its assets in mortgage lending is unduly inhibiting on its activities, it will have another reason for converting, if it wishes to do so. It is for the society to decide whether that is a condition under which it can operate, in which case it should remain a building society, or whether the condition is unduly onerous, in which case it can break free from the building societies legislation and operate under the Banking Act 1987.

I do not see why, in the course of the building society making that transition, special provisions should be made to compensate for what in other respects might be regarded as an unsound judgment on its part. Building societies must decide under which legislation they wish to operate.

I see no justification for special transitional arrangements, for the further reason that the potential loss of immunity from takeover is a matter over which the societies have control. The provisions of the Bill do not stop one of the newly converting societies going on the takeover trail. It may still do so. Building societies are in no way inhibited from expanding their position by acquisition if they want to do it that way. They would do it in the full knowledge that if they chose to take that route, they would trigger the loss of the immunity. The decision is entirely theirs to live with the consequences of their action. That is why I do not believe that transitional arrangements are necessary. The decision is part of an overall judgment as to whether plc status suits a business. If plc status does not suit it, it should not leave the legislative framework applicable to building societies.

I have the greatest difficulty in understanding the argument of the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), who tried to argue that the amendment provided protection for existing mutuals. Exactly the opposite is the case. It does not provide protection for existing mutuals at all. If the hon. Gentleman contributes again to the debate, perhaps he will explain his views.

There seem to be some drafting defects in the amendments, which the Building Societies Association has clearly identified, particularly in relation to the question of when a mutual financial institution encompasses a company and when it does not. Even if one embraced the principle, which I hope the Committee will not, the amendments would have to be redrafted.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have listened with interest to the views of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) about the five-year rule.

I have a great deal of sympathy with building societies such as the Alliance and Leicester and the Woolwich, which undertook conversion in the expectation of a five-year protection. Ten months after the Alliance and Leicester had made public its intention to convert, the Government suddenly announced in November for the first time that there would be a significant change to the five-year rule as a result of the consultation that had taken place. Naturally, the converting building societies were surprised and angry at that announcement, and I fully understand their surprise and anger. The question is whether the wording of the clause is an appropriate response.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West acknowledged that there might be technical problems with the amendment. I shall return to that, but let me say a word about the principle. Converted building societies want some protection to take over others in order to reach a critical mass during the five-year period, so that they will be less susceptible to takeover at the end of it. That is what the clause is about.

The hon. Gentleman advanced a sensible argument in support of his amendment. He argued that there is a public interest in maintaining a degree of diversity and choice in our financial institutions. He said that we would not want to see a mutual building society sector and a big banking sector, with very little in between, because building societies that had reached the end of their five-year protection period or had launched a takeover during that period and lost their protection had been the victims of takeovers.

There is an argument for retaining a degree of diversity and choice in the market, and for ensuring that some institutions, which are not big banks or mutual societies, are able to perform the same functions. I am not entirely sure that this is the right way to protect that area of the market. The Minister said—and we agree—that the Government should be neutral regarding whether conversion takes place in a particular building society. However, unamended, does not clause 41 impose an obstacle to conversion? Any converted building society will either already be at critical mass or seek to achieve that critical mass, to enable it to survive at the end of the five-year protection period. Many smaller unconverted societies know that, if they were to convert but failed to reach critical mass within five years, they would probably be taken over.

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

Clause 41 says, in effect, that building societies cannot convert and seek to achieve critical mass. Would not building societies that are contemplating converting look at that clause and cease to consider it, because it is unlikely that they would be able to survive a takeover after the cessation of the five-year protected period? Do the Government intend that clause 41 should deter mutuals from converting? That does not square with the Minister's comments. Perhaps she could clarify precisely how the clause would operate.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is a question not just of critical mass—as I tried to explain to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French)—but of the nature of the loan book? A converting society will, of necessity—even after the Bill is passed—have a loan book comprising 75 per cent. loans secured on residential property. A high street bank has an entirely different loan book. Institutions require some transitional protection when changing from the loan books that they had as societies to the loan books that they will need as banks.

Mr. O'Brien: I do not deny that the hon. Gentleman makes a strong argument, and I shall be interested to hear the Minister respond to it. However, I am not convinced that the amendment will deal with that issue in a technical manner. Does he accept that there are technical deficiencies in the amendment, as worded?

Mr. Butterfill: I am advised of that.

Mr. O'Brien: In that case, I shall not outline those deficiencies. I certainly cannot support the amendment, as worded. I do not think that it achieves the hon. Gentleman's objectives, and it poses a number of potential threats to mutual societies which I am sure he does not intend.

However, I believe that there is something to be said for the broad principle that the amendment embodies. I shall be interested to hear the Minister respond to that point, and to whether the operation of clause 41, unamended, would discourage building societies from converting.

Mrs. Angela Knight: Contributions to the debate have highlighted the differences of opinion on this subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), who moved the amendment, believes that protection for converted building societies is a key issue. I think that the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) was somewhat confused in his remarks. The amendments do nothing for mutual societies: they are about the degree of protection that a converted society may have. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) sought more information, and my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) agreed with me about the matter.

At issue is the amount of protection that a converted society has, or needs, once it becomes a new bank. The consultation process produced the universal view that no protection should be necessary. In fact, we have chosen the middle course: if a converted building society requires time to stabilise once it becomes a new bank and needs to make the sort of changes to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West referred regarding 75 per cent. of its lending being on residential property, it has five protected years in which to do so. It loses that protection only if it goes on the acquisition trail.

Both banks and insurers—not just the mutual building society sector or the mutual sector—have expressed concern to us that such protection should not exist. My hon. Friend is a well-known business man who has operated in various fields. If, as a business man, his company was the subject of a hostile takeover bid and he was unable to defend it because the predator company had protection, I think that he would be justifiably angry. Parliament should not confer unfair protection on a particular sector of the financial services industry. It is true that widespread concern has been expressed, and that we have given the converters a concession in another way by allowing the removal of what is known as the priority liquidation distribution rights, which has benefited them to the tune of tens of millions of pounds. We have taken with one hand, and given with the other.

I should like to dispel three illusions that were created in the debate. The first is that converting societies are small institutions. They are not. The Woolwich and the Alliance and Leicester are of comparable size to the Royal Bank of Scotland and rather larger than that well-known insurer, the Guardian Royal Exchange. They are substantial organisations operating in a vibrant, thriving financial market.

Secondly, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West and others said that converted building societies would not wish to acquire mortgage books and so forth. Yet that is precisely what has occurred. Some of the societies that are remaining mutual are making acquisitions in order to expand their activities as mutual societies.

My final point relates to the comments of the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), who said that he has some sympathy with concerns expressed in this area because I suddenly announced the Government's intention to change the five-year rule. Consultation in this area has been going on for some time, and organisations such as the Building Societies Association were concerned that protection should remain. I am informed that the Alliance and Leicester, which has raised hon. Members' awareness in this area, was represented at a meeting of the BSA council in June, when the association's response to our consultation was discussed and finalised. That response called for the removal of five-year protection. We are not talking about something new that represents a sudden change. Instead, we are talking about ensuring fairness in the mutual sector and in the banking sector, be it the new banks, the insurers or the traditional banks. On that basis, I ask the Committee to reject the amendments.

6 pm

Mr. Butterfill: I am extremely disappointed by my hon. Friend's response. She said that there would be complaints if we were to give protection, which tells me that she is missing the fundamental point. The bodies concerned have the protection now, and have enjoyed it since 1986. To my knowledge, there have been no complaints of abuse by them of that protection or abuse

by any of the societies that have already converted. My hon. Friend is raising a false hare when she speaks of abuse. The system has existed since 1986 and it has not been abused.

We are seeking to give transitional protection and no more. My hon. Friend suggests that the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) is confused, but it would seem that the confusion lies with my hon. Friend. It is inevitable that converting societies that are anxious to change their businesses rapidly will go on the acquisition trail. If the amendments are accepted, they will not go on that trail for mutual building societies, friendly societies or mutual insurance companies. They will confine their activities to businesses that will not lead them to the risk of losing the limited protection that is proposed.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Minister does not accept the amendment. Those in another place may take a different view. In the meantime, as I accept that there may be drafting defects, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 41 agreed to.

Clauses 42 to 47 agreed to.

New clause 1

CONDITIONS FOR TRANSFER OF A SOCIETY'S BUSINESS

'.—After subsection (4) of section 97 of the 1986 Act (transfer of business to commercial company) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(4A) The Commission shall not confirm the transfer and its terms unless it is satisfied—

(a) that a period of not less than six months has elapsed between the date of the first notification to the members of the society of the proposal for the transfer and the date when the members of the society were required to vote on the transfer resolutions; and

(b) that the directors of the society provided reasonable facilities for communicating to the members of the society any statement of reasons, submitted in writing by a member of the society, for opposing the transfer resolutions.".'.—*[Mr. Austin Mitchell.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: new clause 2—*Demutualisation: proceeds for charitable purposes*—

' —After subsection (4) of section 97 of the 1986 Act (transfer of business to commercial company) there shall be inserted the following subsection:

"(4A) The Commission shall not confirm the transfer and its terms unless the terms include provision for the application of not less than 15 per cent. of the realised capital value of the society to charitable purposes appropriate to the society's existing business and geographical location.".'.

Amendment No. 9, in schedule 5, schedule 5, page 70, line 42, at end insert—

'5CC. It shall be the duty of a building society receiving a transfer proposal to appoint independent financial advisers representative of the interests of the members of the society, to obtain from those advisers an assessment of the capital value of the society, and to communicate that assessment promptly to the members of the society.'.

Mr. Mitchell: Given the heavy, serious and prolonged consideration that we are giving to such an important Bill, it is a pleasure to introduce the new clause. I do so while making the usual protest about the pressures that have been put on us to speed the Bill through its parliamentary passage. These pressures are effectively turning the House of Commons from the Mother of Parliaments into an abortion clinic. We are being asked, potentially, to kill infant Bills so that the mother Bill may live.

Another pressure is being brought to bear on the Committee. The Whips are saying, "Keep it short because we want to get the business statement." Younger Members such as myself have hopes of high office in the incoming Administration, and against that background it is important that Members's names are being taken. I shall, of course, comply with this pressure. At the same time, I congratulate the Minister. I hope that she gets her Bill. She has shown great perseverance, effort and charm in plucking this brand from the Prime Minister's funeral pyre. That is effectively what the hon. Lady is doing. Given the haste with which the Bill is proceeding through Parliament I have only to say, "Sister, this Bill had better be good", as we say in the new Labour party.

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is supposed to be speaking to new clause 1.

Mr. Mitchell: I am the chair, brother.

New clause 1 is before us, Mr. Morris, and we know what is happening. We must accept that the Bill is word perfect in a way that no other Bill has been. That reflects the pressure that is upon us.

The new clause represents an attempt to introduce a greater check on the process of demutualisation. I am speaking of the transfer of mutual societies into other businesses, such as public limited companies. The process has been overhyped, with the result that the mutual principle has been grievously wounded. That is a principle that we must keep alive. It is important that we have variety and pluralism. Mutuality should be maintained as a system of corporate government because it holds out great benefits. It brings important services to both borrowers and lenders, such as better rates of interest to those who lend money to a society. The advantages of demutualisation, as I have said, have been overhyped by an organisation that was desperate to take that course.

Shareholders have been asked to believe that the money that they have been given in the form of bonus shares comes from nowhere. That is not so. The money comes from the capitalisation of the efforts and investments of previous generations. Shareholders are being asked to believe that demutualisation will revitalise the society but it will not. Instead, it will enable the society to continue in much the same fashion.

There has been no sudden or dramatic change in any of the societies that have been demutualised. Instead, they have spread into new services and new areas of business, which means meeting new risks. New status equals new risk. That could be the basis of an advertising slogan throughout the country. The process is taking societies away from their core business, which they know well,

[Mr. Mitchell]

and encouraging delusions of grandeur, which are easily encouraged in building societies on the part of top brass, including directors.

Effectively, the shareholders have been conned. The real dynamic is the desire of the top brass, including the directors, to enrich themselves by increasing their salaries and returns within the new companies. To do that, they are putting over a story that is enormously exaggerated and distorted.

It is a story that can fool the shareholders. At the Halifax conversion meeting, the light of greed was glittering in shareholders' eyes. They were being given £1,000—in some cases more—for nothing. It seemed that the money was being plucked from the air. I seek a breathing space through the new clause so that the alternative view might be put more effectively.

In some respects, new clause 2, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), is even better than new clause 1. My hon. Friend asks that there be actuarial advice on financial gains and losses, and in this instance it is easy to deceive shareholders.

When the Halifax conversion took place I received great wodges of documents and financial statements from the society advancing the case for demutualisation. The process was presented as the opening of a glittering future. There was little to represent the alternative argument. There was no opportunity to provide a costed and calculated reply underlining the disadvantages of demutualisation while at the same time stressing the strengths of mutuality. It was not possible to present that argument to the shareholders with the same power and effectiveness as was enabled by illustrated lectures and overhead projection to support the case of demutualisation. The alternative argument should be advanced on an alternative footing.

Investors are being conned by glittering financial prospects in a series of unsubstantiated claims and statements by the top brass in building societies, including directors—those who will be the principal beneficiaries from the process of demutualisation. We should be suspicious. Even better, information should be provided to support the other side of the argument. Let us impose a delay so that we ensure that financial calculations are properly undertaken. I do not want the mutual principle to be weakened and cut any further by the Gadarene rush of investors in large building societies such as the Halifax. That process of weakening and undermining encourages others to go the same way and get the same rewards.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) will not want to reply at length to this debate. I hope, however, that he will use a tactic different from the one he used earlier. I hope that my hon. Friend will sit and growl, and look as though he supports the new clause, gives it his good will and thinks that it is damned good—it is a damned good new clause. If he does that, we may frighten the Minister into giving us a concession.

The Minister may then say, "It is a bit late to introduce the proposal in a new clause and it is not as well worded as it would have been if the Government's draftsmen had written it, but I shall see whether we can use regulation to approach the same point and to make the process of demutualisation more difficult." If my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire growls a bit, we may be able to frighten the Minister into that concession. I hope that my hon. Friend will do that.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): As I am older than my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and do not have his aspirations, I will take a few moments to explain new clause 2 and amendment No. 9.

It was not so long ago that a right hon. Member was reported to have said that there was no such thing as society. If one reads carefully the article in which the then Prime Minister was quoted, one discovers that she said that there was no such thing as society unless there were strong families. I suggest that one can also have no such thing as society unless there are strong feelings of mutual aid in a community. Over the past 20 or 30 years, we have seen a ripping out of what amounts to valuable social capital.

When housing was in both the public and the private sector, one was able to speak for one's family. If someone wanted to look after his mother or father, that was a good reason for being rehoused near them. Such reasons are now ignored and other reasons have been put in their place. That helps to destroy the sense of society and community, and the operation of mutual aid.

The Bill deals with the social capital that has been built up in mutual aid societies and which is being ripped out because certain individuals wish to make a small financial gain. I refer to many individuals because, as I should have declared at the beginning, I am a member of a number of building societies. If we take the Economic Secretary's advice, we should join many more to protect their status. I am also a member of Abbey National. I see no difference in the service that that bank now offers compared with the service offered when it was a building society. What we do see is that in all the groups that demutualise, the directors get very generous share options.

It is to protect the social capital that has been built up through generations of members not demanding their pound of meat, but leaving some of it there for the benefit of future generations that I have tabled new clause 2 and amendment No. 9. In new clause 2, I suggest that if a society demutualises, it should be required to put aside 15 per cent. of the value of the company that results in a charitable trust to further the aims of the former mutual society.

Under amendment No. 9, when societies contemplated demutualising, the members would have appointed for them financial advisers to tell them whether they thought it was as good a deal as the directors said it was, given that the directors would benefit through large share options.

The Minister may make points about whether the new clause and the amendment are sound; I will defer to her on that. If we withdraw the new clause, will the Government give us an undertaking that they will seek to put the provisions on the statute book by way of a statutory instrument? I hope very much that that is possible.

All our debate today—it has been a fine debate—has reflected the idea that we do not get a community by being able to spell the word or by tabling resolutions in the House of Commons, but by working at it. As the previous Prime Minister said, if we do not have strong families, we are unlikely to have a society. Similarly, if

we do not have strong mutual aid organisations, we shall not have strong communities and strong societies. That is the spirit in which I speak to the new clause. I may have been less brief than my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby, but I am older and without his ambitions.

6.15 pm

Mr. French: The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) will have noticed that the Northern Rock building society, in formulating its conversion proposals, has made provision for the setting up of a charitable foundation, the purposes of which will be to meet exactly the good causes that are described in new clause 2. It is open to societies at the moment to meet the spirit of the new clause, although they are not obliged to do so.

Mr. Frank Field: Everyone in the House applauds Northern Rock. New clause 2 would put its action beyond any dispute in the courts. Much as I admire Northern Rock's proposal, I wonder whether some of its members may move against it in the courts because it has not given the membership all the money that is due. New clause 2 would ensure that Northern Rock's proposal is not only sound for it, but has to become the model of behaviour for all other societies that are converting.

Mr. French: The hon. Gentleman will also have noticed that a formula not dissimilar to his is likely to be embraced by the Alliance and Leicester building society. Of the societies currently converting, the one that stands out as refusing to meet the spirit of new clause 2 is the Halifax building society.

Mrs. Angela Knight: The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) is nothing if not consistent; he has made similar remarks throughout our discussion of the Bill. New clause 1 would require a delay of not less than six months between the date of the first notification of the proposed transfer to the members and the date on which they were asked to vote on it. The process takes longer than six months already. If we imposed a statutory period of delay in what is essentially a commercial, market-sensitive operation, there would be difficulties.

Members opposed to the principle of a transfer already have opportunities to make their views known. Many of those opportunities have been strengthened through the accountability package in the Bill. If the commission has evidence that material information in relation to proposals that are being put to the vote has not been given to members, it will take that into account when deciding whether to confirm the transfer.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), in amendment No. 9, would require a society that received a takeover offer, whether confidential or not, to get a valuation of the offer and to pass it to its members. That would cause immense difficulties because proposals made to a society are often confidential. Under the amendment, the society would have to publish the details of the valuation of a confidential offer. That would cause considerable instability for a society. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the regulations operated by the Building Societies Commission ensure that all details in the transfer document, which the society will ultimately give to its members, are full and correct in every respect. The issue of the valuation of an offer that is out in the open is, therefore, covered in that way.

New clause 2 would ensure that a converting society put a proportion to one side for a charity. We all congratulate Northern Rock on making that decision and I am sure that Northern Rock's members are in favour of it. If we made such a charitable option compulsory, we would be moving away from what we understand to be the necessary requirements for a charity. Although I agree with the sentiments behind the new clause and I would urge other converting societies to follow suit, I have strong reservations about making a voluntary requirement into a compulsory one.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I was disappointed with the Minister's reply. Although it is easy to pick holes in the amendments as we do not have the support of skilled civil servants and draftsmen, I wanted the Minister to express her support for the principle involved—that of making demutualisation more difficult, slowing it down and providing information of a quality, volume and weight comparable with the deluge of that put out by the directors. I am sorry that the hon. Lady did not accept that principle. I understand that she is becoming nervous about the fate of her Bill just as I am getting nervous about my future in seven weeks' time. Because of both those paroxysms of nerves, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 4

INFORMATION TO BORROWERS

'.—After section 57 of the 1986 Act there shall be inserted the following section—

".—(1) It shall be the duty of the Commission to prescribe in rules the information which must be provided by a building society to its borrowing members.

(2) In particular, and without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) above, rules made by the Commission under that subsection shall prescribe that any notification of a change in the rate of re-payment of a mortgage loan should include notification of any consequential change in the final date of completion of the mortgage.".'.—*[Mrs. Dunwoody.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

As the Minister has proceeded with great speed this afternoon, I am sure that she will happily accept new clause 4, which is straightforward. We have heard a great deal about tidying up the 1986 Act. I am asking only that we are fair to the innumerate.

The new clause requires:

"It shall be the duty of the Commission to prescribe in rules the information which must be provided"

and that

"In particular, and without prejudice . . . rules made by the Commission under that subsection shall prescribe that any notification of a change in the rate of re-payment . . . should include notification of any consequential change in the final date of completion".

The issue arose because an extremely intelligent and sensible lady of my acquaintance had arranged to repay a 15-year mortgage with the final payment just before her retirement. She was considerably upset when she queried a particular rate change to discover that the term of the outstanding mortgage was two and a half years longer

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

than she had expected. The banking ombudsman took up her case and only then was it revealed that, because of the miscalculation by Abbey National, she had been underpaying her mortgage for more than 10 years. That would place anyone in a difficult position as it would require continuing to make repayments for a greatly extended period or doubling the repayments.

Many people would find it extremely difficult to cope with much larger repayments or an extended term. Abbey National contended that its old computer system had not alerted staff to the error. How do Abbey National customers know that the current system is working properly? Would it alert staff to a similar problem? How many others may face the same difficulty in repaying their mortgages with Abbey National or any other lending institution?

I make no apology for the fact that many borrowers are not particularly numerate. However, they are often clear about the date of the final repayment. Many of them have it engraved on their hearts. Therefore, particularly in view of the fact that all large companies will have to reprogram their computers in 2000, it would be simple to include in the information to borrowers my simple, straightforward proposals. The new clause would be of enormous use and protection to customers and it would be so simple to implement that I am sure the Government would like to do so. I am therefore very happy to give the hon. Lady the chance to accept new clause 4.

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have a great deal of sympathy for the case that the hon. Lady has made. However, there are three difficulties with new clause 4, so let me suggest another way of achieving its objective.

First, the new clause would require the commission to have a new statutory function to administer it. Clearly it does not have that statutory function. Secondly, the new clause applies only to building societies and banks also offer mortgages. Thirdly, even if an unfairness arose, the new clause provides no means of redress.

Shortly, the Council of Mortgage Lenders will be publishing its code of practice, which will cover such matters. In addition, it ties all lending institutions to the relevant ombudsman. Therefore, should similar difficulties arise in future, I am sure that they will be covered by the code and there will be redress through the relevant ombudsman. I hope that, with that assurance, the hon. Lady will see fit to withdraw the new clause, although I respect the reason why she moved it.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, but I should say that I tabled the new clause precisely because the banking ombudsman, having considered the case and discussed it, was unable to sort it out. I shall withdraw the amendment tonight, but I shall not forget it. I shall return to the issue again and again.

I am seriously disturbed by the inordinate speed at which the Bill has been rushed through the House. Experience tells me that any Bill, no matter what the subject, taken at such speed ends up having to be done again.

Mrs. Knight: I assure the hon. Lady that the case to which she referred was considered before the Council of Mortgage Lenders' code of practice, which has not been produced in its final form. I also assure her that I, too, will be looking carefully at these matters to ensure that unfairnesses are properly addressed in future.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedules 1 to 9 agreed to.

Bill reported, with amendments.

Order for Third Reading read.

6.28 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Given the quality of debate today and on Second Reading, and given that the Bill has been published in draft form and has been the subject of extensive consultation outside the House, I believe that it would be for the convenience of the House to move its Third Reading formally.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Business of the House

6.28 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, I should like to make a further short business statement. Following my announcement earlier today and discussions through the usual channels, the business for tomorrow will now be as follows.

TUESDAY 18 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the Birds (Registration Charges) Bill.

Motions on the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Codes of Practice No. 4) Order and the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 (Code of Practice) (No. 2) Order.

Motions on the Treasure Act 1996 Draft Code of Practice (England and Wales) and the Treasure Act 1996 Northern Ireland Draft Code of Practice.

Motions on the Legal Aid (Functions) Order and the Legal Advice and Assistance (Scope) (Amendment) Regulations.

I regret that it has not been possible, as I had hoped earlier, to announce the business for the rest of the week. Discussions between the usual channels are continuing and I shall make a further business statement tomorrow.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Leader of the House for that information and share his regret—although I understand why—that he is not able to announce more than one day's business at the moment. Will he confirm that the other business to be completed later in the week is important and could, indeed, lead to votes in the House? Discussions are continuing and I am sure that further statements will be made shortly.

Is the Leader of the House in a position to say anything about private Member's Bills and the procedure that he suggests we adopt for them? Will he assure the House that Ministers will not in the next few days abuse their position to make statements to the House except on matters of real significance or to provide genuine accountability to the House, which has been rare in this Parliament?

In the earlier business statement, the Leader of the House very unusually forgot to answer one of my questions. Will he take this opportunity to confirm that, when the House is prorogued on Friday, it will not meet again and that the Dissolution of Parliament will be by proclamation?

Mr. Newton: I apologise to the hon. Lady for the fact that I did indeed miss one of her questions earlier. I will take it first now, and the answer is yes. I am grateful to her for acknowledging the difficulties of sorting everything out in time for this statement. I can confirm that some of the other business that we expect to take later in the week, including that currently in another place, could well lead to votes. If she is anxious to underline that, I can certainly confirm what she says. The area of private Member's Bills is one of those in which we are still considering precisely how we should proceed. I hope that I shall be able to make things clearer on that tomorrow. Lastly, I have not the slightest idea what she means in talking about ministerial abuse of statements.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will my right hon. Friend clarify one point with regard to Friday? Will the House meet for Prorogation only or will there be some business before Prorogation?

Mr. Newton: My expectation, and certainly my hope, is that the House will meet for Prorogation only.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): On Thursday, the Leader of the House promised that electoral registration figures for England and Wales would be supplied to the House on 26 March. As the House will prorogue on 21 March, there will be no opportunity to try to use the procedures of the House to discuss those figures if they prove to be inadequate. In those circumstances, will he ensure that the figures are made available to the House tomorrow so that hon. Members who are interested in such matters will still have an opportunity to raise them before the House prorogues?

Mr. Newton: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman that promise off the cuff—not least because I am not the Minister who has responsibility for those statistics. I shall however certainly look into his point, and if there is any possibility of achieving what he wants, I will of course be very pleased to please him, and indeed the House. I cannot add to that.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South–West): Is my right hon. Friend having discussions with the usual channels in this House and the House of Lords concerning the private Member's Bill, the Public Entertainments Licences (Drugs Misuse) Bill, which progressed unanimously—

Madam Speaker: Order. The Leader of the House has made a very limited statement about tomorrow's business only. He is coming to the House tomorrow to make a further statement. Negotiations are going on about things such as the Bill to which the hon. Member referred.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On tomorrow's business, is there any chance of a statement—some kind of comment or action—on the subject that I have now indelicately raised four times with the Leader of the House in business questions: the work of the Standards and Privileges Committee in relation to the outpourings of Mr. Mohammed Al-Fayed and the book "Sleaze"?

Mr. Newton: I have referred the hon. Gentleman on one or two occasions to the fact that a substantial report—the one dealing with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary—on that area has already been published. Beyond that, I am not in a position to make statements from the Dispatch Box on behalf of the Standards and Privileges Committee.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 2

ASSISTANCE FOR TRAINING

'. In section 56 of the 1995 Act (financial assistance for training), after subsection (3) there is inserted—

"(4) In providing assistance in accordance with this section the Secretary of State shall have regard to the maintenance and development of the United Kingdom's merchant fleet and marine related business and for that purpose shall—

(a) keep under review all aspects of that fleet and business; and

(b) seek the advice of those who appear to him to have experience of that fleet or business.

(5) In this section, 'marine related business' means any trade, business or other activity concerned with the manufacture of, or the provision of goods and services for, or the operation or use of ships and includes maritime educational establishments, marine classification societies, marine equipment suppliers, marine surveyors, marine and naval architects, marine insurance companies, protection and indemnity clubs, provides of maritime financial or legal services, the operators of ports and harbours and shipbrokers.".'—*[Ms Glenda Jackson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

6.35 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The purpose of the new clause is abundantly clear. It underlines the importance that training has always had not only for the safety of lives at sea but for the maintenance and therefore the ensuring of safety of the ships in which people sail. It is of particular importance given the Bill's framework.

I do not think that it would be an exaggeration to say that this nation has set the benchmark not only for the training of seafarers but for the introduction and maintenance of many of the safety measures that, over the years, have reduced loss of life at sea and been instrumental in steps being taken in this country and in the wider international community on the very serious issue of pollution and its potential risk should such strict safety standards and training measures be eroded. It would however be quite wrong to mislead hon. Members into thinking that what has been is what faces us now.

In common with all other merchant fleets, the British merchant fleet is undoubtedly operating in a severely competitive climate. Over the past 18 years, we have seen a serious decline in the number of ships flying the red ensign. The number of ships on the United Kingdom register has declined from more than 1,200 of 500 gross tonnes or more in 1980 to only 240 ships of an equivalent tonnage today. At the same time, there has been an even more staggering decline in the number of registered UK seafarers. In 1980, there were 60,000 seafarers, but there are just about 20,000 today. That figure includes some officers who are employed on foreign-flag vessels.

As this nation has set the benchmark not only for training but for the maintenance of safety standards on our vessels, British-trained crews are undoubtedly much admired and desired by international competitors. In a study commissioned jointly by the Department of Transport, the Chamber of Shipping Ltd. and the Marine Society, which was conducted at the University of Wales in Cardiff and published in March 1996, it was, however, identified that the need for trained seafarers is the exclusive preserve neither of shipping companies nor owners but of many land-based related industries.

It is extremely interesting to see the wide variety of businesses, industries and commercial enterprises that are in a sense dependent on having as part of their personnel people who have obtained sea-going qualifications and are experienced in the area. The obvious ones are surveying and ship inspection companies, cargo surveying firms, classification societies, ports and port services and, of special relevance to the Bill, organisations committed to pollution control. The list is long and runs to many pages, and I do not wish to delay the House. The study by the University of Wales in Cardiff identified approximately 17,000 land-based jobs that employers much prefer to fill with ex-seafarers, but the number of mariners—and the number who present themselves for training, certainly in the cadets—has declined.

The Government have taken steps, via the DOCS—development of certificated seafarers scheme—and the Government assistance for training—or GAFT—scheme to encourage people to train as mariners. From conversations I have had, I do not believe that young people are any less willing to look to the sea for their future careers than they have ever been. Last year, at one of our much-prized, internationally recognised nautical colleges, some 1,000 young people who wished to dedicate their lives to the sea competed for a limited number of places.

It is remarkable—and we should take pride in the fact—that 50 per cent. of all ship broking is conducted through the Baltic exchange in the City of London. The City is the primary area for all maritime business, nationally and internationally. People are concerned that if standards of training, and the numbers entering such training, decline, that primacy could be lost.

The purpose of the new clause, which I hope that the Government will consider favourably, is to ensure the widest possible consultation and discussion in the maritime industry on how we can expand and increase existing training schemes, as well as incorporate individual ideas from a variety of sources. It has been argued that the individual, land-based businesses should take on the exclusive responsibility for training, but such training schemes would be dependent on the size of the company. Many such companies, which make a considerable contribution to the nation's economy, are small, and it would be impossible for them to engage in training schemes. If we had wide-ranging consultation and discussion, companies could present a compilation of their ideas.

I shall end where I began. We are a proud maritime nation. We have set benchmarks for the international community in training, standards of seamanship, maintenance and safety procedures. I hope that the Government will look kindly on the new clause, because we should expand our activities in this area, not decrease them.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I speak in support of the new clause. My father was a merchant seaman. He served as a stoker in the merchant

navy from 1936 until his retirement in the 1960s. He was torpedoed on three occasions during the war. A seaman's occupation affects his family directly. When my father complained about safety at sea, he was disciplined and the family lost wages. A seaman at sea is under maritime regulation and can be disciplined differently from a worker on land, who can complain about health and safety with no repercussions. At sea, it is impractical for a complainant to step off the boat. Seamen who have spoken up about safety have been dismissed and left at the next port.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): In that context, I remind my hon. Friend that, traditionally, if a man was swept overboard from a company-owned trawler, the wages given to his wife or mother were docked from the hour he was knocked overboard.

6.45 pm

Mr. Martin: That is true and my hon. Friend may be able to expand on that point. My mother was paid fortnightly through a seaman's allotment. If my father's wages were docked or he was put off the boat in Egypt or Montreal, it might be 14 days before my mother discovered that he had been disciplined. I know that the position has improved, but the point is that good safety training on our sea-going vessels—the few that are left—is a must. Those British men and women who have the honour of serving in our merchant navy are entitled to the best possible training. Those in charge of our able seamen, stokers, stewards and others should also have the best training. I hope that the new clause will improve the situation, and I support it.

Dr. Godman: I am happy to support the new clause. Will the Minister confirm that fishing vessels fall outwith the United Kingdom's merchant fleet? If that is so, I hope that the Minister—if he is sympathetic, as he often is, to our case—will pay serious attention to the need to emphasise the training of our fellow citizens who are employed in marine-related businesses and the fishing industry, as well as those in the merchant fleet.

Safety training is especially important. I need hardly remind the Minister about the two terrible losses that we have just suffered. Allegations were made in Scotland over the weekend that the Arbroath, which foundered a few days ago with the loss of its crew, snagged its gear on a pipeline. Whatever the truth of those allegations, it is essential that those who go to sea, on any vessel, should be given the best safety training. The Minister will not be surprised to hear that such training should include training in donning immersion suits. Men may have only a few minutes to put the suits on. They are not easy to put on, especially in the darkness and if the sea is running and the vessel is going down. That is the sort of training that all our seafarers should be given.

Safety is of the essence; and the Under-Secretary and the Secretary of State have agreed with me on this in the past. I would like the measures dealing with the merchant marine to include also the fishing fleet, where safety is also important. If a vessel is going down, but the men and women on board have time to put on survival gear before going into the water, excellent equipment is important. I told the Under-Secretary in Committee about the French fishermen who had to jump off their ship west of St. Kilda. Those who had time to put on their survival suits survived, but the other men died quickly. Safety is of the essence, as is safety training.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I wish to support briefly the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson). Many people believe that the reason for the decline in the British merchant fleet has been the far cheaper charters offered by flags of convenience, and that may be true in some sectors. But we must remember that our continental partners—particularly Norway and Denmark—have been able to maintain substantial merchant fleets and, in certain areas, have expanded them.

The tragedy for the British merchant fleet has occurred in areas where, initially, Britain led the way—I am thinking in particular of the United Kingdom continental shelf, where many of the supply vessels which operated in the late 1960s and early 1970s were owned, operated and crewed by British people. Since then, there has been a significant decline in the proportion of the British merchant fleet operating on the United Kingdom continental shelf. Some of it, admittedly, has gone to flags of convenience with relatively cheap crews, but a significant part of the market has been taken by Norwegian, Danish and German-crewed vessels.

If, as we well know, the officers and crew of Norwegian, Danish, German and Dutch vessels are paid extremely well, why on earth is the British share of the market so small? The same is true in relation to tanker fleets, where the Norwegians and the Danes have been able to maintain a significant and flourishing sector. Any Government must address the issue of why there has been such a huge decline—as described by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate—in the British sector of the world merchant fleet. We must find out why countries with high-quality training and well-paid crews—any British seaman would give his right arm for their terms and conditions—have been able to maintain, and improve where necessary, their merchant fleets.

Other significant areas must be addressed, such as new build and how we support the merchant fleet not just on the United Kingdom continental shelf, but in the world market. The tragedy is that the British merchant fleet has shrunk to such an extent that it will be difficult to build it up to what we knew and appreciated in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John Bowis): I am grateful to the hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. In moving the new clause, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) talked about this country's great maritime traditions, and she was right. Those traditions have been based on a quality of seamanship that has been the envy of the world, and many of those qualities have been the result of the training given to our seamen.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin)—in a moving tribute to his father's experiences—highlighted some of the risks, dangers and problems faced by our seamen. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) reminded us of the most recent tragedies affecting fishing boats and the men who put to sea in them. Our thoughts go to the families of the crews of those two ships which had such a sad end.

[Mr. John Bowis]

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow asked whether the fishing fleet was covered by the related section of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995. The Act does apply to fishing vessels, although it does not apply to the matters referred to by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate. The hon. Gentleman rightly drew our attention to the need for equipment and clothing, and we have referred him in the past to the guidance that is available on this matter. His points are well taken on board.

The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) had a wider shopping list than is addressed by the new clause. However, British training benefits British seafarers—no matter what ship they are sailing in. We should bear that in mind as we look at our training record.

The new clause is unnecessary, but I want to make clear that the Government are very much in favour of consulting those with an interest in seafarer training or those with relevant expertise and experience. We are against imposing needless bureaucracy and superfluous regulation. The Government's record shows clearly that we support well-thought-out and targeted schemes for seafarer training.

I wish to refer the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate to the implications of the wording of the new clause, which caused me to have some doubts about it. The problem is what the new clause could do in practical terms. As drafted, the new clause could mean—among other things—that when the Government wished to make an adjustment to a seafarer training support programme, the Secretary of State would be obliged to consult all those presently engaged in the merchant fleet and all those engaged in marine-related businesses, as defined. It could also mean that the Secretary of State would be obliged to consult all retired members of the merchant fleet and all retired practitioners in marine-related business.

There are issues on which it would be valuable to have the advice of harbour operators, naval architects, manufacturers of the specialist equipment used on board ships and ship builders but, at first sight, the new clause would seem to oblige the Secretary of State to consult them all—whether they had relevant experience or not.The hon. Lady developed her point to make clear that she is not looking for something rigid, but for as wide and as sensible consultation as possible.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate referred to two training support schemes by the Government. The GAFT scheme has been running since 1988 and assists cadet officers. Since 1988, it has helped to fund some 4,000 trainees at a cost in excess of £18 million. During that time, no eligible candidate has been refused assistance. Junior officer training is supported by the DOCS scheme, which is in its third year of a pilot exercise that has helped to provide nearly 1,000 junior officer berths.

The Department of Transport currently spends some £4.3 million a year on these highly successful schemes, and the value and skills of British seafarers are recognised the world over. We estimate that some 5,000 British seafarers work on foreign-owned and flagged tonnage. British seafarers and their training are success stories of which we should be proud. We have kept the operation under review and we have proposals to integrate the programmes to make better use of funding. We are consulting the relevant bodies, including training providers, trade unions and ship owners. We do all that already.

Our assistance for seafarer training also takes account of the need for trained seafarers in shore-based establishments, especially those that constitute what we know as maritime London. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate paid eloquent tribute to the Baltic and others. As she said, the consultation under way on changes to our training support scheme follows the study by the University of Wales that was jointly commissioned by my Department, the Chamber of Shipping and the Marine Society. That underlines the Government's recognition of the importance of the contribution made by British shipping as a whole to the nation's well-being.

Because we have kept developments in the merchant fleet under review over the years we have been able to take steps to promote the competitiveness of British shipping. Apart from the generous support that we have offered to seafarer training we have, among other things, changed the registration law to allow bareboat charter vessels on the United Kingdom register and introduced roll-over relief on capital allowances to encourage the replacement of aging tonnage.

We do a great deal already, and to that extent the new clause is not necessary, but in the spirit of co-operation that has prevailed on the Bill in both Houses, and in the spirit of Donaldson, to which we have tried to listen and respond at all stages, I am content to accept the new clause.

7 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson: I thank the Minister most sincerely for accepting the new clause and for underlining the spirit of openness and eagerness to ensure that the Bill completes its passage through the House which all of us who had the privilege to serve on the Committee have enjoyed. We all benefited from the great expertise on particular subjects that resided in more than one member of the Committee.

It was not our intention in tabling the new clause to place an enormous burden on the Secretary of State or his Department, necessitating consultation with absolutely everybody with any association, however remote, with the maritime industry, whether at sea or on land. It is undoubtedly the case that practical experience is usually the greatest teacher, and no classroom is more severe than that of the sea. Much expertise and experience can be brought to bear.

It is important to note that the Bill will place new requirements on various parts of the maritime industry. Consultation and the sharing of knowledge and experience can bring benefits to all concerned. Information technology is making inroads in what have been the traditional methods of navigation and it is important that training should keep pace with the scientific and technological advances.

Once again, I am grateful for the Minister's acceptance of the new clause.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 4

APPOINTMENT BY SECRETARY OF STATE OF ADVISORS ON MARINE SALVAGE, &C.

'.—In section 137 of the 1995 Act (shipping casualties), after subsection (5), there is inserted the following subsection—

"(5A) The Secretary of State shall appoint such persons as he thinks fit to advise or assist him in connection with marine salvage and other matters relating to the exercise and performance of his duties under this section.".'.— *[Mr. Ainger.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Ainger: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also new clause 5— *Duties of the Secretary of State in relation to marine pollution—*

'.—After section 293 of the 1995 Act there is inserted the following section—

"Duties of the Secretary of State in relation to marine pollution

293A. It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State—

(a) to carry out regular reviews of emergency salvage capacity in United Kingdom waters, including need, availability and potential funding sources; and

(b) to ensure that adequate emergency salvage capacity is provided in United Kingdom waters, as identified in reviews carried out in accordance with paragraph (a), above.".'.

Mr. Ainger: New clause 4 developed from the clause stand part debate in Committee, in which I said that clause 2 was in the Bill because the marine accidents investigation branch made three separate recommendations in its interim report published on 22 November 1996: to give legal status to the marine pollution control unit's national contingency plan; to give the Secretary of State additional powers to direct harbour authorities, harbourmasters and pilots; and to give the Secretary of State or his officials the right to charter vessels, aircraft and equipment in the commercial sector to carry out an anti-pollution operation.

It is worse than useless to give the Secretary of State those powers if he cannot sensibly exercise them. I am glad that he is here. I remind the House of the meeting that he and I had at 11 o'clock on 20 February, the day after the Sea Empress made her final grounding and spilled about 30,000 tonnes of oil on the falling tide. I asked him why he had not intervened and exercised his considerable powers under the current legislation between 15 February, when the vessel first ran aground, and the day of our meeting.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will confirm my precis of our conversation. He said that he felt that he could not intervene, because the salvors were acknowledged as being world class and he had no expertise with which to countermand their policy and decisions, and that he was afraid that if he exercised his powers the salvors' tugs, equipment and expertise would be removed.

That is the key issue. We all want the risk to be reduced wherever possible, and if an accident occurs we need to be able to handle it as best we can, with all the technology at our disposal, to reduce the impact on the environment, but if, with the best will in the world, we give the Secretary of State those powers, we must also provide him with the independent expertise that could advise him if a salvage or towing operation were going wrong.

In Committee, the Minister tried to reassure us that measures had already been taken. He said that the contracted emergency towing vessels based at Dover, Falmouth and Stornoway had salvage experts attached to them. That assurance does not bear close examination. If we need all-year-round expertise, and its source is on the emergency towing vessels, those vessels would have to be on charter all year round, which they are not: they are chartered for only six months of the year; so for six months of any year there is no contracted salvage expertise available to the Secretary of State.

The three emergency towing vessels cover only the three sectors identified by Lord Donaldson and by Captain Belton, so if a casualty were to occur well up the east coast, in the middle of the North sea, it would be a significant distance from the existing covered sectors and the expertise would not be readily available.

Perhaps the most important point is how independent and objective any salvage expert who is part of a salvage operation will be. The Minister has told us that salvage experts will be on the vessels. The House will be interested to know that, under the current contract between the salvage or towing companies and the Coastguard agency, 60 per cent. of any proceeds from a successful salvage operation will automatically go to the salvor and only 40 per cent. to the Department of Transport. Again, there is a question mark over the independence of the people who are attached to the emergency towing vessels.

How do we give the Secretary of State that day-in, day-out, year-in, year-out, objective and independent expertise so that he can exercise the powers that previous Acts have given him and the Bill would give him? The Sea Empress disaster has clearly shown us that he did not have expertise in which he was confident and could place his trust. That is vital. If one lesson has to be learnt from the Sea Empress, it is that the Secretary of State must have independent and objective advice constantly available to him. That is why I tabled the new clause, which would put into the Bill the requirement for the Secretary of State to have such marine salvage expertise.

The Government were generous on new clause 2. I hope that they will show similar generosity on this important issue.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I shall speak to new clause 5, which is in my name and would make it a duty for the Secretary of State to carry out regular assessments of the availability of emergency salvage capacity in United Kingdom waters—an issue that I raised in Committee. It would also place a duty on the Secretary of State to ensure the provision of adequate salvage capacity based on the information obtained through such a review.

It is not a question of who funds the capacity—it is likely to be done through the private sector—but of the role of the Secretary of State in ensuring that such provision is available. I want to put an end to the considerable delays in ensuring that emergency salvage tugs are available in areas that are at risk from shipping. In Committee, the Minister argued that the question

[Mr. Matthew Taylor]

concerns the extent to which the Government should provide or ensure such salvage facilities. Lord Donaldson was in no doubt that the duty of ensuring that adequate cover was available lay with the Government. The fact that he also considered that tug ownership should remain primarily a private sector service was not intended to allow the Government to leave areas exposed to an avoidable pollution incident while they considered funding options.

In Committee, the Minister was reminded of the relative costs of salvage provision and of an oil spill, not all of which can be recovered from the ship's insurers or oil pollution compensation funds. Oil spills cost tens of millions of pounds, and it is highly desirable that the polluter should be asked to pay for the cost of pollution prevention, but coastal communities should not be left at risk while the issue is resolved.

When a similar amendment was discussed in Committee, the Minister questioned the meaning of "adequate". The new clause would give the Secretary of State the means of assessing what would constitute adequate emergency salvage tug cover. The Minister may argue that that already happens, but by making it a duty the new clause would ensure that the Secretary of State responded quickly to such assessments—certainly in less time than it has taken to implement some of Lord Donaldson's recommendations.

The Minister might question the meaning of "regular". He might suggest an interval that he would recommend for such a review and which is current practice, so that should not be a concern. Reviews should not be triggered solely in response to accidents. Under the new clause, the Secretary of State would be charged with ensuring that adequate salvage capacity was available in the period between reviews.

In Committee, the Minister also argued, in relation to a similar amendment, that a function of the Secretary of State

"did not impose an obligation."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 4 March 1997; c. 116.]

The new clause has been redrafted to take that comment into account. The Minister's comment raises some concerns, however, about other provisions in schedule 6, which I had understood would place an obligation on the Minister. If his comment is correct, they would not do that.

7.15 pm

An interim recommendation of the marine accidents investigation branch into the Sea Empress called for the national contingency plan to be given legal status. The Government have implemented the recommendation by seeking to add, through this Bill, the preparation of a national contingency plan to the functions of the Secretary of State under section 293 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995. If the Minister objects to the new clause, perhaps he could clarify, on the basis of his previous comments, whether the preparation of such a plan should be made a duty of the Secretary of State instead of a function. It now seems less than clear whether that is the case.

The tug in the western approaches was not in place when the Sea Empress ran aground in February 1996. Lord Donaldson highlighted the need for a tug to be placed at that location in May 1994. There was a considerable time gap, and if things had been done as suggested there might have been a very different outcome. It is to be hoped that there will not be another case that so clearly illustrates the cost to the marine environment and the coastal communities that rely on it of delaying the provision of adequate emergency salvage capacity around the UK coast. The new clause would place the necessary obligations on the Secretary of State both to find out what is needed and to act on the conclusions.

I have one further question for the Minister. In Committee, when we debated the issue, he said that there might be an announcement on the measures to be taken for the winter of 1997-98. I do not think that one has been made, unless I missed it. Can he confirm whether he will be announcing a continuation of the three winter tugs? To date, they are in place only on a trial basis, and it is important that such cover is continued. I know that the Minister agrees in principle, but it would be helpful if an announcement were made.

Dr. Godman: I have considerable sympathy with both new clauses. I remind the Minister—if he needs a reminder—of what might have happened west of the Western Isles with the Panamanian-registered Soro. Perhaps I may say, in response to a comment my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) made, that we always have a problem when tankers run into difficulties, because the owners place enormous pressure on their captains. We found that with the Exxon Valdez: the captain was reluctant to send for assistance. The same held true for that terrible foundering off the Shetland coast: there seemed to be some reluctance on the part of the captain to call for assistance. That was not the case with the Soro, as I am pleased to say that Captain Jim McFadden, a constituent of mine, acted promptly—as the Minister will agree in his response, I am sure.

In relation to the measures proposed in the new clauses, I want to know what information the Minister has about the Soro. There could have been a serious incident—that word is not strong enough. That august journal the *Greenock Telegraph* stated last Wednesday:

"A Greenock tanker captain has averted what could have been a major maritime oil disaster.

The Panamanian-registered Soro ran into difficulties after encountering storm force conditions off the coast of Lewis."

That means the west coast of Lewis—the deep-water route—where the vessel should have been. As the Minister knows, I have always argued that such vessels should not use the Minch in heavy weather.

The report continues:

"The severe weather damaged the ship's steering but Captain Jim McFadden of Greenock managed to bring the vessel and her cargo of 284,000 tonnes of crude oil to safety—preventing what could have been an environmental catastrophe.

Tugs rushed to the aid of the Soro and brought her to the Clyde for repairs. This morning she left the river to continue her voyage to Canada."

Were Government inspectors involved in inspecting the vessel's seaworthiness before she left the Clyde to continue her voyage to Canada?

Captain McFadden acted promptly to avert danger by alerting the emergency tug at Stornoway, but there have been cases where captains, even when their ships were in serious trouble, have been reluctant to send for an emergency tug because of the cost. The new clauses deal with the problem of unscrupulous owners who let their captains and crews know their views about the need to avoid what they regard as unnecessary expense. They tell captains to try to effect running repairs and to get their engineers to deal with the faulty steering or whatever and not to call out a tug because of the cost. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) will know that some owners put that terrible responsibility on captains. In the case of Captain McFadden, there were no problems because he behaved in the honourable tradition of seafarers and sought to protect both his crew and the marine environment by sending for the tug promptly. He is to be complimented for his actions, but I worry about unscrupulous owners putting intolerable pressure on their captains.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I welcome the new clauses as an opportunity to raise important issues relating to salvage tug capacity around the United Kingdom. This gap in our marine pollution prevention measures was identified in the Donaldson report. I echo the request for confirmation that, at the very least, the three tugs that have operated in the winter months recently in Dover, Stornoway and Falmouth will continue.

My concern relates to the presence of adequate salvage tug capacity in the waters around Orkney and Shetland. The Minister knows that I have taken the matter up often. On 11 December, I was fortunate in being able to raise the matter in an Adjournment debate in the Scottish Grand Committee. I do not propose to repeat the points that I made, which are still relevant.

In Committee, when my hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) spoke of the need for salvage capacity around Orkney and Shetland, he received a reply that has become familiar. The Minister said:

"Both the Donaldson report and the Belton report on tugs referred to the waters there as being of secondary risk—that is their definition, not mine."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 4 March 1997; c. 116.]

I must accept that, but the Department of Transport has not addressed the fact that while Captain Belton's emergency towing study team's report, which was commissioned by the Coastguard, found that in general it was a secondary danger area, it also found that there was a particularly high risk during the winter months. That is self-evident to those of us who live there.

Captain Belton's study team recommended that the area should be provided with emergency towing vessel cover from the beginning of October until the end of March. The debate gives the Minister an opportunity to respond to that and to update the House on what the Minister of State, Scottish Office told me. He said:

"The Coastguard Agency has been in correspondence with commercial enterprises in Shetland to consider possible joint arrangements in the provision of emergency towing, and how these might be of benefit. The discussion will continue, but without commitment at this stage."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 11 December 1996; c. 47.]

I would welcome an update on any discussions that have taken place with private commercial enterprises in Shetland. The Minister could also comment on the fact that, in its evidence to the Donaldson inquiry, the harbours department of Orkney Islands council displayed a willingness to discuss partnerships to ensure that adequate salvage capacity—not the capacity already there, with tugs doing harbour jobs in both Scapa Flow and Sullom Voe—would be available as a joint venture in Orkney as well.

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful to the four hon. Members who have spoken. The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) introduced the debate on new clause 4, and the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) spoke to new clause 5. At the outset, I must say that both new clauses are unnecessary.

New clause 4 seeks to give the Secretary of State powers that he already has, although it does not use, as the hon. Member for Pembroke suggested it should, the words independent or must. The Secretary of State can already seek the advice and assistance of experts in or outside Government, as he thinks appropriate. We do not need new primary legislation for that. The hon. Gentleman nevertheless raised some important issues. I merely suggest gently that he is being premature with some of them. The review of the national contingency plan will, of course, have regard to the lessons learned from the Sea Empress incident and of any relevant recommendations made by the marine accident investigation branch. Clearly, if there is evidence that a particular sort of expertise has not been sufficiently available in the past, it can and will be addressed.

The conduct of salvage operations is one of the many aspects of the Sea Empress incident that are being considered by the MAIB. It would not be appropriate for me to guess its conclusions. The chief inspector expects to present his report to the Secretary of State by the end of the month. It will be published as soon as possible thereafter. New clause 4 is unnecessary and I hope that the hon. Member for Pembroke will seek leave to withdraw it.

The hon. Member for Truro mentioned our debates in Committee, where we debated this issue at some length. In practice, the Secretary of State already does what new clause 5 suggests. To make that a duty seems unnecessarily inflexible. It would impose a duty on the Secretary of State

"to carry out regular reviews of emergency salvage capacity".

It does not specify how often that should be done, as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged.

New clause 5 imposes a further duty

"to ensure that adequate emergency salvage capacity is provided".

It still does not specify what adequate means. While I take the point of the hon. Member for Truro about having a stab at it, it is still vague. It is a useful new clause for debate, but not for legislation.

We had a full and useful debate on provision of emergency towing vessels in Committee in response to an amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Truro. I can assure the hon. Member for Truro and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) that, since then, we have made the announcement—the hon. Gentleman must have missed it. We have announced that tugs have been retained to provide cover for a further winter in the Minches, the Dover strait and the south-west approaches.

[Mr. Bowis]

As I said in Committee, we will be undertaking further analysis of the trials to date—we are not waiting for next winter—so that the benefits of the provision of such Government-funded vessels can be fully assessed. It is right that we should carry out a careful evaluation of the costs and benefits of the trials to date; the public expenditure involved, of about £1 million per tug per winter, is not negligible. In the light of the evaluation, which we are now embarked upon as a matter of urgency, we will reach decisions on the longer-term provision of Government-funded tugs, how many there should be, where they should be located and for what period of the year.

7.30 pm

I hope that my comments have answered the queries of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. His points, which I have been unable to respond to in detail today, will be taken into account in that review, as will many of the points made by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). The hon. Gentleman reminded us of the incident involving the Soro, which was skilfully captained by one of his constituents. In that incident the request was made for support, the tug was available and set out. As the hon. Gentleman will recall, before it reached the ship, the ship was able to get under way on its own and subsequently made its own commercial arrangements for tug support.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the Minches, where it is always a matter of trying to strike the right balance between the protection of the environment and the protection of life—hence the routing in the Minches. I know that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly about that issue. It is a matter of using the deep channel whenever it is sensible, and using the protection of the coastline when necessary.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to cost. We are talking in general terms of the costs being the responsibility of ship owners. The hon. Member for Truro made it clear that he was not looking for wider public funding, but wanted an assurance that we would ensure that adequate provision was made. We shall take account of any comments or recommendations made in the MAIB report into the Sea Empress when it is to hand.

In the light of the work in hand and the announcement that the Government will fund three tugs for a further winter, I hope that the hon. Member for Truro will be reassured and that the hon. Member for Pembroke will feel able to withdraw his new clause.

Mr. Ainger: We have had a disappointing, but not unexpected, reply from the Minister.

I wish to comment on new clause 5 and the Minister's response to it. It is worth reminding ourselves that chapter 20, paragraph 127 of Lord Donaldson's report clearly recommended that there should be all-year-round emergency towing vessel cover in the Dover strait, the western approaches and north-west Scotland. That report led to Captain Belton's report, which was published one year later, in May 1995. He concluded that the primary danger areas were Dover, the Hebrides and the south-west approaches. Captain Belton's report recommended that emergency towing cover

"should be provided throughout the year in the Primary Danger Areas of DOVER, HEBRIDES and the SOUTH WEST APPROACHES; and for the winter only"—

the point made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace)—

"(1 October-31 March) in the Secondary Danger Areas of FAIR ISLE and NORTH CHANNEL."

The final report commissioned by the Coastguard agency—the emergency towing vessels trial report—stated, in its conclusions at paragraph 46:

"The two winter trials have taught us a lot about operating emergency towing vessels. We know what they cost and we have seen their potential benefits. Essentially they are an insurance policy and as such only pay off when an accident happens."

The paragraph concludes:

"The trials support the broad conclusions reached by the Donaldson Inquiry and Captain Belton's study team."

I am disappointed. How many more reports shall we have before the recommendations made by three objective committees are taken up? They have made it perfectly clear that, in their view, the emergency towing vessels should be in the key areas—the primary danger areas—all year and in the secondary danger areas, which were referred to by hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland, for six months of the winter period. I am worried that, yet again, we shall have a winter-only charter and another report. My great fear is that we shall have a repeat of the Sea Empress disaster, and not necessarily in the winter months.

I shall now comment briefly on the Minister's reply to new clause 4. He says that it is unnecessary because the powers already exist and the Bill contains additional powers. As I explained earlier, the powers already existed but could not be exercised because the Department of Transport did not have the confidence to come up with an option different from that put forward by a salvor who undoubtedly had a world-class reputation.

My fear is that we are currently dependent on the review of the national contingency plan including in its recommendations that the Secretary of State should have that expertise available to him. My argument is that if the Secretary of State has to exercise powers in relation to a salvage operation, high-quality salvage expertise should be available to him—I think that most people with an objective view would accept that as a sensible argument—but the Minister is saying that unless the national contingency plan review makes that suggestion, and unless the MAIB makes that suggestion, the Government may not implement it. That is why I have argued that the provision should appear on the face of the Bill so that every Secretary of State, whoever he or she may be, must have that expertise available to him or her.

I am conscious that we should have to await those reviews. I hope that, as they are on-going, the people who are producing them are listening to our debates, or reading the transcripts of them, and taking on board the points that have been made in a purely non-political way. Sensible points are being made by people who have built up a certain amount of experience and expertise. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland and I have done so through direct experience of major pollution incidents in our constituencies.

I hope that those who are producing the reports have listened to what has been said and will seriously consider what is being proposed. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

POWERS OF INTERVENTION WHERE SHIPPING ACCIDENT THREATENS POLLUTION

Mr. Wallace: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 4, leave out lines 1 to 5.

The amendment would delete references to harbour master and harbour authority from the list of those to whom the Secretary of State could give directions where there was a risk of significant pollution in United Kingdom waters.

The background to the amendment is that the original Bill—the draft Bill that went out for consultation last year, which exercise probably helped to smooth the passage of the legislation through both Houses—did not include the provision to which the amendment relates. The interim report of the MAIB on the Sea Empress grounding and a powerful intervention from Lord Donaldson on Second Reading in another place led the Department of Transport on 2 December to issue a consultation paper regarding the possible extension of the intervention powers of the Secretary of State. The consultation paper required a response, or at least initial views, by 16 December, so there was little time for consultation. It is therefore important that we examine the reasons for that extension of the Secretary of State's power.

In his response to clause stand part in Committee, the Minister did not adequately explain the scope of the powers or the circumstances in which they would be used. He said:

"To some extent we must await the MAIB's report and should not prejudge that."

He added:

"The fact that we have announced a review of the national contingency plan is evidence of how seriously the Government take the problem. We are trying to establish whether procedures are adequate and whether the plan needs revision. We are going to make it statutory through this legislation. I hope that that will provide some reassurance for the time being on this important matter.—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 25 February 1997; c.28.]

In other words, there was little scrutiny of the need for this power.

In its response to the consultation document, Shetland islands council, which is the harbour authority responsible for Sullom Voe, expressed considerable reservations about the extension of the power. I do not have to hand a copy of the submission from Orkney islands council, which is the harbour authority for Scapa Flow and the oil traffic that goes in and out of the Flotta terminal, but I understand that Orkney council shares those reservations and concerns. In its response, Shetland islands council said:

"Probably the acid test for Central Government in this matter is whether or not the use of such a power would ever be envisaged or contemplated. It is unlikely to be used, it should not exist and, instead, a more effective approach will be to ensure the existence of a comprehensive legal framework for effective control at a local level."

Later in the submission, it states:

"Directions given, on-the-hoof, in the heat of an incident are no substitute for a rational and properly thought out plan with all lines of communication, authority and accountability clearly established. Again, this Council believes that the Secretary of State already has sufficient powers available to him and these, together with properly developed plans, will secure actions appropriate to the area and the nature of the incident."

The amendment seeks an explanation from the Minister of how, and in what circumstances, he envisages the powers being used. I also want an assurance that they really are powers of last resort. They should not, in any way, be seen as a substitute for proper discussions with harbour authorities to ensure that there are well worked-out plans for dealing with emergencies in each harbour authority area. The tone and the considerations that motivated the response by the harbour authorities in my constituency suggested that there is no substitute for dealing with these matters in advance. Of course, some decisions will have to be made in the heat of an emergency, but proper plans will ensure that decisions made under pressure are more likely to be the right ones.

I conclude by noting the comments of the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) in Committee on clause stand part. He questioned what expertise would be available to the Secretary of State in circumstances where he might have to exercise the power. He said:

"I am sure that the powers will be delegated to the director or the chief executive of the Coastguard or to someone in the Ministry of Defence, but with the best will in the world, they are not salvage experts. They do not have the professionalism, which comes from many years of experience, to countermand an organisation that also claims to be expert in the field."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 25 February 1997; c. 26.]

Many of those who daily deal with our harbours have built up considerable expertise. I am sure that it is not the intention of the clause to sweep that aside and to enable the Secretary of State to swoop in with such advice as he has available to him. However, the purpose of the amendment is to obtain some information on how the Minister envisages the powers developing and a reassurance that they will not be used as a substitute for adequate local planning.

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) for raising this issue and for the terms in which he has done so. I hope that I can give him the reassurances that he seeks.

The amendment would remove the Secretary of State's power to give directions to harbour masters and harbour authorities. That would restrict his ability to monitor and, if necessary, take overall control of counter-pollution operations following a maritime casualty. As the hon. Gentleman correctly said, the widening of the intervention powers to cover harbour masters and harbour authorities was an interim recommendation of the MAIB. That recommendation received widespread support, including that of the noble and learned Lord Donaldson, whose words we listen to with considerable respect, as we do to the MAIB.

7.45 pm

The hon. Gentleman may be reassured to hear that we would not expect to use those powers often. When we did, we would seek to minimise the consequences for the commercial operation of ports, but, as Lord Donaldson

[Mr. Bowis]

said in another place, where a number of people are involved with a casualty, including a harbour authority, the buck must stop with someone, and that person should be the Secretary of State or his representative on the scene.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to spell out what the new powers would do. They will not alter our preference for co-operation rather than coercion. That is set out in the national contingency plan and I can assure him that only in cases of extreme urgency would we give a direction. Our intention is that, in general, we would use the powers simply to require salvage plans to be submitted for agreement by the Secretary of State's senior representative. We would not usually invoke the powers to take overall command of an operation, but, where the situation warrants it, we would have the power to intervene directly.

The United Kingdom's national contingency plan has been developed in conjunction with harbour authorities and others and the hon. Gentleman is right to say that that is the proper way to proceed. Regulations imposing a duty on harbour authorities to have plans are currently being drafted and will shortly be circulated for comment. The plans will deal with the response that a harbour authority might be able to make to an incident. No plan—however good—can cater for all circumstances, which is why a reserve power of direction is needed. That is proposed in the Bill and the amendment would remove that power in respect of harbour authorities.

The House would be unwise to disagree with the MAIB, which originally proposed this measure, or with the overwhelming support that the measure has received, including that of Lord Donaldson. With those reassurances on how the power would be used and when it would not be used, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Wallace: I welcome the clear terms in which the Minister has set out the way in which he would expect the power to be used or not used. It is the view of his Department—and, I assume, of the responsible agencies of his Department—that the emphasis should be firmly on forward contingency planning. Every encouragement should be given to the development of those plans, over and above that which already exists. With those words from the Minister on the record, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Later this evening, we are to debate a Pensions Measure and the only contribution that I wished to make to that debate was to thank the Second Church Estates Commissioner, the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), for the skilful and graceful way in which he has presented the Commissioners' business to this House. As I have to absent myself from the Chamber for a short time to make a satellite link-up with New Zealand, can you advise me as to whether there is any way in which I can get my comments into the *Official Report* before leaving, just in case the pensions business is completed before I return?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Even after five years in the Chair, I am unable to help the hon. Gentleman with that problem.

Clause 4

Powers of fire authorities

Dr. Godman: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 5, line 6, leave out 'whether or not'.

The Minister knows of my concern about the clause. I begin by quoting the excellent notes on clauses provided by his officials, paragraph 3 of which reads:

"This clause adds a new paragraph (dd) after paragraph (d) enabling fire authorities to employ the fire brigade or use their equipment anywhere at sea, whether or not within the United Kingdom's territorial sea".

If it were accepted, which I doubt it will be, the amendment would change the clause by leaving out the words "whether or not".

In response to the Minister's kind and generous invitation to write to him with my reservations, I did so—and I see that he has received my brief letter. In it, I quoted a letter that I received from Firemaster John Jameson of Strathclyde fire brigade. I know of no firefighter who would refuse to go to the assistance of someone caught in an emergency, but the clause creates real problems for firemen and firewomen.

John Jameson says in his letter, of which the Minister has already seen a couple of paragraphs:

"The Fire Service in Strathclyde for humanitarian reasons would wish to respond to any life threatening incident, including an incident at sea. The response can only be effective if the fire fighters are well trained, have reliable transportation and are properly equipped for the incident. Section 1 (i)(a) of the 1947 Act states that the Fire Authority shall secure the service of such a Fire Brigade and such equipment as may be necessary to meet efficiently all normal requirements".

Firemaster Jameson goes on to say:

"Fire fighting at sea is such a rare event in Scotland that it could not be described as a normal requirement for Fire Authorities to be equipped and trained to meet. It therefore requires special training and specialised equipment to enable fire fighters to deal safely with a deep sea incident."

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has mentioned the specialist training facilities at the centre in McDonald road, Edinburgh. I have visited those facilities, where I know many mariners have been trained to fight fires at sea in simulated conditions. I think that John Jameson is right to stress the fact that fighting fires at sea requires special training. He goes on to say in respect of health and safety:

"The requirements of the Health and Safety legislation, quite properly in my view, place very stringent responsibilities upon the Fire Authority and the personnel of the service to ensure adequate steps have been taken with regard to the health and safety of persons. To meet the requirements of the legislation the Brigade would be required to provide the following: all personnel would require to undergo survival at sea courses and attend revision courses. Survival suits including helmets would be provided for all offshore personnel. Special carriers for firefighting equipment would have to be purchased. Extensive ship firefighting training would require to be carried out covering not just wholetime fire personnel but also the retained members. Helicopter training would be extensive and costly in financial terms. Boat to boat transfer training for the high seas would be costly in time and finance".

I have quoted this letter at length because it comes from a highly experienced Scottish firemaster, and no one in this place should disregard the serious concerns voiced by such a fine and honourable man.

There are other problems. Professor Robert Black, professor of Scots law in the faculty of law at Edinburgh university kindly gave me a copy of the opinion that he wrote for the Fire Brigades Union. He had a number of things to say that the Minister and his officials need to "take on board"—perhaps I should say, need to take seriously.

Professor Black says:

"The very real likelihood in an offshore firefighting situation that the person whose negligence caused the firefighter's injury, and who is thus the potential defender in any action for damages, is not domiciled in Scotland, presents grave legal and practical obstacles to the successful pursuit of the firefighter's claim".

We all of course hope that no one will ever be injured in an emergency, but injuries are inflicted on firemen. He goes on to say:

"These difficulties are exacerbated if the firefighter's injury was sustained outwith United Kingdom territorial waters (generally twelve nautical miles from the coastal low-water line)".

The professor is saying that the general rule under Scots law is that a person seeking legal redress must apply for it in the courts of the place where the person against whom it is sought is domiciled. He goes on to say that if an injury from an emergency is sustained in our territorial waters, the Scottish courts could then deal with such a claim:

"It follows that in all cases where the accident to the firefighter did not occur in Scotland (as defined above)", the injured person

"would have to seek redress against a defender whose domicile was outwith Scotland in the home courts of that defender and not in the courts of Scotland".

I should like to hear the Minister's response to this key element in the opinion. Professor Black goes on to say:

"If the delict occurred in the territorial waters adjacent to the coast of Scotland then Scots law alone falls to be applied as both the lex fori and the law of the place of the delict (lex loci delicti): see *Private International Law: Choice of Law in Tort and Relict*".

He then quotes his sources, and continues:

"If the delict occurred on the high seas (and does not fall within . . . the above) . . . and is not purely internal to a single ship, then the maritime law of Scotland alone falls to be applied . . . If the delict occurred on the high seas (and does not fall within sub-para (a) above) and is purely internal to a single ship, the double actionability rule applies and the pursuer must satisfy the court of the entitlement to damages under both the law of the flag (or port of registry) of the ship (as the lex loci delicti) and Scots law (as the lex fori)".

Those are important warnings; the professor is firing across the Minister's bows.

The professor talks about a practical difficulty in Scotland. I do not know how the law stands in England, but before cases are heard in Scottish courts precognitions—a statement made before a court hearing—are frequently sought. The professor asks how such precognitions can be obtained when a firefighter has been injured on the high seas tackling an emergency. He claims:

"More seriously, there is no mechanism whereby witnesses resident outside the UK can be compelled to come to Scotland to give evidence at a proof here. Where a foreign witness is willing to give evidence, but is unwilling to travel to Scotland to do so, it is normally possible for the Scottish court to arrange for that witness's evidence to be taken, before a commissioner appointed by the Scottish court, in his country of residence."

He refers to paragraph 35.11 of the "Rules of the Court of Session 1994".

8 pm

Another means of obtaining evidence from overseas is the letter of request procedure, but it is not very satisfactory because, under the Hague convention on the taking of evidence abroad, dated 18 March 1970,

"there can be no guarantee that the foreign court will accept the request, or will act upon it timeously or efficiently. The 1970 Hague Convention has not been ratified by such major maritime flag states as Greece, Liberia and Panama."

There are problems relating to taking firefighters to the scene of the accident by helicopter. If there is an accident, firefighters' families may be unable to claim compensation. Professor Black finishes by saying that

"it will be appreciated that the process of obtaining damages for an injured firefighter against a person or corporation domiciled outside the UK is likely to be a complex, troublesome and expensive one, even where the Scottish courts have jurisdiction. A fortiori is this so where the Scottish courts do not have jurisdiction."

Firemaster Jameson says that there are serious practical problems. He claims that, despite the undoubted commitment of all our firemen and firewomen to go to the aid of those in danger, resources and special training are needed. He points out that firefighters are rarely taken offshore, but let us not forget the Piper Alpha disaster—God forbid that there is ever a repeat of that dreadful event—in which the emergency services, not firefighters but others, were found to be lacking in trained personnel and in resources. Most of the stand-by vessels, which should have been able to react promptly, were old side trawlers, which were useless for tackling that type of emergency. As Lord Cullen readily acknowledged, the crews were remarkably brave men, but their resources—the aging side trawlers—should not have been there.

I know that the Minister will take it seriously when I say that Firemaster Jameson is right to warn of these problems and that the warnings by Professor Black need to be taken on board so that our firefighters can be protected. If they must go to sea to tackle an emergency, they should be able to do so secure in the knowledge that, if they are injured, they will have recourse to adequate compensation—where Scotland is concerned, in our courts.

Mr. Ainger: I shall add a few comments in what I am sure will be a short debate. Before I was elected to this place, I was a member of Dyfed county council and of its public protection committee. That committee ran the fire service in Dyfed, which, since the mid-1980s, has been one of the few fire brigades that has had a ship firefighting capability and has trained a select few of its full-time and retained men for offshore firefighting. Milford Haven is one of the largest oil ports, so there is a constant risk of fire on board ships in, or entering or leaving, Milford Haven.

Interestingly, several times firemen from Dyfed fire brigade have fought fires on board tankers within the confines of Milford Haven port authority. The most famous one was on board a ferry, the Naronna, when she was midway between Pembroke dock and Rosslare, slap in the middle of St. George's channel. There was a fire deep in the vessel, producing a great deal of smoke, as a result of which one passenger died. However, the fire crew was able to reach the vessel, using the search-and-rescue helicopters then based in Brawdy in my constituency, and within an hour of the mayday call

[Mr. Ainger]

firefighters were on board the Naronna, bringing the fire under control, saving tens, if not hundreds, of passengers' lives.

The other fire brigade with offshore firefighting capability is Kent fire brigade, which covers not only the usual shipping traffic in the Dover straits but the ferries that sail out of Ramsgate, Dover and other ports on the Kent coast. I know from my experience with Dyfed fire brigade that whenever a new ferry comes into use, the fire brigade trains on board, getting to know it extremely well internally, in case there is a fire.

As we were constantly told by the finance committee of the county council, all that extra equipment and training was not paid for by anyone. One hoped that to some extent that it was taken into account when the grant that then in some cases came from the Home Office was calculated. Bearing in mind the specific risks posed by the presence of a large petrochemical complex on the shores of Milford Haven, it may have been so organised or arranged that, over the years, the Home Office took the additional cost into account when calculating the grant of the county council. That is obviously a matter for debate. I am certain that, when calculating grant for many coastal county councils and fire authorities, no account has been taken of offshore firefighting capability or the need for it.

The Minister needs to understand that we are not talking about a cheap option; the people who fight fires in a house or factory cannot be immediately transferred to an offshore incident. In the brigade, the idea of training firemen to be delivered by lifeboat was once considered. I know from experience that once one is wearing kit to be ready to go into action quickly—perhaps wearing breathing apparatus or almost ready to enter a situation that requires it—on a lifeboat, when the sea is choppy, certain things start to happen, and that is a significant problem. Ideally, training should always be with helicopters and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) said, that costs money and needs proper planning. I do not argue against what has been included in the Bill; I ask that the Minister recognises that my hon. Friend has highlighted a real issue in terms of resources, training and equipment that the fire authorities will require.

My hon. Friend's second point is worrying, because I am sure that the same legal problems, about which he went into great detail, probably apply in England and Wales as well. If there is no recompense in relation to an injury to a firefighter—or even a death—that needs to be clarified very quickly. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising these issues, because they are very serious. An offshore firefighting capability would be another tool in preventing pollution and possible disasters on board ferries. The Scandinavia Star was travelling only a short distance between Denmark and Sweden but suffered a serious fire that resulted in nearly 200 deaths on board. There was no offshore firefighting capability to deal with that.

This is a very important issue, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow for raising it.

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger), who, in a sense, answered the point made by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) about the need for the ability to fight fires outside territorial waters.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow made important points about equipment, training and so on, and that applies to fighting fires at sea however far out they are. I am sure that his points will have been heard even if they are not totally germane to the amendment. He did me the courtesy of writing to me, as I invited him to do, and I am grateful for his letter, in which he set out some of his concerns. I hope that I can allay them.

Clause 4 is in the Bill as a result of the fire authorities themselves, which asked us to include it because of the lack of clarity on their power to deploy their services to fight fires anywhere at sea, whether or not they are within the United Kingdom's territorial sea—the 12-mile limit. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's general concerns, I repeat the assurance that I gave him in Committee: decisions on whether to deploy their resources at sea will remain a matter for the fire authorities. There can be no question of anybody directing them. It will be their decision whether to respond to a request for help.

In this context, there is no reason to draw a distinction between the territorial sea and waters beyond the 12-mile limit. The fire authorities accept that and, in 1995, a sub-committee of the Scottish Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council said,

"it is illogical and unacceptable that fire brigades should be authorised to provide assistance to HM Coastguard by way of attendance at incidents at sea only if such incidents occur within the 12 mile limit".

The report recommended that the law be changed; clause 4 does that, and we have drawn it to the attention of officers of the Strathclyde fire authority.

In his letter to me, the hon. Gentleman raised two points, which he developed this evening: first, that special training and equipment is required. I accept that, but that applies to fires 11 miles offshore or 13 miles offshore. There is no reason to distinguish between fires inside territorial waters and further out. There is a memorandum of understanding between the Coastguard and the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association, which covers operating procedures for fighting fires offshore. If a particular fire authority has concerns about the equipment that it should use in such circumstances, it should discuss it with the Coastguard.

The hon. Gentleman's second point concerned the legal and practical problems that might arise if a firefighter was injured while fighting a fire outside territorial waters. It is correct to say that, in those circumstances, if the firefighter wished to bring an action against a ship owner who is not domiciled in Scotland, the action would have to be brought in the courts of the state of domicile of that ship owner. That reflects the long-standing position on the allocation of jurisdiction between states.

In any event, as I have explained, the clause does no more than allow—I stress the word "allow"—fire authorities to fight fires at sea; it does not compel them to do so. No fire authority has suggested to my Department that that possibility would deter it from fighting fires at sea. Indeed, when the Bill was published in draft for consultation last year, all those who commented on the clause were in favour of it.

I understand the points that the hon. Gentleman raised and am grateful for them, but I hope that in the light of my comments he will feel reassured and will withdraw his amendment.

Dr. Godman: Whoever is in office over the next few weeks will need to study very carefully what Professor Black said in the learned opinion that he gave to the fire brigades union. I have no wish to divide the House on this matter. I have raised the concerns that people have voiced to me and will continue to campaign on their behalf.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 5

WASTE RECEPTION FACILITIES AT HARBOURS

Ms Glenda Jackson: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 6, line 24, after 'recovered', insert

'without creating a disincentive to those who are expected to use them'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 5, in page 6, line 24, at end insert

'; and

'(d) measures to ensure the ease of use of waste reception facilities.'.

8.15 pm

Ms Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These amendments would make a valuable addition to an immensely important section of the Bill. As all members of the Committee have acknowledged, the Bill is extremely important, and many of the recommendations of Lord Donaldson's report, "Safer Ships and Cleaner Seas", have been endorsed. We believe, however, that there are still areas within the Bill where improvements can be made. That is why we have tabled the amendments.

We are concerned that the ease of providing waste facilities at our ports is not such as to encourage ship owners to instruct their masters and crews to use such facilities when they are in place. The possible costs of such waste facilities would be a disincentive.

I should highlight that competition throughout the whole of the international maritime industry is fierce, and competition is no less fierce in our ports. Not only are British ports in direct competition with other ports within the European Union but there is competition within the ports themselves. It is not our intention—nor, I imagine, is it the intention of any hon. Member—that waste reception facilities should add yet another competitive burden on our ports, but we have to take the necessary steps to ensure that ships do not take the easy option, which has undoubtedly been the case in the past, of dumping unwanted waste at sea.

There are, of course, well-recorded incidents of waste being dumped more by accident than design, but, as I said in Committee, I well remember that, more than 25 years ago, when I was sailing across the Atlantic and our vessel approached the Sargasso sea—with my limited hydrographic knowledge, I presume that it is about the middle of the Atlantic ocean, where one would expect to see little or no waste—I saw that the weed within the wide Sargasso sea was thick with detritus that, clearly, had been thrown over the side of vessels.

I regret that I did not have the opportunity to inform my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that I intended to refer to one of his speeches, but in the second sitting of our Committee he had occasion to refer to "Beachwatch 1996", in which he and his wife had taken part. The amount of debris that was collected from British beaches during that exercise makes astounding reading. My hon. Friend said:

"Debris was collected from 237 beaches in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. . . A total of 291,228 items were surveyed, weighing an estimated 17,518 kg. . . and filling 2,438 bags."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 27 February 1997; c. 34.]

My hon. Friend went on to detail some of the items that had been lifted from our beaches. They were plastic, glass, metal, polystyrene, rubber, cloth and pottery or ceramic items. He spared the Committee's feelings and did not describe in detail items that could be regarded as having landed on our beaches because of sewage.

The evidence that my hon. Friend presented to the Committee, and the evidence that I saw with my own eyes, admittedly many years ago, underlines the seriousness of the problem. Unless the facilities provided at our ports are easy to use and do not create a disincentive, the problem could grow worse in the future. As was said this evening and in our earlier deliberations, good shipowners and good masters will welcome such facilities and use them. We are concerned about ships whose owners and masters are less scrupulous, and where the pressures imposed by an owner on a master to make a fast turnround at the port of call could impact on the use of such facilities.

We have more than 350 ports in these islands, which provide a wide variety of facilities, whether commercial or recreational. No one presupposes that one kind of plan will meet the requirements in every port in these islands, but there must be a requirement on all ports that such facilities as they eventually devise and put in place must not act as a disincentive to vessels that use them, and they must be easy to use.

Mr. Wallace: I strongly endorse the views advanced by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson). With regard to the declaration of the North sea as a special area for oil under MARPOL, the marine pollution convention, can the Minister tell us what progress has been made in establishing special area for oil status, as recommended by Lord Donaldson? As that would virtually ban all discharges of oily waste, is the Minister confident that there are sufficient waste reception facilities in UK ports to meet any resulting increase in demand?

Mr. Bowis: On the last point, I can confirm that progress has been made. We have reached the stage where that will occur.

On that happy note, I can pass on to the amendment. We have no difficulty with the aims of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson). Harbour authorities in the United Kingdom have for many years been required to ensure the provision of adequate

[Mr. Bowis]

reception facilities for ships' waste. We will use the power provided by clause 5 to make regulations on waste management planning. We believe that the planning process will ensure that all ports, harbours and marinas comply with the existing requirement to ensure the provision of adequate facilities.

We do not need the amendments, because we can and will deal with the matters covered by them, and they were all covered by the merchant shipping notice that the Marine Safety Agency issued last year. The notice requests that all ports, harbours, marinas and oil terminals develop plans on a voluntary basis pending the introduction of legislation, and recommends that in preparing plans consideration should be given to the assessment and monitoring of the types and quantities of waste discharged, the development of effective procedures for informing port users about waste reception facilities, how the charging mechanism might influence the use of facilities, and measures to ensure ease of use.

Those matters will all be covered by the regulations that we shall make under the power provided by clause 5. The amendments are unnecessary. Clause 5 will shortly be in force, I hope, and we can implement the Bill as an Act for the protection of the seas and seafarers.

Ms Glenda Jackson: In the light of the Minister's reassurance, which is welcome not only to the Opposition but to everyone who has an interest in the Bill, and in the certainty that, although we would have preferred to see the word "disincentive" in the Bill, the end that we all hope to achieve will be realisable, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent and Prince of Wales's Consent signified.]

8.26 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill set sail from another place towards the end of last year and has had a relatively serene passage before docking in the House tonight. A brief return passage will be necessary to deal with new clause 2, but I hope that that will not be too long delayed.

The Bill demonstrates our commitment to driving up standards of maritime safety and reducing the risk of pollution for our waters and our coastline. We have built on the recommendations in Lord Donaldson's report, "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas".

Following its introduction, the Bill has benefited from lively, high-quality, informed discussion. I am grateful to my hon. Friends and to Opposition Members for their contributions during the Bill's passage. I am particularly grateful to my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping for his role in guiding the Bill through another place, and for the contributions of their noble Lordships. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, on whose broad shoulders has fallen the responsibility of negotiating the passage of the Bill through the House.

We shall seek to ensure that these important and widely supported measures to improve safety and protect the environment at sea are put into practice at the earliest opportunity.

8.27 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): The Minister earlier referred to the spirit of Donaldson. That is indeed the spirit in which the Bill has been approached by both sides of the House. I commend the expertise and experience of Back Benchers and Front Benchers on both sides. I am especially grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) and to my other hon. Friends, whose experience in relevant matters has been so evident.

This is a good Bill, which will strengthen security at sea and improve the protection of our maritime environment. That does not mean that it is a perfect Bill. We were pleased to be able to improve it a little with our new clause on training. There are remaining concerns about the availability of salvage expertise, the provision of standby tugs and the operation of waste facilities.

The Government's argument on all those matters has been that the powers already exist or that they are acting anyway. I refer particularly to the designation of marine environmental high risk areas. We were assured that it was the Government's intention to get those designated and that that was expected later this year. We are not satisfied with the progress that the Government have made. They say that the powers exist and that matters are in train. I give a pledge that whereas the present Government have so far failed to designate those areas, the next Government will certainly do so.

The Bill is a step forward. Let us see it passed into law without further delay.

8.29 pm

Mr. Wallace: I also commend the passage and Third Reading of the Bill. Subject to some reservations that the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) mentioned—not least the absence of any significant progress in designating marine environmental high risk areas—many of the Bill's provisions implement the recommendations of Lord Donaldson's report, "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas". The report was commissioned following the grounding of the Braer in my constituency in January 1993, and my constituents remain concerned about the absence of salvage tugs, for example. Although many—if not most—of Lord Donaldson's recommendations have been implemented, gaps remain in the area of marine pollution prevention. I am sure that the House will return to those issues regularly.

The Braer incident gave rise to Lord Donaldson's report and to many compensation claims that have been processed by the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund. Under clause 26 of the Bill, the fund will continue to enjoy the exemptions of the International Organisations Act 1968, although the United Kingdom's membership of the 1971 fund may terminate. I understand that that fund will be superseded by a 1992 fund, which implements British protocols that came into force on 30 May last year—regrettably, too late to increase the amount of compensation available for victims of the Sea Empress or the Braer incidents. As the House is continuing privileges by virtue of that clause, I wish to

register the continuing unhappiness and dissatisfaction of many of my constituents at the way in which outstanding claims, still unpaid by the 1971 fund, are being protracted.

In many cases, the claims and the amounts have been agreed, yet the moratorium means that people cannot be paid. In the past fortnight, one constituent told me that his business was threatened as a result of the delay. Another constituent wrote to me last week to say that she cannot reroof her house as the money has not come through, and her property is deteriorating. The Government believe, as all hon. Members do, that the polluter should pay. Unfortunately, in this case, those who have been polluted are paying the penalty.

While the 1971 IOPCF is operating within its legal rights by enforcing court orders for expenses at interim stages, my experience of the Scottish courts is that that right is not usually exercised. All questions of expenses are usually settled at the end when the case is finally determined. That is proving to be a particular financial burden on many of my constituents. I pay tribute to Viscount Goschen, the Minister for Aviation and Shipping in another place, to his officials and to those at the Scottish Office who have worked co-operatively on those matters. I hope that, when the executive of the 1971 fund meets next month, representatives of Her Majesty's Government will confirm that we intend to continue the privileges, although we may terminate membership of the fund. As we are doing it a favour, the executive might wish to address the continuing concerns of many of my constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

ARCHITECTS BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, That the Bill be not committed.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

LIEUTENANCIES BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, That the Bill be not committed.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

NURSES, MIDWIVES AND HEALTH VISITORS BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, That the Bill be not committed.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

JUSTICES OF THE PEACE BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to the Standing Order, That the Bill be not committed.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Local Government Finance

That the Special Grant Report (No. 25) (Metropolitan Railway Passenger Services Grant for 1997-98) (HC 316), which was laid before this House on 18th February, be approved.

Local Government Finance (Scotland)

That the Special Grant Report (Scotland) on Grant in Aid of expenditure on rail services in the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Areas (HC 297), which was laid before this House on 19th February, be approved.

Social Security

That the draft Social Security (Incapacity for Work and Severe Disablement Allowance) Amendment Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 24th February, be approved.

Data Protection

That the draft Data Protection (Regulation of Financial Services etc.) (Subject Access Exemption) (Amendment) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 25th February, be approved.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Question agreed to.

Church of England (General Synod) (Measures)

[Relevant document: The Fourth Report from the Social Security Committee of Session 1996–97 (HC 352) on the Church Commissioners.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Pensions Measure, passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which the said Measure was laid before Parliament.—*[Mr. Alison.]*

8.34 pm

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): I am pleased that the Measure has been accepted, and that the Committee is content with it. The link between the commissioners and the Synod through the House has been maintained in a most gracious way by the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) during his term as Second Church Estates Commissioner. I have often thought that the right hon. Gentleman, with his red book, was like a Minister on the Back Benches. It is much more comfortable to operate from the Dispatch Box, as I did for eight and a half years. The right hon. Gentleman has fulfilled his role in a quite extraordinary way. I thank him, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the bottom of my heart—I know that all hon. Members share those sentiments—for the gracious way in which he has discharged that marvellous responsibility.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am speechless.

Question put and agreed to.

Canals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

8.36 pm

Mr. Warren Hawksley (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity of raising a very important issue: the future of British canals. My interest in canals developed when I was a young boy in Shropshire. I suppose that my parents took me along most of the towpaths around the Shropshire Union canal while exercising our dog. I also admit that I fished in the canals on several occasions. I rarely boated on them, although it must be a wonderfully relaxing past time. Canals are a great leisure facility. I would prefer a better climate for regular boating, but those who do indulge thoroughly enjoy themselves.

As a member of the Shropshire county council in the 1970s, I was involved in supporting the restoration of the Montgomery canal. Later, as Member for The Wrekin, I persuaded the Department of Transport to route the Oswestry bypass at a higher level to allow the restoration work to continue underneath it. One of my constituents, Mr. Bob Clarke, is the news editor of *Canal and Riverboat* magazine, and he keeps me fully briefed about developments on our waterways. I pay tribute to him for his dedication and to my other constituents who are also canal users and who have expressed their enthusiasm for canals and devote much effort and resources to preserving them.

About 2,500 miles of navigable waterways in England, Wales and Scotland are owned by the British Waterways Board and the Environment Agency. Some 2,000 miles of canals are the responsibility of British Waterways, of which the vast majority are man made. They have existed for some 225 years and remain a working example of the waterways that fuelled the industrial revolution, particularly in the west midlands. The expansion of manufacturing industry in the midlands led to the black country, of which my constituency is part, becoming known as the workshop of the world and to Birmingham becoming known as the "city of a thousand trades".

The advent of railways, the takeover of many canals by railway companies to kill off competition by allowing canals slowly to deteriorate, along with the arrival of road transport, led to almost 1,500 miles of that connected network facing closure by the British Transport Commission in the 1950s and the early 1960s. The commission publicly said that there was no future for these waterways even as outlets for leisure and recreation.

It is worth reminding the House that it was only active campaigning by enthusiasts, including the Inland Waterways Association, with protest cruises and do-it-yourself canal restorations—once in 1962, in my constituency of Stourbridge, even under the threat of prosecution by the British Transport Commission for those who led a particular protest—that led to change.

The arrival of the British Waterways Board in 1963 saw a significant change and shift in policy. The dogma that had been shown by the British Transport Commission was gone and the new incoming British Waterways acknowledged the future of our canals for leisure and recreation.

Even in those early days, as custodians of what, in effect, is a living museum of the contribution that the United Kingdom had made to industrial development and manufacturing skills, British Waterways was constantly hamstrung by a lack of funding to enable it to wipe out the decay of more than a century and restore all the nation's waterways to a standard capable of withstanding the increasing growth that we are seeing in leisure pursuits.

Much the same has befallen those navigations that are the responsibility of the Environment Agency. It is ironic that the United Kingdom, which over the past 200 years has given the world so much in advancing engineering technology on land, in the air and on the sea has seen its river navigations, which linked canals with seaports, fall into a similar state of disrepair. In Europe, however, our competitors have developed many of their waterways to the bulk carriage of raw materials and finished goods. What can be greener than a navigation where one boat or large barge carries up to 20 lorry loads of what would otherwise have gone on the road?

Only last week, as a Member of this place, I went as a guest of the Port of London Authority with the parliamentary waterways group down the Thames from Westminster to Gravesend. We as members of the group saw the improved use of the riverside, with development, and the return of the river as a means of removing gravel and waste.

United Kingdom waterways, whether independent of the canal system or part of the integrated network, bring greenery, peace and tranquillity even into our city centres. Leisure and recreation facilities attract 160 million visits a year, either by boaters, anglers, cyclists, towpath walkers, naturalists, wildlife photographers or artists. So large has been the expansion of canal and river-related activities that a huge industry has developed round them.

Hundreds of people are gainfully employed in boatbuilding, servicing and hire-cruiser bases. There are about 26,000 boat owners on British Waterways waters and thousands more on the Environment Agency's navigations. Scores of tourists use industries that are connected to canal sides, including hotels, restaurants, marinas and retail premises, the construction of which has employed thousands of craftsmen.

I suppose that I should declare an interest. If the Montgomery canal were ever to open, I think that my wife's hotel could benefit, as many other businesses would in the Welshpool area.

Also to be considered are the midlands and the investment that has been attracted by waterside locations. The examples are numerous. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has seen the multi-million pound regeneration projects on the canal sides of Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Sheffield. There have been equally prestigious developments in the west midlands, at Walsall, Coventry and Brierley Hill. The waterfront at Brierley Hill in the evenings is a hive of activity attracting many of my constituents, who thoroughly enjoy the facilities that it provides.

The British Marine Industries Federation has kindly provided me with statistics, which show that capital investment within the system runs at about £500 million. Hire and charter on inland waterways amounts to about £29 million. Repairs and mooring account for a further £30 million. I suggest that that is a considerable investment in our economy.

I know that it cannot have escaped the notice of my hon. Friend the Minister that millions of pounds of millennium and lottery moneys are providing for the restoration of the two canals across the Pennines in the form of the Huddersfield and Rochdale canals. There has been the reopening of the Kennet and Avon canal by Her Majesty the Queen. In addition, there has been the recent announcement of the Forth and Clyde and Union canals, which will give Scotland a second coast-to-coast waterway as well as restoring a waterway link between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

We must not forget the restoration work that is now proceeding on the link between the Thames and Severn rivers by the hoped-for reopening of the Thames and Severn canal and the Stroudwater navigations. The latter project is still operating very much as a voluntary scheme.

There also is the Stourbridge navigation trust in my constituency, which is hoping soon to receive lottery money of about £750,000 for the scheme that it has proposed. It is to be hoped that approval will be given in the next few months to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the reopening of the Stourbridge arm of the canal. That would be appropriate as the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Society saved the mile-long arm of the Stourbridge canal and allowed the development of the bonded warehouse and canal company offices that provide tourist attractions, moorings and public meeting places.

Work starts this spring on the eventual restoration of the Dudley No. 2 canal. The work is being helped by European aid, which is being prepared by the Halesowen Lapal canal trust. Another scheme worthy of mention, which is now almost at a standstill until more funding becomes available—the Montgomery canal, which I have mentioned already—involves English Partnerships, which appears to have withdrawn its support. That is tragic because the scheme would help to relieve the pressures on the Llangollen canal. I believe that the canal and the associated project are examples of the far-sighted visions of canal enthusiasts, who persuaded English and Welsh local authorities of the tremendous tourism potential that such a restored waterway would have. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will assure us that he will do what he can to ensure that the turn of the century will still stand for the restoration of this waterway.

I acknowledge the demands upon the Exchequer, but I feel that there is a lack of detailed understanding of the infrastructure that is now an integral part of the waterways network which is of importance to an area of activity that even in the depths of the recent recession still shows some growth.

Our nation still has at least 2,500 miles of waterway that need vast sums spent upon them if they are to survive another 25 years, let alone another century. Within the system a multitude of skilled jobs is required, including construction plant operation, bricklaying, carpentry, metal working, flood control, property restoration and skills in architecture and the environment. In other words, we have a 2,500-mile training ground for the long-term and young unemployed. At the end of such training those involved would be in possession of proof of having been trained and having proficiency in a skill. I urge the Government to examine inland navigations in the long term. It would be a tragedy if all recent developments became worthless

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because of a failure to maintain the main canal structure, which now needs about £100 million spent on it if it is to be safeguarded.

British Waterways has played its part by doubling its self-generating income. I believe, however, that users should pay. Canals have withstood the ravages of time and deliberate vandalism by previous owners. They still function but their stability, function and safety—indeed their very existence—can no longer be guaranteed by either British Waterways or the Environment Agency. What better place in which to train the unemployed in new skills or to engage craftsmen? It is an area in which skills are badly needed in the restoration of an integral part of the nation's unique heritage.

It would not be the first time that the nation's inland waterways have been used for getting people back to work, retraining or for finding work for the longer-term unemployed. An example is the Caledonian canal in Scotland, which was built by such people. Other examples are the Grand Union canal between Braunston and Birmingham—the waterway that linked London docks with midland industry, which was widened in the 1930s in the depths of a great depression. The project was used as a method of putting people back to work.

The Department of Employment and Education is expanding its workfare ideas towards a project works scheme. There are helpful ideas that could give the unemployed skills. These skills are to be obtained through schemes that involve the canal system.

Only a few who use the waterways—boaters and anglers—pay any appreciable amount for using them. Cyclists and walkers cause considerable erosion to towpaths yet they do not have to pay. Outside the areas that qualify for various types of Government or European aid, British Waterways is faced with having to repair that damage as well as trying to hold together a 200-year-old system, parts of which are literally falling to pieces.

Will the Government try to show vision in planning the important future of our canals? I accept that the Government tried to protect British Waterways in the Budget by giving it an extra £5 million for three years, which is 11 per cent. over the original provision, but I hope that more can be done. I realise the pressures that the Treasury is under and I am aware of its restrictive attitude on many occasions.

Why do the Government not free British Waterways from many of its restrictions and bureaucratic controls? Our hospitals are now trusts which can raise money in the marketplace. Why cannot British Waterways be similarly treated so that it can raise money, so that its long-term borrowing can be spread out over many years and so that a rollover of expenditure can take place to safeguard the basic canal structure? The canals have 12 million visitors a year and provide 35,000 jobs in the private, public and voluntary sectors. Only with such freedom will the massive and welcome schemes being funded by Europe, by the millennium fund and by lottery resources be justified, as well as keeping safe our old canals.

8.50 pm

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): I welcome the opportunity to discuss on the Floor of the House the future of Britain's canals. This is the first Adjournment debate on waterways matters since 1988 when the Manchester ship canal was discussed, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) on securing the time to discuss this important matter. He has a long history of commitment to the canal network of the United Kingdom and it is good to see that he is able to bring that to our debate tonight. I am also delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) in his place, because he has taken a close interest in the waterways network as it affects London. What a pity it is, however, that this important debate has not been graced by a Labour Member. Labour has demonstrated all too clearly tonight that it simply does not care about the waterways.

Many people have a strong affinity for the waterways, and I count myself among them. I have been closely involved in the examination of waterway issues in this House, both as a former chairman of the all-party waterways group and as a member of the Environment Committee which examined British Waterways a few years ago. Indeed, after my wedding reception in the House, I and my bride were taken down the Thames by my very good friends Chris and Val Coburn in their narrowboat Progress. I have a strong commitment to canals, and it was a pleasure to me to become the Minister responsible for inland navigation because I have been able to see a good deal more of the canal network, including the Caledonian canal, the Brindley Place and Gas Street basin in Birmingham, the Huddersfield narrow canal and the Sheffield and Tinsley canal.

I was delighted to visit the inland waterways display just a couple of weeks ago in the Upper Waiting Hall organised by the Association of Waterway Cruising Clubs, the Inland Waterways Association, the Royal Yachting Association and the British Marine Industry Federation. I also met recently a delegation led by my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) and the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) to discuss a range of canal issues. As my hon. Friend is retiring from the House at the forthcoming election, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to him for all his work both as my predecessor as chairman of the all-party waterways group and as my successor in the same role. I have little doubt that he will continue his interest even though he will not be a Member of this House.

There has recently been a rise in public interest in funding for the waterways. My postbag, prompted by the various waterway organisations, has had a significant increase in the number of canal-related letters. It seems, therefore, timely to set out the Government's role.

There are about 3,100 miles of operational canals and navigable rivers in the UK. The majority are managed by public organisations—British Waterways with 2,000 miles, the Environment Agency with 500 miles and the Broads Authority with 125 miles. That leaves around 475 miles which are managed by various other bodies such as local authorities, private bodies and charitable trusts. The Government sponsor directly BW, the Environment Agency and the Broads Authority. In view of the points made by my hon. Friend, much of what I say will be in relation to British Waterways.

It is often said that cities such as Birmingham, and perhaps parts of London, were built on the back of the canal system. They made use of the canals not only as a transport link, but as a means of drainage, waste disposal and water supply. It is fair to say that canals continue to

play an important part in many aspects of modern life. In particular, they are important to leisure and recreation, heritage, tourism and the environment. They have provided the focus for a range of urban and rural regeneration schemes.

Waterways provide an important catalyst for urban and rural regeneration. One of BW's aims is to promote and accommodate conservation and regeneration. In doing so, it works with a range of partners in the private, public and voluntary sectors. An excellent example of the role of canals in regeneration is the Birmingham waterfront, where more than £300 million of private sector finance has been attracted to developments alongside BW's canals. Another success story is the joint investment of £7 million by BW and Gloucester city council in Gloucester docks, which has attracted more than £30 million in private finance. The shift in the city's focus to the docks has seen the number employed there rise from 100 to 2,000 and tourism visits rise from a few thousand to more than 1 million. In Scotland, the millennium link, aided by £32 million from the Millennium Commission, will create 4,200 permanent jobs and attract £400 million of private investment along the 70 mile waterway corridor.

One of the most important areas of regeneration involves trying to cope with our housing needs. We are all familiar with the forecasts of an extra 4.4 million households; it will be much better if some of that housing can be provided alongside canals, regenerating disused sites and former industrial sites, rather than going into our green belt. It is a great pity that people such as the mayor of Berkhamsted, Mr. Peter Such, seem to think that it is not Government policy to build alongside the canals, when it clearly is. That policy can do a lot to regenerate our urban areas.

The profile of inland waterways has also been raised by the publication last April of the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council's consultative report, "Britain's Inland Waterways: An Undervalued Asset". As a former member of IWAAC, I take great pride in the fact that it has produced a report which has provoked an interesting and lively debate. The Government and British Waterways will be required to respond to its conclusions and recommendations in due course.

The Government's policy is to maximise the benefits of the canals while taking account of the needs of all interests. To be more specific, there are five things I want: first, improved services and amenities for all users and beneficiaries of the canal network; secondly, a more strategic approach to the day-to-day use, planning and future development of navigations; thirdly, the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and the man-made heritage of buildings and structures; fourthly, a balanced approach so as to avoid conflicts between different uses; fifthly, a commercial approach, adopting cost-effective solutions and efficiency improvements to ensure good value for money for the taxpayer and payers of charges.

I value the considerable commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated by canal restoration societies and others in restoring canals. The Government have provided financial help to a range of projects through the land reclamation programme grant and the environmental action fund. Canal restoration schemes are also eligible for money from the various lottery distribution boards.

My hon. Friend is aware that there continues to be pressure on public spending, so all expenditure is carefully scrutinised. In recognition of the importance that the Government attach to the waterways, not only have they been cushioned from that pressure more than other spending programmes, but our contribution to the waterways has increased.

In the last Budget, for example, we announced an extra £5 million for BW in each of the next three years—an increase of almost 11 per cent. above original provision. That compares with cuts of 9 per cent., 12 per cent. and 14 per cent. in the DOE's total expenditure over the next three years. In addition, I recently announced an extra £1.233 million for this year to enable BW to carry out additional repairs and maintenance to the network. That will bring the total grant in aid from Government in 1996-97 to more than £51 million. By any standards, that is a significant slice of public money.

I am fully aware of the survey that BW undertook last year, which identified a £100 million backlog of maintenance. As I have said, I have seen a number of the sites where urgent work is required. The Government recognise the seriousness and urgency of the problems, especially on the Caledonian canal, and have responded by providing immediate funding of £2.8 million. Only last Friday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced a further £3.2 million for BW over the next four financial years to help with future repairs to the Caledonian canal. Taking into account all the extra Government money and BW's own efforts, that should enable BW to make major progress in dealing with the backlog over a realistic time scale.

As a nationalised industry, BW is responsible for the day-to-day management of its estate. Government objectives for BW require it to act commercially and in a manner which is commensurate with its statutory responsibilities. That includes meeting its costs as far as possible from charges on users and revenue from its property. I recognise that BW licence fee increases have not been well received. Nobody likes paying more, but it was a commercial decision for BW, and one I fully support. If the Government are giving an extra 11 per cent. a year to BW for the next three years, boaters must also play their part in helping BW to continue to invest in the future of the waterways.

It should be remembered that grant in aid and licence fees are not the only sources of funds available to BW; it generates its own income via its property, commercial and leisure interests, and for 1996-97 it expects income of more than £38 million from such sources and forecasts more for 1997-98.

In addition, a range of other funding opportunities is available to BW. This year, for example, BW has benefited from £10 million from the Government's single regeneration budget challenge fund for a London-wide canal regeneration programme and £3.6 million for a project on the Calder and Hebble navigation at Sowerby bridge. BW has also been a partner in lottery awards this year of £25 million for a programme of heritage and environmental conservation and visitor improvements on the Kennet and Avon, £2.7 million for the Ribble link—a new waterway linking the Lancaster canal to the Leeds and Liverpool—and £14.8 million for the Huddersfield canal. Two non-BW canals, the Ashby and the Rochdale, have also received £1 million each from the Government's rural challenge fund. BW also received

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more than £1 million from local authorities and expects to receive £1.5 million in grants from Europe in the current year.

BW has worked hard to attract funding from a wide range of sources. It is a reflection of its enterprise and commercial ability that, over the past seven years, it has increased self-generated income from £21 million to £43 million. It certainly deserves credit for its performance.

My hon. Friend expresses an interest in finding a way to get the whole waterway network designated so that it is eligible for European grant aid. As I have just mentioned, BW already bids for funds from a variety of sources, including Europe. It continues to look at ways in which it might increase revenue, including options that would allow greater flexibility in generating additional income for the canal network.

A new national designation for the waterway system is one of the conclusions the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council drew from its examination of inland waterways. That is an issue that I will wish to consider as part of the Government's and BW's eventual response to IWAAC's report.

My hon. Friend is keen to extend the use of casual labour and youth training to help with the maintenance and repair of the waterways. I particularly pay tribute to the waterway recovery group, which provides the opportunity for volunteers to work on all aspects of canal restoration. In his 1995 Budget, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a pilot initiative, project work, to help long-term unemployed people. The project, which has recently been extended due to its success, offers a programme of intensive jobsearch help and practical work experience for people aged between 18 and 50 who have been out of work for at least two years. As my hon. Friend said, there is a history of canal projects being used as opportunities for job creation. People on project work carry out work of value to the local community, which certainly includes work on the waterways.

There is plenty to be positive about. The total amount of money going into the canal network from a wide variety of sources is greater than ever. There is renewed interest in the canal system for a range of different activities—leisure, recreation, tourism, regeneration, conservation, education, and in some areas still for commercial traffic.

Only a few months ago, I agreed to the upgrade of the Sheffield and Tinsley canal—the first upgrade since 1983—following significant public and private investment in the area, including a commitment from Sheffield city council to meet the costs of the additional work required to maintain the canal to cruising standard for 21 years.

Of course BW has a significant backlog of work, but as I said it is taking positive action to tackle the problems and invest in the future of the waterways. With all the activity in the public, private and voluntary sectors, we can look forward with confidence to the future of Britain's canals. I congratulate my hon. Friend on this important debate, and wish him and the canal system well for the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes past Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 18 March 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BODMIN MOOR COMMONS BILL *[Lords]*
To be considered on Tuesday 25 March.

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time tomorrow.

LEVER PARK BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Tuesday 25 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Primary Care Provision

1. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the use of the private sector in primary care provision in the NHS. [19161]

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): None.

Mr. Rooney: Were not the Government's true intentions on primary care, as with so much of the national health service, shown in the original drafting of the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill—that is, the wholesale privatisation of the service and the extensive involvement of the private sector, to the detriment of patients?

Mr. Malone: No. The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. I thought that he might have been rising to record the 6.9 per cent. increase in the number of general practitioners since 1978–79 in his local health authority, or perhaps to congratulate it on 60 per cent. of the local population being covered by fundholding, but no, he raises yet again another argument that we killed off both in Committee and on the Floor of the House.

Dame Jill Knight: Will my hon. Friend ensure that, in the coming general election campaign, three points will be made: first, the precise amount of savings made in the NHS by the use of the private sector; secondly, that every penny of those savings went towards patient care; thirdly, that there would be no chance of such money coming if ever the Labour party was to have a chance to govern?

Mr. Malone: I am happy to endorse my hon. Friend's points. Of course it is true that the Labour party still has an ideological point of view about any private sector involvement, no matter how new it may try to appear to the public. That would mean fewer services for patients.

Ms Jowell: Is the Minister aware that, in the past four years, the amount spent by fundholding doctors on getting patients treated in private hospitals has increased from £4 million to £66 million and that, at the same time, 144 trusts have gone into debt? Is that not further evidence of the Government's undermining of the NHS in favour of private health care, and that the Government's failure to safeguard the NHS shows why the people of Britain deserve better?

Mr. Malone: Perhaps it is about time the hon. Lady started to think about patients when she talks about health care and the quality of services that are being provided. Put into context, the figure she mentions is about 1.9 per cent. of fundholding budgets. It provides better care for patients and services that patients want. The whole nation will know that the Labour party would deny them those services if it were ever to be returned to office.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend know that Staffordshire social services department is deliberately preventing people from going into residential and nursing care in the private sector, contrary to the principles enunciated in my right hon. Friend Secretary of State for Health's excellent White Paper, and that the High Court has recently issued an injunction against that department because of the disgraceful way in which it is handling that function and responsibility?

Mr. Malone: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. He gets to the heart of who—Conservatives or Labour—will provide better services for patients. I have no doubt that he will be campaigning vigorously on that point and on the White Paper that my right hon. Friend has recently published on the matter, so that the electorate will have a clear choice. That choice will be in favour of this Government's policies.

Dental Charges

2. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the levels of NHS dental charges. [19162]

Mr. Malone: All Governments since 1951 have accepted that patients who can afford to should make some contribution towards the cost of their dental care. National health service dental treatment is free to those aged under 18 and extensive exemption and remission arrangements protect vulnerable groups.

Mr. Banks: Why does not the Minister tell us that real dental charges have gone up by 245 per cent. since 1979? Those are not just arid statistics, but are based on my experience. I have just paid £350 for a crown. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] That may be funny for Conservative Members. If any of them want some free dental service outside the Chamber afterwards I should be more than happy to give it to them. I am now facing £600 of periodontal work that has to be done privately because it cannot be provided on the national health service. I can afford it because I have a job and I shall have a job after

1 May, which is more than can be said for some Conservative Members, but what about people on low earnings who cannot afford that? We have a toothless Government who are obviously determined to render the nation toothless as well.

Mr. Malone: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what has happened in his constituency between 1991–92 and 1995–96. Perhaps he is not interested in that, but is interested only in what is happening to him. The proportion of adult courses of treatment provided free in his health authority has risen from 48.5 per cent. in 1991–92 to 59.5 per cent. We shall take no lessons from Labour on charging until the shadow Chancellor releases the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) from the shackles that have bound him on health service expenditure, meaning that Labour cannot match the Prime Minister's pledge for real increases in funding year on year on year on year during the next Parliament.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend remind the House and the former guardian of the Greater London council silver who introduced dental charges, and how many general hospitals would have to be closed if dental charges were abolished?

Mr. Malone: Dental charges have been supported by Governments since the early 1950s. I cannot tell my hon. Friend how many hospitals would have to be closed, but £381 million would have to be recovered. Labour has recently reneged on what it had said about free eyesight tests. The public know what Labour would do about dental charges if it were ever elected to office.

Mr. Ainger: Will the Minister be straight with the House and accept that not just in Wales, but throughout the country, there are constituencies with hardly any NHS dental service? The issue has been raised for the past four years. Is it not about time that he came forward with a plan to ensure that British people, on benefit or not, have access to an NHS dentist?

Mr. Malone: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been living. He has certainly not been following the affairs of this House recently. In the context of a growing dental service with more dentists and more treatments than ever, we have just given a Third Reading to a primary health care Bill that will address the problems of locating treatment in certain parts of the country. Access schemes have also been set in place, for which I hope health authorities in his constituency have been bidding. We have taken initiatives that have been endorsed by the House. I am glad to be able to point them out to the hon. Gentleman at this late stage.

Chief Nursing Officers

3. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals' chief nursing officers currently bear the title matron; and if he will make a statement. [19163]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): The information requested is not available centrally. Job titles may have changed, but the principles of professional leadership remain and trusts can use the title matron if they wish.

Mr. Greenway: I invite my hon. Friend to consult those who have matrons in their hospitals and others who have known hospitals with matrons. Is he aware that they are very glamorous people? Matron is a better and more meaningful title than any other for a chief nursing officer. Will he bring back the glamorous matron? We want her.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The first glamorous matron who comes to mind is Hattie Jacques; glamour comes in all shapes and forms. I think that my hon. Friend will agree that it is crucial that we have a management system which provides the most effective health care for patients being treated under the national health service.

General Practitioners

4. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to require all general practitioners to become fundholders. [19164]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The general practitioner fundholding scheme is, and will remain, voluntary. With effect from 1 April this year, 58 per cent. of patients will be registered with a fundholding GP.

Mr. Brown: My right hon. Friend says that the scheme will remain voluntary. Does he agree, however, that fundholders are able to offer increased opportunities for treatment at their surgeries rather than at a hospital? I have visited the Barton-Upon-Humber surgery, which is a fundholding practice in my constituency. It is able to deliver patient care, ensuring that patients do not have to go 20 miles down the road to a hospital at Grimsby or Scunthorpe. The practice is able to offer what used to be regarded as cottage hospital treatment. Many treatments are now available from fundholders. Will my right hon. Friend think again about making the scheme available to all patients?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is entirely right about the benefits for patients of the fundholding scheme. He quoted a typical example; there are many others throughout the health service. Over the next few weeks, the question for the Labour party is why it supports the abolition of a scheme that has brought about the benefits to which my hon. Friend referred. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is quite specific. A Labour Government would abolish fundholding. That would neuter Britain's GPs and be a major step backwards in the provision of health care. The burden is on the hon. Gentleman to explain why he wants the health service to take that gigantic step backwards.

Mr. Spearing: Does not the Government's version of fundholding introduce elements of competition which undermine the principle of universality? Is not that principle founded on an injunction of 2,000 years ago, to bear each other's burdens? When will the Government put that into practice in the health service in the next millennium?

Mr. Dorrell: It is extraordinary that, when we introduce a scheme that improves care for the patients of

fundholding doctors and which the majority of Britain's GPs adopt because they believe that it is in the interests of their patients, Labour's reaction is to want to abolish the scheme that has made those improvements possible. I simply fail to understand how the Labour party can say that the right way forward for the health service is to abolish a scheme that has brought about the improvements to which my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) referred.

Mr. Mans: My right hon. Friend will be aware that, in Lancaster, all doctors have fundholding practices. Does he agree that, if the system were abolished, patient care in north-west Lancashire would be severely affected—and would be a lot worse?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is entirely right. In his constituency, in Lancashire, and around the country, fundholding is delivering improved patient care not only to the patients of fundholding GPs, but to every patient of the health service, because it has changed the relationship between primary and secondary care, to the advantage of primary care.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury seems to disagree. He should look at a press release from the British Medical Association published this morning in which the BMA and the representatives of general practice in Britain came together and made it crystal clear that they support the continued existence of a range of options for Britain's GPs. That is the position of the BMA and of the representatives of Britain's GPs. The Labour party must explain why it believes it knows better than the majority of Britain's GPs what is in the interests of their patients.

Mr. Simon Hughes: As the system created as a result of the Government's reforms unfairly allocates money to GPs depending on whether they are fundholders and has produced a two-tier service for patients depending on whether their doctors are fundholders, will the Government modify it, which fundholders would willingly accept, so that, no matter which GP people go to, they have equal access to the health service, or will the Secretary of State go into the election defending a two-tier health service which is a national health lottery for Britain's patients?

Mr. Dorrell: I am going into the general election campaign defending a system of totally fair funding across all parts of the NHS—whether GP fundholders or not. I take it as significant that, on this question about fundholding, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and all his hon. Friends have remained firmly seated. They are not prepared to engage in the argument about fundholding in Britain, because they know that they are on a loser.

Mr. Dunn: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is tremendous public support for GP fundholding in my constituency? Will he confirm that the Labour party's policies are contrary to the health needs of my constituents, and will work against them in the long term?

Mr. Dorrell: Once again, my hon. Friend is right. He highlights the fact that the Labour party adopts only policies that would impose a single bureaucracy across the entire country. The idea that there may be advantage in different approaches in different localities, reflecting the different choices of GPs and their patients, is utterly foreign to the Labour party. It will never win the argument, and is no longer even prepared to engage in it.

Clinical Services

5. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for use of the private sector in clinical services in the NHS. [19165]

12. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the use of the private finance initiative in respect of clinical services in the NHS. [19173]

Mr. Dorrell: The private finance initiative in the national health service is concerned with the provision of modern and efficient facilities for the delivery of NHS health care. It is not concerned with the transfer of NHS clinical services to the private sector.

Ms Eagle: How can the people of Britain believe the Secretary of State when they look at the PFI contract for the Royal Hallamshire extension in Sheffield, which includes the privatisation of radiology and pathology services? Do not they, like Opposition Members, know that the Tories cannot be trusted on the NHS? All Tories want is to get as much of it into the private sector as possible.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady will no doubt keep repeating the mantra, but she will cut no ice. People know that, over the past 18 years, we have delivered a broader range of high-quality care to all patients who need it. That is the commitment that the Conservative party has delivered, about which the Labour party is content only to talk.

Mr. Cunliffe: Does not the Minister understand that, despite the secrecy about clinical services, the creeping privatisation is well known to people in the country? Once again, no reassurance has been given today that a future Conservative Government—heaven forbid—would not take the opportunity to privatise. Does he not understand that people know that, over the past 18 years, the Government have looted the wealth of those who created it and intend, through the internal market, to loot the health of public services by introducing private services? Will he try at least to give a positive answer instead of the same old corny comments on clinical services that he has given up to now?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman's slightly convoluted question might be clearer if he sought to explain the Labour party's policy on the hospital building programme to his constituents and people throughout the country. What the Government have set out is crystal clear. We have launched the PFI, which holds the prospect of long-needed hospital building programmes in Norwich, Dartford, Bishop Auckland, north Durham, Worcester, Calderdale, Bromley, Hereford and Carlisle. Labour's Front Benchers must explain to the people why they would put all those projects on hold.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that even the more socialist countries in the

European Union allow and encourage independent health care organisations to supplement the statutory authorities' expenditure on health? Statistics on the proportion of gross domestic product spent on health show that we spend the same as other countries in the public sector; the extra that enables them to boast that they spend more than us is made up by independent care organisations, which are rejected by the Opposition.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right about the arithmetic. It is also worth reflecting on the point that British citizens have exactly the same opportunity to obtain private health care insurance as citizens of other countries, but a smaller proportion of the British find it necessary to do so because the national health service commands a confidence that comparable organisations elsewhere do not. The reality is that the British national health service is the world's most efficient health care system. An endorsement of that principle from the Opposition occasionally would make a welcome change.

Mrs. Roe: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the trade union Unison is wholly opposed to the private finance initiative in the NHS? Given the pecuniary relationship between that union and the offices of Labour Front Benchers, what credence does he give to the claim by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) that he wants to speed up the PFI in health care?

Mr. Dorrell: The Opposition cannot work out their attitude to the PFI in health care. They say they want to speed it up; they also describe it as the privatisation initiative. We have heard this afternoon the Opposition's visceral suspicion of any suggestion that private capital and management can reinforce the delivery of NHS objectives. They oppose it before they hear the arguments. That is why the Government and the Conservative party, re-elected in the next Parliament, will deliver improvements in the national health service that the Labour party could never dream of.

Mr. Chris Smith: Why does the Secretary of State not have the honesty to admit that the Tory agenda is a piece-by-piece privatisation of the national health service? Will he now confirm what he failed to say a few minutes ago—that, at the Royal Hallamshire hospital in Sheffield, radiology and pathology will be put out to the private sector? He and his colleagues have consistently refused to give a guarantee that they will not privatise clinical services. Will he give such a guarantee now? If he will not, and if the Tories are elected again, we will not have a national health service in five years' time.

Mr. Dorrell: That beggars belief. I gave the hon. Gentleman due warning, and he still comes to the Dispatch Box and calls the PFI privatisation. The last time he mentioned the subject, he said that Labour promised to speed up PFI deals. Now he calls it privatisation. The hon. Gentleman must sort out his ideas—and he does not have long in which to do so.

Mr. Booth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is staggering that two of the first three questions tabled by Opposition Members relate to complaints about the private sector? Does he agree that that says something about their priorities? The right priorities for the national health service are patient care, standards, and more money, which we will deliver.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right on every count. We have the commitment to deliver a growing health service, which the Labour party will not match. We have the commitment to deliver a properly managed health service, which the Labour party will not match. We also have the commitment to deliver quality of care to patients, which the Labour party regards as a boring detail.

Mental Health Patients

6. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on provision for mental health patients. [19166]

Mr. Burns: A range of policy initiatives have been taken that should enable health authorities, in conjunction with other agencies, to provide a comprehensive service for patients with mental health problems.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I thank the Minister for that response, but does he not accept that there is still work to be done centrally, to gain a better understanding of the needs of the nation and to plan strategy accordingly, and that part of that strategy must include a recognition of the need for more improvement in mental health care for children and adolescents?

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question. Yes, of course the Government and all in the national health service are determined to enhance and further to improve mental health provision for adults and children. As he will be aware, several initiatives designed further to enhance that care have been taken over the past few years. We are not complacent; we shall continue with that work. As for the treatment of adults with severe mental health problems, last month my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State published a Green Paper, to explore the options for moving forward to further improvement in the service.

Mr. Nigel Evans: About a month ago I went to a mental health seminar in Preston, where I was impressed by an initiative that has been taken up by one of the trusts to the west of my constituency, which I hope will be taken up in my constituency, too—a mental health helpline. As my hon. Friend will know, people who need help with mental health problems often need it at unsocial hours, not just between nine and five. Will he congratulate the people who volunteer to give guidance via the helpline, and encourage other trusts to take up such initiatives?

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing to the attention of the House what sounds like an excellent idea—providing support and making available through the helpline counselling, advice and help for those in crisis and their families. I strongly recommend other health authorities and trusts to consider that example, and to see what lessons can be learned so as further to enhance support for the families of those suffering from mental illness.

Hospital Waiting Lists (Manchester)

7. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in the Manchester area have been waiting longer than 12 months for hospital admission. [19167]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): Provisional figures show that, on 31 December 1996, 384 people resident in the Manchester health authority area had been waiting more than 12 months for admission to hospital.

Mr. Eastham: I thank the Minister for that reply, but I was asking about current figures rather than those for last December. May I tell him that, for the North Manchester hospital alone, 180 people have been waiting longer than 12 months for admission? Further compounding the problem, the equivalent of almost two wards in that hospital are bed-blocked because social services cannot accommodate the patients outside the hospital. As a result, 913 consultant episodes concerning patients who need attention have not taken place.

Mr. Horam: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about bed-blocking, he should take his complaint to the Manchester local authority, which is in the firing line when it comes to doing something effective about it. Over the past few months, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has helped with measures specifically designed to reduce bed blocking, so I am surprised that Manchester has not done a better job.

Equally, I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not singing the praises of his native Manchester, which has a good record on waiting times. Over the past few years, there have been periods in which, in Manchester as a whole, nobody waited more than 12 months. As the House should be aware, the national picture shows that we have maintained the progress with waiting times, despite the attention now being turned to emergency care and mental illness. The hon. Gentleman really has nothing to complain about.

Mr. Atkins: Will not waiting lists in Manchester, at hospitals such as the Christie, be considerably helped by the building of the £5.8 million cancer unit at the Royal Preston, which will do a great deal to provide facilities for people in Preston? That will avoid their having to go to the Christie in Manchester, thereby improving the situation of patients both in Manchester and in Preston.

Mr. Horam: I am delighted that my right hon. Friend made that point. We are hearing a great deal about Lancashire today, and with good reason. Not only is a Calman cancer unit being developed at Preston and Chorley; there are others at Blackburn and Burnley, Blackpool, Lancaster, and Kendal and Barrow. All represent new initiatives and are part of a clear programme to deal with cancer problems. I am delighted that Lancashire is taking the lead.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister confirm that the Manchester figures are not unique, and that more than 1 million people are on hospital waiting lists nationally? That figure is increasing and it is the highest we have ever had. The health authority in Manchester has a current deficit of £1.2 million. We assume that that has be found from next year's budget, which will mean even longer waiting lists in Manchester. Is that not further evidence of the mess and turmoil that the Government have created in the national health service, and one of the many reasons why they should not be elected for a fifth term?

Mr. Horam: On the contrary, it is an extremely good reason why we should remain in power. Waiting times have improved: the average wait is down from nine months to four months. When Labour was last in power in 1979, one in four people had to wait more than 12 months. That figure is now down to one in 50 people. In 1979, 25 per cent. waited for more than 12 months, whereas, under the Government, the figure is now only 2 per cent.

Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, Stanmore

8. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to visit the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital, Stanmore, to discuss the future major development plans. [19168]

Mr. Horam: I shall be having a meeting shortly with the chairman and chief executive of the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital trust, which is working up a business case for the redevelopment of the hospital.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my hon. Friend for the thoughtful way in which he has responded to the many submissions on the hospital's future that have been made in recent months and, indeed, years. I shall also be present at that meeting on Tuesday at 4 o'clock. The overwhelming opinion—local and wider opinion—is in favour of the hospital remaining on the same site. To allow the necessary funding to be made available in the future and to ensure that the excess of old buildings is reduced and that the modern footprint and curtilage is properly paid for, will he ensure that the regional health authority speeds up its authorisation decisions to get that money under way?

Mr. Horam: I am interested in what my hon. Friend says, and I look forward to that meeting. The business case is at a fairly early stage. I am conscious of the orthopaedic hospital's extraordinary record over many years. About 30 or 40 per cent. of all the orthopaedic surgeons in the country have been trained at the Stanmore hospital at one time or another. I am sure that my hon. Friend, who strongly supports the hospital, is very proud of that record.

Rehabilitation Services (Elderly People)

9. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the rehabilitation services provided for the elderly. [19169]

Mr. Burns: New arrangements for national health service responsibilities for continuing health care, which includes rehabilitation and recovery services, were introduced in April 1996. Since that date, all health authorities have been required to have in place local policies and eligibility criteria for continuing health care.

Ms Squire: Does the Minister agree that the Government have failed elderly patients by closing

thousands of NHS beds for the elderly and by not, in spite of what he says, providing the convalescent and recuperative care beds required to allow people to stay in hospital until they are strong enough to return to their own homes? Does he also agree that the Government have turned the care of the elderly into a competitive marketplace, and have put price and profit before decency and dignity in old age?

Mr. Burns: No, I do not agree with a word of what the hon. Lady has said, because it is totally divorced from the truth. She seems to forget that the continuing care challenge fund has provided £16 million in the current year, and will next year provide £20 million, plus £40 million of matching funds from local and health authorities, including £11 million for rehabilitation and recovery services. The gimmick that the Labour party has announced in the past month on recuperation is ridiculous. It proposes a pilot scheme costing £500,000, which is the amount that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is giving, through the continuing care fund, to the constituency and health authority area of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). That excludes the rest of the country, which will receive the other money.

Mr. Congdon: Would not more resources be available for rehabilitation services and care in the community if local councils, especially those controlled by the Labour party, were prepared to make more use of private residential homes, rather than boost bed usage in their own homes? That costs the taxpayer a lot of money, which could be better used to provide care for more elderly people in the community.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend is right. It has been shown that, on average, a place per person per week in a local authority-owned home in England costs £40 more than a place in the private sector. It seems odd that the Labour party is so antagonistic towards getting better value for money while providing the highest quality of care for the elderly, so that more money can be saved and ploughed back into care for the elderly.

Ms Coffey: Does the Minister accept that 9,000 NHS beds for elderly people have been lost since 1990—beds for nursing care, rehabilitation and convalescence? Are not old people in need of care simply seen as bed blockers by hospitals driven to maximise their business income? How can this Government, who have abandoned health care for old people to the market, be trusted with the NHS for a fifth term of office?

Mr. Burns: The hon. Lady seems to be divorced from reality. The Government's policy is being implemented day in, day out—despite the smiles of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who should realise that this is not a funny subject. Care for the elderly is at the highest level possible and record amounts of money are being spent. It is time local authorities—which are mostly Labour-controlled—started to work with health authorities in using the continuity care challenge fund money to undo the problems of bed blocking and finding proper care for the elderly, who deserve it.

Patient Care

10. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans to improve patient care in the NHS. [19171]

Mr. Dorrell: Over the next five years, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has pledged that we shall increase the real resources available to the national health service year on year on year on year on year. We challenge Labour to match that pledge.

Mr. Winterton: The House must warmly welcome the commitment given by the present Conservative Government to increase spending for every year of the next Parliament if they are re-elected. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not just the amount of money spent on health care that is important—we spend a great deal—but the level of service provided? That service has made the United Kingdom national health service the very best in the world. The Opposition have failed to match our pledge on resources, and they would fail to deliver the best service in the world as well.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right. It is not simply a pledge year on year on year on year through the next Parliament. It is the 18 years since 1979—I will not say it 18 times—in which the Government have increased the resources available to the NHS year on year. We have delivered a growing NHS, and a wider range of care is available to patients. More patients are being treated and better-quality care is being provided. That is the Government's record on the NHS and we are pledged to project it through the five years of the next Parliament. The problem that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has with Mr. Charlie Whelan is that the hon. Gentleman is unable to match the pledge that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has given for the next five years.

Mr. Stevenson: Is the Secretary of State aware that plans for patient care at the North Staffordshire hospital trust have been brought into question by the resignation of the chief executive, Mr. Stuart Gray? The reasons for that resignation are clouded in secrecy. Will the right hon. Gentleman institute an urgent investigation into that departure in the public interest, so that the real reasons can be established?

Mr. Dorrell: Changes in trust management are matters handled in the first instance by the trust's board. What the hon. Gentleman has to explain to the citizens of north Staffordshire—as all Labour Members must explain to their constituents—is how Labour can even begin to talk about support for the NHS when it is not prepared to match its words with real commitments. The Conservative party has shown real commitment in action. The last Government to cut the resources available to the national health service was the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979. Health resources in 1979 were lower than in 1976. The Labour party must explain its record and explain how it turns its words into action.

Mr. Garnier: Does my right hon. Friend accept that one of the best ways of improving patient care is by increasing the number of general practices that are

fundholding? What does he make of the remarks of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on one day that he would abolish fundholders and on the next, to a different newspaper, that he would not? Which Mr. Smith should we believe—or do they both have *Sun*-stroke?

Mr. Dorrell: Unfortunately for Britain's patients, but fortunately for the Conservative party, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has since made it clear which of those policies he supports: a Labour Government would abolish fundholding. Because Labour is committed to the abolition of a scheme that has delivered real improvements to patients, the question about how to deliver real improvements to the patients of the national health service can have only one answer: re-elect a Conservative Government.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 March. [19191]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Hughes: The Prime Minister yesterday made the uniquely personal decision not only to have a general election on 1 May and to dissolve Parliament on 8 April but that Parliament should be prorogued and sent away this Friday. *[Interruption.]* Is it not obvious that one of the reasons for that decision and for the unprecedented gap between prorogation and dissolution is that— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. This is so time-consuming. Come on, Mr. Hughes: spit it out.

Mr. Hughes *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. There is no point in waiting for silence: the hon. Gentleman will not get silence. Produce your voice, Mr. Hughes.

Mr. Hughes: One of the reasons for that decision is that the Prime Minister knows that the report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards on cash for questions will be ready on Monday or Tuesday. That report will therefore not be seen by hon. Members in this Parliament and will be hidden until after the general election.

The Prime Minister: One of the reasons for making the announcement on Monday and arranging for Parliament to be prorogued on Friday was to give the hon. Gentleman time to finish his question. As for Sir Gordon's report, I have no knowledge when it will be presented.

Sir Cranley Onslow: Following his successful visit this morning to the headquarters of the McLaren formula 1 team in my constituency, does my right hon. Friend agree that what counts is not who is ahead at the first corner, but who has the skill, expertise, stamina and nerve to see the race right through to the winning post?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. The purpose of going to see the McLaren team was rather wider than that. I wanted to draw attention to a tremendous British success story, of which there are many. McLaren and the British motor industry have been a huge success. Of the 20-odd cars that lined up at Melbourne for the grand prix won by David Coulthard, 20 would have been built in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister agree that a situation where two thirds of health authorities and one third of hospital trusts are in deficit to the tune of £300 million is grave, and potentially disastrous for many parts of the national health service?

The Prime Minister: I find it odd for the right hon. Gentleman to talk about funding in the health service, since he has declined to increase funding, whereas we have given a commitment to do so. In any event, the figures that he uses are blown out of all proportion. The forecast deficit is a relatively small fraction of the national health service budget and, of course, in less than two weeks' time, funding for the national health service will rise by £1.6 billion, a multiple of the deficit to which the right hon. Gentleman refers.

Mr. Blair: Is the Prime Minister aware that many health authorities have deficits this year that will not be met by real-terms growth next year? To give one example, in north Essex, the deficit is £10 million and the real-terms growth that he is promising is only £9 million. He is not keeping the promise that he says he is making. He may believe that this is a matter of no account whatever, but is he aware that non-emergency surgery is being cancelled up and down the country, that accident and emergency departments are closing, that waiting lists are up and that there are bed and staff shortages in many parts of the national health service? Is that not a real tragedy, and disgraceful handling of the NHS?

The Prime Minister: Some time ago, the answer to the question whether the NHS was working was set out by the shadow Foreign Secretary as whether more people were treated, and treated well. Since then, an extra 1 million people are being treated, and treated well, in the NHS. The number of consultants in accident and emergency departments has risen by 40 per cent. over the past few years. The right hon. Gentleman does not mention that. He does not mention the fact that we have committed increased resources over and above inflation to the national health service every year since 1979, and will do so throughout the period of the next Parliament. That is a record that would not have been met by any previous Government, and cannot be met by any other Government, because they would not have delivered the growth in the economy that we have achieved.

Mr. Blair: The contrast is between the Prime Minister's complacency and what people know is happening in the national health service the length and

breadth of this country. Is it not the case that in the past six years, there has been an increase in administration costs of more than £1.5 billion a year, with 20,000 more managers and 50,000 fewer nurses? Is not the truth that the real challenge of the national health service is how to get money out of invoices, contractors, managers, company cars and pen-pushers and into front-line patient care so that we can rebuild the national health service that the Labour party created?

The Prime Minister: There are elements of what the right hon. Gentleman had to say with which I would agree. That is why we support compulsory competitive tendering, which he does not support; that is why we cut a whole tier of management that he voted to keep; that is why we have cut management costs by 10 per cent., £340 million, in the past two years. He cannot do that.

No one is being complacent about the need to improve the health service: that is why we are providing more resources; that is why I mentioned the extra doctors in accident and emergency; that is why 1.5 million more patients are being treated, with more than 10 million more in-patients every year, 3.5 million day cases a year and 14 million out-patients a year. Health service hospitals are now dealing with 75,000 patients every day of the year—£730 for every man, woman and child in the country, very nearly double the amount when his party left office. The Labour party may have set up the health service, but we have built it up.

Mr. Sykes: When my right hon. Friend comes to choose his new Cabinet on 2 May—*[Interruption.]* Listen to the page three boys shriek, Madam Speaker. I remember when they were shrieking in Sheffield the week before the last general election. I should like to hear them shriek after this election, every single one of them. What would my right hon. Friend say if all that he had to choose from after the election was a group of failed teachers, a bunch of ex-trade union officials, one television director and a bar steward? That is all that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has to choose from.

The Prime Minister: I think that it would be a kindness to protect the right hon. Gentleman from ever having to make such a choice. Who is meant by the bar steward, I cannot imagine.

Q2. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 March. [19192]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wareing: How did the Prime Minister have the audacity at the weekend to tell Tory central council that his type of Conservatism aimed to help the struggling classes—the have-nots? In 18 years of Tory rule, what did his Tory party ever do for the homeless, the sick and the disabled? The Prime Minister is not only past his sell-by date, he is well beyond his use-by date. It is time he went.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is unusually animated on this occasion, for reasons that I do not understand. I suggest that he asks the millions of council tenants who would never have become home owners but for the activities of the Conservative Government or the millions of people who now have savings, shares and pensions that are owned by them rather than held by a Labour Government, as they were in the past, on their behalf. We believe that, in the late 1990s, people should have the right to personal ownership for themselves and their families, and that is what we are building. We apply that to everyone, not just middle-income earners such as the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. French: Did my right hon. Friend see the reports at the weekend that 40,000 people took to the streets of Paris to protest against the rising tide of European unemployment? Can he explain to the House why the same thing has not happened here and what will be the quickest way of making it happen here?

The Prime Minister: I saw that, and I have also seen the trend in unemployment in many countries across Europe. The Labour party is keen that we should sign up to a 48-hour week, the minimum wage and the social chapter. Perhaps Labour Members should hear what the United States Chamber of Commerce had to say about the 48-hour week. It has just told the Irish Government:

"It is no exaggeration to say"

that it would be

"the single most negative change in the last 20 years."

We intend to continue to put people back to work, as we have done in spectacular fashion in the past 18 months. Policies such as the social chapter, the minimum wage and the 48-hour week—however glib they may sound—are a recipe for putting people out of work if they are in work and, if they are out of work, making sure that they stay out of work for a long time ahead. That is the poison pill of the Opposition's policy.

Casualty Units (London)

Q3. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to pay an official visit to a London NHS hospital to discuss the operation of casualty units. [19193]

The Prime Minister: We have made an extensive investment in recent years in London's accident and emergency services as part of a £400 million capital investment to provide the highest-quality and up-to-date facilities. I hope to have the opportunity to see some of them before too long.

Mr. Corbyn: When the Prime Minister finally gets around to visiting a casualty unit in a London hospital, what answer will he give to staff who have seen one in seven of all the acute beds in London lost, 12 of the 46 casualty units closed, huge waiting lists, people waiting on trolleys, loss of morale among staff and the recent resignation of the consultant in charge of the casualty unit at Queen Mary's University hospital, Roehampton, who left because he could no longer run it within the budget provided and did not feel that he was giving people a decent service? Is that not the reason why nobody trusts him and his Government on the future of the national health service and will accordingly vote him out?

The Prime Minister: I think that the first advice that I would give them is not to vote Labour, because they are getting more money from this Government than they would from any putative Labour Government. I would tell them that the number of consultants in A and E departments has risen dramatically by 40 per cent. I would tell them that the number of nurses appointed had risen by 21 per cent. I would tell them that more patients are being treated. I would tell them that the hon. Gentleman is living proof that old Labour lives, because, while the Labour Front Benchers are saying that they will not raise taxes, he is saying:

"What . . . many"—

including the hon. Gentleman—

"have been talking about is the need to raise taxation for the above average income people in order to pay for the rest. I see a moral justification for that and I think it is the right thing to do."

That may be what he tells the consultants, but it is not what the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) tells the consultants.

BILL PRESENTED

Road Traffic Speed Limit Reduction

Mr. Chris Davies presented a Bill to amend section 81 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 so as to impose a speed limit of 20 miles per hour in built-up areas: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 141].

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I hope that you will ask the Secretary of State for Transport to come here this afternoon to make an urgent statement about the allegation that Great Eastern Railways administration ordered 20 train drivers to drive over the body of a young woman on the railway track. I hope that the report of that barbarism is not correct, but it should be discussed by the House of Commons.

Madam Speaker: I had not heard of that incident, but I am not aware of a Minister coming to make a statement on such an issue today.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that on 27 February I requested under Standing Order No. 20 an early debate on the future of the Building Research Establishment. On 27 February, 6 March and again on 13 March—on three successive occasions at business questions—my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) repeated that request. You will be aware that, despite the Leader of the House agreeing to draw the matter to the attention of relevant Ministers, no such debate has taken place and no effort has been made by Ministers to give this House the opportunity to discuss the many crucial issues that arise from the proposed privatisation.

Yesterday, the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency, in answer to a written question from the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), announced that his Department had entered into a contract to sell the Building Research Establishment. Is that not a flagrant abuse of ministerial power? Does it not demonstrate a deplorable failure to allow the House a proper opportunity to consider the matter before contracts are entered into? Would it not be right to require the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency to come to the House, make a statement and account for his actions in a matter that the House has had no opportunity to consider and debate?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman and the House are aware, I have no authority to require a Minister to come here to make a statement at any time. Those sitting on the Treasury Bench will have heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks and the build-up to his point of order. No doubt they will take note of them.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will know that there is a digital terrestrial broadcasting application before the Independent Television Commission. One of the applicants is Mr. Murdoch. I ask for your ruling, Madam Speaker. We know of a private fund that was used to fund the Leader of the Opposition's office, although we have yet to discover who was providing that money. We also know that the Leader of the Opposition went to Australia to see Mr. Murdoch. I wonder whether that type of thing is proper, as we now know that *The Sun* newspaper—which is owned by Mr. Murdoch—has for some reason best known to itself decided to back the Leader of the Opposition. Do we know whether a deal has been done?

Madam Speaker: That was rather ingenious, but it was a long way from a point of order.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Transport Select Committee was due to meet tomorrow to interrogate South West Trains—the failed southern franchise. That meeting has now been aborted, without a decision by the Committee. Although we have not had a full business statement, I think that we should be entitled to the protection of the Chair and the House in ensuring that a hearing which is very important to people in 100 southern constituencies is not aborted for political reasons—to minimise the Tory party's acute embarrassment on rail privatisation.

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman is fully aware, that is not a matter for the Speaker; it is entirely at the discretion of the Chairman of the Select Committee.

House Numbering and Home Delivery

3.35 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the clear marking of a number or name on every dwelling and to make provision for standard sizes for all new letter boxes.

Not so long ago, I found myself in a street in Merseyside. The road name-plate had been removed by some helpful person, and eight out of the 10 houses in that road had no number visible on any part of the property. The two numbers that were on display—numbers one and eight—were in a cul-de-sac, and the numbers could therefore have been displayed either consecutively or as odds and evens. In the coming weeks, thousands of people delivering millions of items will be able to savour the frustrations that postmen suffer daily. They will learn about the amazing ability of Englishmen in their castles, Scots in their keeps and Welshmen in their valleys to conceal from the outside world exactly where they live.

Personally, I love the individuality and eccentricity of the British character and the humour of calling the canal-side cottage "Riversley house" or the upstairs maisonette "Homlea", "Dunrovin" or even "Dun Inn". I like the ancient names of Rookery Nook, Falcons Crest, Hatters End and Mon Repos. In my constituency, there are names such as Corail de Neige, Shiehallion, Ryedale and Far End cottage. I live next to a house called Stingamires, and, in a street in Stockton-on-Tees, I have seen "Hers n Mine". However, I think that the best name is one in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes), in Burneston road, called "This'll Do".

Some houses have a name as well as a number, but some have only names. Most of my constituency is urban. Moreover, most of the urban growth in Stockton-on-Tees is in my constituency. In many cases, houses have names and numbers, although the name but not the number is prominently on display. Although none of us wants to be treated as a number, if the proper address is a number, it would be better for the convenience of others if it were on display. Many people go looking for individuals at their addresses to ask them questions or to see them for many good reasons, only to find that the house is unmarked. I understand that Michael Levy, who funds the Leader of the Opposition's blind trust, lives in a house that has no name and no number. I shall leave hon. Members to draw their own conclusions from that.

There is a fantastic variety of letter boxes in the United Kingdom, and—as we shall discovering in the next few weeks—they come in all shapes and sizes. There is the tiny vertical letter box, in which only very small cards will fit. There is also the famous horizontal flap, which comes in many sizes and varieties, such as the spring-loaded type. Others include those located at the door base, the rear-flap variety, the one with the front sub-flap and—perhaps the one that we all hate the most—the type with the brushes and the dog behind it, ready to take our fingers off when we try to push some mail through the brushes.

Worst of all, I suppose, are the houses with no bells, no knockers and sometimes even no doors. As we all become increasingly aware of energy efficiency, and as more people succumb to the amazing offers of double glazing salesmen, the situation seems to go from bad to worse. Every day we find some new type of devilment apparently designed to catch fingers, crunch letters and generally offer cruel and unusual punishment to the deliverer.

Given the amount of junk mail that some people receive, I can readily understand the desire to maim or frustrate the sender, but all too often it is the messenger or postman, not the sender, who pays the price.

Let us find a practical new way of designing doors and property fronts so that deliveries can be made easily and conveniently. I notice that, in France, since the time of Napoleon every separate dwelling has had to have a number clearly on display. In the United States, every house has to have a number and a registered size of post box. Let us therefore mark each house so that not just the Member of Parliament but the emergency services, the doctor, the gas or water company and others can find it in a hurry—and so that everyone gets his own junk mail, not someone else's.

This Bill will not become law, but it will serve to highlight a problem that we vow to solve at every general election. It would provide that every separate dwelling be clearly marked with a name or number at the principal entrance, and that an adequate or separate delivery opening be provided as well. It would be phased in over five years, so that by the year 2002 the postman's lot will be a happy one.

Before long the European Union will turn its attention to this amazing diversity and, as with so many other things, it will seek to end that diversity by regulation. The time to act has therefore come. Our legislators are about to spend the next six weeks hunting for numbers and door bells—sometimes even for doors—and certainly for letter boxes. Let us all consider during this time the size and shape of the letter box to take us into the new millennium. Even though in 50 years' time all our important mail may be electronic, there will still be a market for tangible leaflets, magazines, and papers that can be picked up, pored over, carried about and shown to others. How they will be delivered to a nation in which an ever increasing number of people have double glazing I do not know.

Let us leap in before Europe does and design a great British letter box as distinct as the K3 telephone box, the Brigade of Guards and the policeman's helmet. The time to act is now, and I place this Bill before the House in a spirit of good will before the general election begins.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Who will prepare and bring in the Bill?

Mr. Devlin: I will, Madam Speaker, this not being a Bill that most Conservatives would wish to sign up to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tim Devlin.

HOUSE NUMBERING AND HOME DELIVERY

Mr. Tim Devlin accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the clear marking of a number or name on every dwelling and to make provision for standard sizes for all new letter boxes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 142].

Orders of the Day

Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Bill [*Lords*]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

BURDENS ON CROFTING PROPERTY TO BE DISPOSED OF

'.—Before any disposal under section 1(1) above, the Secretary of State shall publish in respect of each such crofting property a list of those burdens that shall remain with the Secretary of State after such disposal.'.—*[Mr. McFall.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.43 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

It is gratifying to see that the same applies to the Government's 10-minute rule Bills as applies to their manifesto: not many Members of Parliament want to sign up to it.

The new clause would ensure that the Secretary of State would publish, in respect of each crofting property to be transferred, a list of burdens that would remain with the Secretary of State after disposal.

We have had a good debate, both in Scotland and in Committee, on various issues associated with the Bill. At this stage, little differentiates us from the Government in terms of the principle of the Bill, but there remains a difference in approach, especially with regard to properties transferred to crofters. Crofters feel that they could be burdened by responsibilities that may not be evident at the time of the transfer. With that in mind, we wish to push the Minister on crofting property burdens.

We are also aware that publicly owned crofts cost the public purse some £205,000 a year to maintain. A cynical view is that the Government are disposing of those crofts to save the Treasury money, so individuals may find themselves in a vulnerable position at a later date. Personally, I do not take that view, but it is important to place such issues on the face of the Bill so that crofters feel that they can take the Government at their word and can undertake the transfer of responsibilities with a clear conscience, without feeling that they may be burdened financially.

I have mentioned to the Minister in the past the type of burdens for which crofters would feel responsible—for example, a flood or landslip. Although a crofting trust has been established in all good will on the basis of viability at that time, it could find itself faced with an intolerable burden that would drive it out of viability. No one wants that to happen. Hon. Members on both sides of the House want the crofters to take responsibility, and personal choice is extremely important in that respect.

It would be helpful if the matter could be debated a little more and if the Minister could give further reassurance about the Secretary of State's responsibility now and in the future.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I rise briefly to support the new clause. Considerable concern has been expressed, principally by the Scottish Crofters Union, about the burdens that are currently discharged in respect of the infrastructural underpinning of crofting estates owned by the Secretary of State, which may, both inadvertently and in some cases even deliberately, adhere to the trust if it acquires the property.

Any transaction should be transparent, and the crofting community should be fully aware of it before embarking on such a development. The new clause seems to achieve that purpose admirably.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): It is a sign of the times that the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) cannot even speak on a Bill that has all-party support without an hon. Member from his leader's office sitting by his side reminding him what to say.

The new clause is unnecessary. Both I and my noble Friend in another place have made it clear that the Secretary of State would transfer those maintenance and repair responsibilities that go with the normal management of a crofting property transferred to a crofting trust. As I said in Committee, there would be no question of transferring responsibility for what have been termed "community assets". We explained that the best way to identify those assets that provide a broader community benefit is in individual discussion between crofting trusts and the Secretary of State. Once agreement was reached, we would be happy to make known publicly those burdens for which responsibility would remain with the Secretary of State for Scotland. We see no benefit in publishing such a list before agreement had been reached with the crofting trust, as that might give the trust the impression that my noble Friend's Department had already made its final decision on what it would and would not transfer.

The purpose of discussions would be to ensure that both parties were content. If a trust was not content with the burdens that the Department proposed to transfer, there would be no obligation on it to agree to the transfer of property

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I apologise to the Minister for missing his opening remarks. Will he confirm that, in the event of a trust proposal being considered, the crofting trust advisory service would call in consultants to provide an independent assessment of the pros and cons? Presumably, therefore, there could be a degree of reassurance that potential burdens would be part of the analysis that the consultants would carry out.

Mr. Robertson: That assurance was given to the Committee, but I recognise that the hon. Gentleman was not a member of it. I reiterate the other reassurances that the Government have given: there is no intention to transfer the responsibility for community assets to crofting trusts, nor is there any intention to burden trusts in such a way as to jeopardise their financial viability. I have made it clear that the Secretary of State would be content to publish details of the burdens that will remain the responsibility of the Scottish Office after agreement had been reached with the relevant trust.

In the light of that undertaking and the assurances that my noble Friend and I have given elsewhere, I invite the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) to withdraw the motion.

Mr. McFall: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

Disposal of Crofting Property

Mr. McFall: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 27, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

Amendment No. 1 ensures that all the mineral, sporting and other rights will be transferred with the property. As mentioned previously, the Scottish Office runs the crofts at a net annual loss of more than £200,000. It is considered that those rights offer many crofts the only potential route to profitability. Without the transfer of those rights, the transfer of many crofts would not be viable.

I am aware that the Government want flexibility in that regard, but reassurance is required by the crofters, and we want it to be given in the Bill. The amendment goes some way towards assisting that process.

The Bill is still less than clear on the approach that the Secretary of State would take on the financial basis of transfer. There still exists a lack of clarity with respect to the land itself and, more importantly, with respect to the sporting, mineral and other rights. There is an apparent lack of balance with regard to the rights that the Secretary of State may transfer, and the burdens that would automatically transfer with the land. We seek to reassure those who would take part in the scheme that their crofts and trusts will be viable.

Mr. Maclennan: One of the least satisfactory aspects of crofting tenure in the highlands is the separation of sporting rights, mineral rights and certain other normal rights of ownership from the landholding enjoyed by crofters, which for many years has deprived them of the greatest potential of the land for earning a living.

The difficulty has been compounded by the absence of an authoritative register showing where such rights lie in respect of all crofting territory. That is particularly surprising in respect of crofts owned by the Secretary of State. The position seems to vary considerably. In respect of some, there are pre-emptive rights which might re-arise in the event of the Secretary of State deciding to dispose of property.

Most crofters, I believe, would regard it as desirable for the trust to have the full rights of ownership, including those valuable rights. That was certainly the consideration in the minds of the Assynt crofters when they acquired the North Assynt estate. The sporting rights are a considerable part of that asset, offering perhaps the greatest prospect of development in that estate, which has a considerable number of trout lochs.

It is slightly odd that the Secretary of State did not make it clearer when drafting the Bill that it was his intention to dispose of those rights to such crofting trusts. If he says that he cannot give that assurance because the rights may belong elsewhere, I would have to accept that, but, in respect of interests that the Secretary of State holds, there is no good reason why he should retain sporting, mineral or any other rights if he proposes to dispose of a crofting estate. I hope that the Secretary of State's representative in the House this afternoon may say that it is the firm intention of the present Secretary of State to dispose of mineral, sporting and other rights where they are in the Secretary of State's ownership, but it would be of interest also to know how the Secretary of State would propose to deal with those cases where such rights may be held elsewhere.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I will make a brief contribution.

This is an essential amendment in relation to the viability of crofting estates that will be transferred under the Bill. Frankly, I am much less interested in the Bill than in the precedent that it sets for future legislation, which will allow the same right of purchase on a communal basis of privately owned crofting estates. However, the whole history of crofting and estates and the weakness of crofting legislation is that it permits the divorce of crofting communities from the assets that should sustain those communities and make them viable.

In many parts of the highlands and islands of Scotland, we have an absurdity and the reinforcement of a historic wrong, where crofting communities were driven to the edges of the land, living on small areas of land, but were cut off from the vast acreages that lay behind and by that land. Although they have grazing rights on that land, they do not hold sporting or mineral rights and they do not have the ownership of the rivers that flow through that land.

That is nonsense. It has always meant that the communities, which were given security of tenure under the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act 1886, were never given the potential wealth that went with that tenure, so people have been allowed to remain on the land on a marginal basis, but have never had the opportunity to develop the full economic potential of their communities.

All that will happen here is that, unless the main assets of these communities are transferred with the estates, that marginality will be perpetuated. It would be absurd and no one would take it seriously in any other context if the Government, in all their munificence, who have been trying—let us be honest about this; there is nothing generous about the Bill—to get these estates off their hands since the early 1980s, after Mr. Edward du Cann's Public Accounts Committee reported on the DAFS—Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland—estates, did not accept the amendment. Nothing would be achieved if the estates transferred without their primary assets.

Therefore, the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) is essential, even as a gesture of good will on the part of the Minister, but, as I have said, this is only the appetiser. It has got the subject up and running. The problem for the Secretary of State and the Minister is the assertion that communities have the right to own their own land on a communal basis if, by historical accident, the land happens to be owned by the Secretary of State. However, the equivalent community next door has no such right to own its own land and manage its own affairs if another form of historical accident has visited on it the most vicious and

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

rapacious landowner in the highlands and islands. That anomaly cannot and will not be sustained, but let us get the precedent right.

These are the dying days of this Parliament. I have no idea to what extent the Bill will be used. If it is used, crofting communities that buy their land must have the right to own all the assets of that land. We should end once and for all the ludicrous separation between the right of tenure and the ownership by others of all economically worthwhile aspects of the land.

4 pm

On many occasions, the Secretary of State, as crofting landlord, has been prepared to sell to the highest bidder the sporting rights on a crofting estate. That has not been a sign of good will towards crofting communities. If the Bill goes through in its present form, there will be nothing to stop the Secretary of State continuing to let off the salmon fishing and shooting rights and to sub-let the mineral rights to parties other than the communities that have nominally taken over the estates. If that anomaly is not ended by the Bill, it will be done by a future Bill covering not only publicly owned crofting estates, but privately owned ones.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: As the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) said, the Bill gives the Government the flexibility to address the circumstances of each proposal for a trust on a case-by-case basis. Surely that is right. Ownership of sporting rights runs with the land, although it may be let to other parties. Sporting rights will therefore be transferred automatically.

The Bill would not prevent the Secretary of State from transferring mineral rights at the outset or in future. We would welcome trusts wishing to acquire mineral rights. When a trust wished to acquire the rights, the public interest would normally require that a valuation be agreed and a charge negotiated.

The Secretary of State holds mineral rights over 27 of his 53 crofting estates. The total annual income from those rights is currently in the region of only £17,000. In many cases, therefore, the appropriate charge for the freehold transfer of mineral rights would be modest.

Our presumption is that mineral rights would, when possible, be included in a transfer of assets to a new crofting trust. If a prospective trust is not initially able or willing to assume the relevant mineral rights, we propose that it should be able to benefit from the income while the Scottish Office retains the mineral rights. Such an arrangement offers flexibility to address each case and the aspirations of each crofting trust. Whatever arrangements are agreed must be fair to the trust and the public purse, from where the money to acquire the estates and support them over the past decades came.

With that assurance, I ask the hon. Member for Dumbarton to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. McFall: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

RESTRICTIONS ON DISPOSAL

Mr. McFall: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 15, leave out 'persons' and insert 'the community'.

The Minister is aware of the debate that we had on this is Committee, when the terms "persons" and "community" featured heavily. He said in Committee that the Crofters Commission would take account of local community development when preparing advice to the Secretary of State on the general interests of the crofting community, which it is required to consider, or any other matter that it thinks relevant. On that basis, he suggested that the amendment tabled in Committee was unnecessary.

In addition, the Minister suggested that the term "local community" was uncertain, and could include more than just the residents and the property to be disposed of. That is the point of the amendment.

The wider community interests require to be recognised for simple reasons. As others have stated, those concerned with policy innovation in the highlands and islands know that support, confidence and agreement do not come easily. It is therefore important that the Bill contains a trigger mechanism which will ensure that a transfer takes place only where there is demonstrable local support for it.

Our view is that the Bill is too narrowly drawn and that the interests of the wider community are not taken into sufficient consideration. Indeed, the Scottish Crofters Union expressed its concern to me yesterday and this morning. It points to the fact that a strict legal interpretation suggests that people living on certain areas of land may not reside on original crofting property. In legal terms, a body will acquire the land-owning interest over a piece of property. That interest carries with it certain burdens, such as march fencing, as well as certain rights to sanction development of a non-agricultural nature or forestry, and the right to resume land for a reasonable purpose such as development. Other rights, such as sporting and mineral rights over the property, may also be transferred.

The wider community interest needs to be taken into consideration. If, for example, development takes place, the environmental interests and local economic interests should be high up the agenda. Those interests are protected by local planning authorities and statutory bodies, and those bodies have a set of procedures that aim to gather the views of parties affected by possible decisions. Any individual or township can have an input in the consultative process.

The Scottish Crofters Union recognises that the danger is that rights in land for people who are not resident in the property could undermine crofting development yet, by the same token, it considers it perfectly reasonable that the wider community should be considered when non-crofting developments are being contemplated. At present, it is more common for the wider community interest to be dealt with through wider legislative mechanisms. If, for example, development takes place, planning legislation provides for the wider community's input, as do elements of the criminal law, such as laws dealing with nuisance.

The principle, with which the Scottish Crofters Union agrees, is that the wider community should have greater involvement in any wider development initiatives. It believes that that can best be dealt with through the articles and memoranda of association of any body acquiring property. It is in the interests of that wider involvement that we ask the Minister to focus his attention on the point. Support from communities is essential if the Bill is to achieve its worthy aims.

Mr. Maclennan: I too have heard from Dr. Fraser Macleod, the director of the Scottish Crofters Union, in terms similar to those described by the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). In our discussion in Committee about the appropriateness or otherwise of the words

"the interests of persons residing on such property",

I was anxious to focus on the apparent restrictions of the use of the word "persons". I preferred the use of the words "the people". It seemed possible that "persons" could be a small number, not necessarily the majority of those who constituted the crofting community. Although I had no doubt that that was not the intention of the legislation, I had and still have concerns that the use of the word "persons" does not sufficiently embrace the interests of all those residing on the crofting estate.

I believe that the words "the community" suggested by the hon. Member for Dumbarton in place of the word "persons" attempts to meet my point and another point, which is the one on which the Scottish Crofters Union has focused—the desirability of the crofting trust having in mind in its establishment the promotion of the interests not just of crofters resident on the land being transferred but of their neighbours in the development of the crofting land.

I take the point made by the Scottish Crofters Union that, strictly legally defined, crofting communities are those associated with crofting land. I remain concerned about the use of the word "persons" for the reasons that I have given, but understand why the Scottish Crofters Union takes the view that to speak of wider community interests would potentially impose on crofters a duty to take into account considerations of those who are not, stricto senso, of that crofting community, and might impose on them burdens such as the construction of fences or other burdens that should not adhere to them as a result of acquiring the land.

The underlying purpose of clause 2 to ensure that the transfer of land from the Secretary of State to the trust considers the wider interests of all those living in the area remains unsatisfactorily spelled out. The Scottish Crofters Union is clear that that is a purpose of the clause, and I am clear that it ought to be a purpose, but it is not spelled out, and I regret that.

Lest there be any question of inadvertently imposing new burdens on crofters through "the community" being in place of "persons" in the Bill, I however incline to the view that my original wording was to be preferred. At this stage, I think that we shall have to wait and see how the provision works in practice. As there is some ambiguity in what is meant by "persons", there is however a great deal of virtue in the Minister putting firmly on the record his judgment of the intention. If the courts are called on to adjudge the matter, the words will be weighed with considerable care.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: We believe that the amendment may risk jeopardising the ability of some crofters to establish crofting trusts. I know that that is not what the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) would wish.

Any requirement that a crofting trust represent a community may be interpreted to require that a community be shown to exist on the relevant property. Decisions of the Scottish land court have found that scattered crofts can be deemed not to form a community. It is therefore possible that crofters in the eastern highlands, where there are no common grazings and crofts are often some distance apart, may be frustrated in attempts to establish trusts if they cannot demonstrate that a community exists on their scattered holdings. The amendment could therefore remove from some crofters the ability to establish a trust, which is contrary to the Bill's principle.

Where a community can be shown to exist, our advice is that the terms "the community" and "persons" have no legal difference, and that in this context, the amendment is unnecessary. I invite the hon. Member for Dumbarton to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. McFall: Although the Scottish Crofters Union does not hold the same view as the Minister on the point, I recognise the validity of his statement. The issue of the wider context still divides us a little, but in the light of his assurance and his very reasonable response—perhaps for the first time, which is very important at the end of this Parliament—I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.—[*Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time—[*Mr. Raymond S. Robertson.*]

4.14 pm

Mr. Maclennan: The importance of the Bill is not to be measured by its length or the fact that it is reaching its concluding stages at a time when the eyes of the public are diverted from the House to the political battle elsewhere. This is a significant little Bill. It was conceived in haste by the Secretary of State, notwithstanding the history—to which the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) referred—of the report by the Public Accounts Committee, when it was chaired by Mr. Edward du Cann.

The evidence for my belief that the Bill was conceived in haste is that the Secretary of State seemed to be unaware of the extent of the obligations contained in the Bill. The earlier debates on the Bill showed much uncertainty about whether the Government were prepared to contemplate the transfer of the sporting and mineral rights with the crofting rights. Today, we have heard a helpful defining statement from the Government on that issue, which marks a development in their thinking.

The Bill has also been given a considerable fillip by the success of the Assynt Crofters Trust, which took a private initiative to acquire the north Assynt estate near Lochinver in my constituency in the early years of this Parliament. That initiative showed how crofters, coming together in a community to acquire the ownership of an estate, could help to benefit their own interests and those of the wider community, economically and socially. That precedent may start a landslide in due course.

[Mr. Maclennan]

The benefits of common acquisition by crofters of a sporting estate have been seen in north Assynt and further north in Sutherland, where the Talmine estate is being similarly transferred to the crofters on the initiative of the proprietor. That estate is in the neighbourhood of Melness, one of the remaining Gaelic communities in Sutherland, and the transfer is a welcome development. Other inquiries and initiatives have followed the north Assynt acquisition, and the Bill will play a useful part in changing attitudes and improving the prospects of crofters in the highlands.

It is clear that many holdings have better prospects of viable development if they are managed by the crofters, in their interest. Most crofters believe that the Secretary of State has been a good landlord, but the appurtenances of ownership in today's world—with the possibility of raising further finances on the security of an estate, or coming together to develop assets that cannot be developed in isolation—offer real advantages in certain areas.

In discussions earlier in our proceedings on the Bill, I have been at pains to ensure, most importantly, that transfers of ownership from the Secretary of State would take place only when there was an absolutely clear view within the community that they would be in the interests of the crofters. There should be no question of this becoming simply a way of disembarrassing the Secretary of State of a loss-making concern. The Minister has made it clear that that is not the Government's intention.

It is also important that, when the Crofters Commission, under clause 2, carries out tests of opinion so as to advise the Secretary of State whether it is in the interests of the crofting community that the transaction should take place, the tests should be completely transparent, deliberate, open and well considered by all affected.

It is satisfactory that the Crofters Commission has said that that would be its intention, although it has not yet defined what it would regard as a significant majority, or said whether it would wish to establish opinion by means of a secret ballot, and whether absentee crofters should be consulted. All those are significant matters that could affect the judgment whether the Crofters Commission has properly discharged its function of determining the will of the people affected.

I would be happier if those details had been given before the Bill reached its concluding phases in the House. It seems to me that a secret ballot is a desirable mode of determining the view of the community. I distrust opinions expressed at a single public meeting, with hands either raised or not raised. There is no doubt that, in many communities, there are people who have a dominant influence on opinion, and that others with as much right to be heard may feel less able to be forthright in expressing their views.

I do not think that a decision of such importance should be arrived at without the kind of deliberative approach that I have recommended from the beginning. Such a step would bring the process of transfer into disrepute, which would not be in accordance with the wishes either of the Secretary of State or of Parliament.

A great trust is being given to the Crofters Commission—to act as the principal adviser. In the past, the commission has had a quasi-judicial role, often considering the interests of particular individuals and determining matters such as what to do about a particular crofter's rights in a common grazing, but I do not believe that any equivalent power has been given to it before.

Although the commission's role will be only advisory, it could turn out to be the critical role. It is hard to believe that its advice would be rejected by the Secretary of State. I therefore go firmly on the record as saying that I hope that the Crofters Commission will weigh its decisions in such matters with great care, and in no case rush to judgment.

I do not believe that the Bill need be the prelude to a rapid transfer of title. The initiative ought to come from the communities themselves. As the burdens of ownership are not to be ignored, they will approach the matter with great caution.

I conclude by expressing satisfaction that one of the last matters to come before this Parliament is the consideration of how best to assist the development of these estates, for they lie at the heart of the highland community. Their well-being remains key to the future of parts of our loved country, which is close to the hearts of all who represent it.

Mr. Wilson: The best that can be said of the Bill is that it is harmless. That cannot be said of much of the legislation that goes through the House, so I regard it as something of an achievement. A few small victories have been won in the Government's lifetime against the onward march of privatisation. It is a cause of satisfaction to some of us that two such measures have been in the highlands and islands context. Caledonian MacBrayne remains firmly in the public sector, in spite of three efforts by the Tories to flog it off, as do the highlands and islands estates of the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department.

I well remember that the initial ploy was to privatisation the estates, to sell them on the open market, and to leave it to the fate of that market to decide who ended up owning the estates that were held in trust by the Secretary of State for Scotland. That was repelled. The current Secretary of State returned with other proposals, which are embodied in the Bill.

The crucial element of the Bill is the lack of compulsion. The estates will be sold only if the people who live on them want them to be sold, and they can be sold only to the local community. Those two advances are vast, and they transform the nature of the legislation compared with the original concept in the 1980s. The first comfort is that there is no compulsion, and the second is that there will be no Tories to carry through the legislation. Even in its much muted form, this legislation would be dangerous in the wrong hands. It would be possible for the element of pressure, if not the element of compulsion, to return.

The general rule of thumb for land legislation in the highlands and islands is summed up in the old saying, "The law favours the landlords, because the landlords made the law." That has literally been true for most of Parliament's history, particularly in the other place. However, during one period in its history, that was not the dominant theme. From the 1880s to the 1920s, Governments of all persuasions were compelled to listen to the voices of the people instead of to the voices of the landlords, because of the pressure for land and the pressure from people who were without land.

When we hear rubbish such as that spouted by the Secretary of State in Stornoway a couple of weeks ago about the sacred rights of property, it is worth noting that the crofting system is probably the biggest incursion into the rights of private property for which the House has ever legislated. To an enormous extent, crofting law removed the rights of private landowners, removed the market-led approach to the ownership of land in the highlands, and certainly removed the right of landowners to act capriciously towards tenants whom they had previously evicted at free will and subjected to various other indignities.

The crofting laws changed all that, and did so in response to the pressures from the people who lived on the land. Crofting laws were by no means perfect, for some of the reasons to which I alluded earlier—for instance, they left sporting and mineral rights outside the rights of communities, and large areas of the highlands and islands are not subject to them.

We are dealing with estates owned by the Secretary of State on behalf of the nation and, in debating a Bill dealing specifically with these lands, it would be amiss not to recognise that the only reason the lands are in common ownership today is that landless ex-service men—many of whom were returning from the first world war—were prepared to struggle, to fight and to demand the right to remain on the land, and were not prepared to be driven off to the four winds at the whim of any landlord. It is because they took that stand that the state was obliged to intervene to acquire land in areas where there was great congestion and great demand, but where land was in the ownership of people whose sole interest was to clear as many people as possible from it and to use it for private economic and sporting interests.

It is because ordinary people in the communities stood up to be counted, often physically resisting the forces of landlordism, that the state was obliged to intervene and to bring the estates into public ownership. That is why we have Scottish Office-owned estates to discuss today—because, in the early part of this century, men and women alike were prepared to go to gaol, to physically resist and to say that the rights of common people were greater than the rights of any landowner or Government.

I salute today the people whose struggles created the publicly owned estates in the highlands and islands, and allowed succeeding generations to live on those lands. The only reason there are healthy and lively communities in the crofting areas of Scotland today is that that struggle was engaged in and those rights secured.

One of the problems was that the crofting laws did not cover the whole of the highlands and islands. One score that I would like to see settled while I am still in this House is the omission of the island of Arran from the crofting laws. It is a particular irony that today we have two Ministers on the Front Bench—one by the name of Robertson, and the other by the name of Douglas-Hamilton.

When the crofting laws were introduced in 1886, they included the county of Bute, which at that time included the island of Arran. The only reason why Arran was taken out of the protection of the crofting laws was that there was a Tory Member of Parliament for Bute at that time named Robertson and a landowner—who needs no introduction to the Minister of State—called the Duke of Hamilton. Each of them used his lobbying power in this Chamber and in another place to get Arran excluded from the crofting laws.

The result of that successful piece of vested interest was that, instead of coming within the crofting system—in which case, it would be a different community today—Arran was excluded. Right down to the present day, Arran is run on a feudal basis by some of the most unpleasant and interventionist landlords in Scotland, who constantly use the powers open to them to extract money and to implement feudal power against the people who live on the island.

What a wonderful thing it would be if at least those who are renting on the island of Arran under the smallholders legislation were to be given the status of crofters and the protection of crofting tenancy. The same argument applies in parts of the constituency of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), where people are rented under the legislation. They are crofters in all but name, but they do not have the protection of the crofting laws. That is one of the elements that will be contained in real crofting reform legislation in the future.

This is only the start. The Secretary of State thought he could pull a publicity stunt by saying that he was addressing the highland land question. What an unlikely thing for a Tory to do—giving crofters the right to buy their own land.

The legislation does not begin to nibble at the highland land question, because it deals only with the publicly owned estates, while the abuses in the highlands and islands take place in the privately owned estates. Once the principle is established that communities can buy their land on a communal basis from the landowner—presumably at 15 times the rental value—no legitimate argument separates publicly owned from privately owned crofting land.

The challenge is to introduce genuine crofting reform legislation as soon as possible, to bring all crofting land under a pan-highlands and islands crofting trust, to extend the area under crofting tenure, to give people the wonderful protection that was created under the Crofters Holdings Act 1886 and to give them all the resources of their own community. That is the way in which to transform the social and economic base of the remoter parts of the highlands and islands.

4.36 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy: I have been looking at the *Hansard* report of Second Reading, which took place at the Scottish Grand Committee meeting in Montrose on 17 February. Here we are today, on 18 March, which goes to show that, where there is a will, and a legislative opportunity, a way can be found to address matters relating to crofting and the crofting counties. Perhaps this sets a useful benchmark for the future in terms of the additional legislation of which many of us would be in favour. The generally supportive spirit in which the legislation has progressed has been notable and welcome.

The Bill itself, however, remains permissive rather than prescriptive, and while that may be the best way in which to structure the legislation, it leaves a lot unsaid, albeit deliberately so. We have had various clarifications—we had a few more this afternoon in response to questioning by my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan)—about intent and the meaning of words, but such intent and interpretation do not appear in the Bill.

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

I strongly underscore my hon. Friend's point, that it will be absolutely crucial, for the practical implementation of the Bill, when individual applications appear before the putative crofting trust, whatever shape that may take, that the quality of analysis carried out by the Crofters Commission, and the transparency of the advice given to the Secretary of State of the day, should carry the confidence of the local communities.

My hon. Friend referred to one obvious shortfall being the lack of detail on what constitutes a majority, and how it is to be weighed and recorded. A straight numerical majority, even if one could agree on what constitutes the electorate—does one count the absentee crofters, for example?—would not be a basis on which a crofting trust application could proceed. A 51 to 49 per cent. division of opinion would be absolutely disastrous, and in those circumstances I would be flabbergasted if the commission were to recommend approval.

Equally, in considering the division of opinion in any crofting trust community, it would be right to take into account the age profile of those for and against, because of the longer-term implications. One would also have to take cognisance of the fact that in the longer term, once trust status has been achieved, considerations may arise from the bit-by-bit disposal by the trust itself of some parts of the trust lands.

Assynt has been somewhat of a trail-blazer in that respect: it has disposed of some extremely small marginal bits that have not affected the nature or critical mass of its trust; but suppose some future trust got into financial difficulties because of some of the burdens that it had inherited, and started to realise commercially some of its property—assuming that that was allowable under the deeds drawn up when trust status was achieved—on the open market. Those factors could have far-reaching long-term effects.

In approving this permissive legislation, we are right to place it on record that the devil will be in the detail. It will be important for Members who represent highlands and islands constituencies and the crofting counties generally, as well as the commission, to keep a close eye on applications. We must remember the Scottish Crofters Union's original submission to the Government's consultation paper, which said that the one thing of which we can all be certain is that there is no simple or single solution. It is right that the legislation should be permissive in recognising that reality, but hon. Members must lay down markers for the future.

This legislative event is significant and must be seen in tandem with the discussions and decisions at the last meeting of the Highlands and Islands Convention in Stornoway. The Secretary of State has agreed to set up a working group to consider the wider issues of land reform in the highlands.

An important decision in the other place was reached as a result of a test case over feudal rights and pre-emption rights, involving representatives of the then district councils of Moray and of Ross and Cromarty. One of those events has already had a significant legal impact, which will in due course affect the Bill. The other, depending on future meetings of the convention, could have a significant impact on future legislation.

Now that the issue is up and running legislatively, and in terms of the national debate and of political and parliamentary discussion, I hope that there will be windows of opportunity for further legislation. However, such legislation would be more likely to receive an earlier and more open window, as well as a more sensitive and informed discussion, if it were conducted in a legislative body in Edinburgh rather than in Westminster. The matter would be an early candidate for legislative priority if, after the general election, we achieve a Scottish Parliament. I welcome the Bill as far as it goes, but we have much further to go.

4.41 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I will be brief. I spoke on this subject in the Scottish Grand Committee in Montrose, but I did not serve on the Standing Committee, because of other commitments.

The Benches are hardly packed; some might ask where the passion is. I assure hon. Members that nothing arouses greater passions in the highlands and islands of Scotland than land use and ownership. Many hon. Members could recite words from folk songs and poems about the people who were condemned by the black-faced ram and the factor's fire-raiser. After the highland clearances, there had to be radical reforms to enable people to come back to the highlands and islands. Those are the historical roots of the issue.

I welcome the Bill generally, but, like the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy), I think that it is permissive, and that we have to look beyond that. From examining the legislation and reading the comments made both in Committee and elsewhere, it seems that many legal niceties will emerge. It will be like the planning permission arguments that hon. Members often experience, where some people want one attitude to be taken, but others feel that it is wrong. It is a minefield.

When I wrote to the Minister of State, he replied that he did not think that it was a lost opportunity. I think it is, because we could have addressed the argument about the feudal system in the highlands and islands. As has been said, the former councils of Moray and of Ross and Cromarty did much work in trying to resolve some of the difficulties, and a concession was eventually made. Beyond that, the issue of feudal superiority will still apply to many people.

Whoever is in power after the general election, we should take account of what was said at the Highlands and Islands Convention in Stornoway. Neither Front-Bench spokesman was present at the convention, but several hon. Members who are here were. Dr. Jim Hunter, who is much respected, has offered to put together a paper on land use and ownership that should be considered in future legislation. It is not enough to deal with the matter piece by piece; we need a radical approach to crofting, land use and land ownership in Scotland.

The land register that was set up has not reached its conclusion. It was supposed to have done that by this year. It will be another 10 years before we have a full land register in Scotland. In what will probably be my last speech in this Parliament, I have to say that the land issue must be addressed much more seriously by all the political parties. I am proud that my party established a land commission under Professor MacInnes of Aberdeen university, who acted in a neutral capacity and took much

evidence from around the country. That is a helpful contribution to the debate. Without land, we can do nothing. We need land and people to build a more secure society; the two go together.

4.45 pm

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Although the issues have had a good airing at the Grand Committee in Montrose, on Second Reading, in Committee and tonight, it is only right that I should respond to some of the points that have been raised.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) talked of the success of the crofting trusts at Assynt and Borve. Their success, with that of Annishadder, has demonstrated that the time is right to offer tenants on the Secretary of State's estate the opportunity to benefit from land ownership.

The response to the Government's consultation paper last year showed that there was considerable potential interest. The Crofting Trusts Advisory Service has commissioned three pilot studies into the feasibility of three possible local trusts. It is too early to say whether that will translate into specific proposals, but there is a growing body of opinion that that is the way forward. We need to be in a position to respond.

The hon. Member for Cunningham, North (Mr. Wilson) said that the legislation might not be used. Perhaps he was thinking of the case of Skye and Raasay, when crofters responded to an earlier initiative in 1990 by deciding that they would prefer to remain tenants of the Secretary of State rather than setting up a crofting trust. He will agree that times have changed, and that there is more interest in the trust option. The setting up of trusts at Assynt and Borve, and at Annishadder in Skye, demonstrates that it is a feasible option for crofting communities.

The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) wondered whether the Secretary of State's crofting tenants should have a right to buy their estates as a whole. Individual crofters already have a statutory right to buy their crofts. To give crofters a right to buy an estate as a whole would be feasible only if the Bill defined precisely which crofters would enjoy the right, and the sort of body that would have to be formed to take over ownership.

The Government believe that it is preferable for the Bill to allow flexibility, so that different approaches can be tried in different areas. The Bill must allow the Secretary of State the right to refuse proposals from crofting trusts, in order to safeguard crofters' interests—for example, if proposals are judged not to be properly representative of crofting interests.

The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye also asked for trusts to be allowed to sell off their land and assets. That will be a matter for the trust. Trusts will no doubt consider carefully the effect of selling or leasing land. The loss of land will need to be weighed against the possible benefits, such as providing a source of money with which to undertake development projects in the interests of the local community.

Moreover, crofting legislation provides protection for the crofting interest, as the land remains in crofting tenure unless the landowner, in this case the trust itself, successfully applies to the Scottish land court to have it resumed. In considering applications for resumption, the court must be persuaded that the resumption is required for some reasonable purpose in relation to the good of a particular croft estate as a whole or of the public interest.

Some Opposition Members asked why the Bill was not being extended to cover privately owned estates.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: I am sorry to interrupt, but I should like to raise one point before the Minister moves on. In the example that he cited, the land court and resumption would come into play. It is clear that he sees the potential for longer term difficulties.

Suppose that a crofting trust, through no fault of its own, or perhaps through bad management or a change in personnel between its formation and several years or decades down the track, finds itself facing financial difficulty or perhaps ruin. Things will be very much in the lap of the gods, or at least the judicial gods of the Scottish Land Court. The outcome will depend on whether the court judged such straitjacket financial circumstances as sufficient reason for granting a resumption order.

Let us hope that it would not come to that. No Secretary of State would grant trust status to something that might not be viable. We are taking a slight gamble on some of the applications that will be made in the next few years, because the circumstances could look markedly different a few years down the track.

Mr. Robertson: I understand where the hon. Gentleman is coming from, but, as he says, it is difficult to legislate for something that may or may not happen. It is unlikely that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would allow any trust to go forward that had not proved itself financially viable not only in the short and medium term but in the long term. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is reassured by that.

The Bill extends to privately owned estates. Its purpose is to enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to dispose of his estates. There is no legal impediment to prevent any private landowner from selling his large crofting trusts if he wishes to do so. It would be wrong for the Government to seek to compel landowners to sell.

There is also the question of land under the control of the Forestry Commission. There is no legal barrier to prevent the commission from disposing of land acquired under the Forestry Acts to a crofting or community trust. Where the land is in crofting tenure and has not been planted, the Government will positively encourage the Forestry Commission to look sympathetically at disposing of the land to a suitable crofting trust.

In the case of existing or newly planted woodland, a number of options could be considered under the Forestry Commission's recent disposal programme and its recently announced extension to the sponsorship arrangements for preferred sales to communities for social and economic development.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland spoke about the mechanism for ensuring that transfer took place only where there was demonstrable local support. I assume that the hon. Gentleman had it in mind that there should be a ballot, and that a transfer should take place only if there was more than a specified percentage of support.

It is clearly right that there should be substantial support for any crofting trust proposal before it goes ahead. It would be a mistake to write any specific figure

[Mr. Robertson]

into the Bill. Should the figure be a simple majority, say, two thirds, or should 90 per cent. or 99 per cent support be required? Who should vote—those with crofting rights, or all adults? Then there is the problem of absentees. Should crofters who live in Canada or Glasgow, or whose employment takes them away from the croft for most of the year, have a vote? Should the percentage be calculated as a proportion of those who vote or of the electorate as a whole?

Before agreeing to transfer any estate to a crofting trust, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must consult the Crofters Commission, which in turn must have regard both to the general interests of the crofting community in the district and to the views of the crofters. That will ensure that these matters are addressed, but it gives more flexibility to take account of local circumstances.

As my noble Friend the Earl of Lindsay made clear in another place, we have no set views on whether a minimum or maximum size of trust will have to be prescribed. A trust must clearly involve more than one croft holding, and, ideally, at least 10 holdings might be desirable, but we will consider each proposal on its merits. Similarly, we have no upper limit in mind. In our view, trusts are particularly suited to local communities, but a trust for larger areas, such as Skye or the Western Isles, could certainly be considered.

The Bill does not prescribe the size or structure of a crofting trust. It is important, as I and my noble Friend have stressed, that any proposal meets the needs of local communities. The Bill offers sufficient flexibility to deal with a variety of local solutions. It would be open to communities to propose trusts which consisted of a whole estate, part of an estate or an aggregation of several estates. The Secretary of State would listen to representations from any crofter on an estate, any part of which was the subject of a proposal to establish a crofting trust.

As for whether all crofters will have to become members of the trust, if, after consultation with the Crofters Commission and due consideration, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State decides to transfer an estate to a crofting trust, all the land owned by him in that estate will become the property of the trust. However, it will always be possible for an individual crofter to use his statutory right to buy his own croft land from the trust. In addition, depending on the precise type of body established, it might be for individual crofters themselves to decide whether they wish to become members of the trust, although they should all have the opportunity to join.

As for whether trusts will need to be based on townships with common grazings, the idea of common ownership through a trust certainly makes most sense where there are one or more townships with common grazings, and most of the land in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's estate would fall into that category. However, we will not rule out a trust based on a series of separate crofts without any township common land if that is what the local crofters want.

On Second Reading, the question of a pan-highlands and islands trust was raised. It is intended that a pan-highlands and islands trust will be a possibility under the provisions of the Bill. Whether such a trust would make sense in practice will depend very much on the nature of the proposal and the extent to which it enjoys sufficient support from the crofters themselves.

The primary purpose of our initiative is to give ownership and control of the crofting estates to the crofters who live on them, and we would have to be satisfied that any pan-highland and islands trust achieved that objective. We would not be interested in a pan-highlands and islands trust if it meant imposing a remote bureaucracy on reluctant crofters.

My noble Friend the Earl of Lindsay met the crofting land trust steering group on 7 February to discuss the consultants' report. The meeting was useful, but it would be premature for the Government to offer a view on the feasibility of a crofting land trust. We are talking here about a report by the consultants to those bodies which commissioned the work, and there is no actual proposal as yet.

Hon. Members asked why the Government should not interfere with the rights of pre-emption, which have been raised throughout our proceedings. If the Government took no action, the transfer of land to a proposed trust could be delayed while the question of any rights of pre-emption was sorted out, or even frustrated, if the inheritors to title decided to exercise their right.

That would create uncertainty, and would be contrary to Government policy, so the Bill abolishes any rights of pre-emption that might exist over the land in the public interest. However, to be fair to the persons who may enjoy such rights, the Government will consider claims for compensation, and the Bill provides a right of appeal to the Scottish Land Court.

Where a particular individual can demonstrate that he or she has a legitimate right of pre-emption, stemming either from the 1919 Act or from the title deeds for the land in question, it is only right and proper for the Government to consider compensation. In considering the amount that might be appropriate, the Government will take account of the circumstances of the case.

Our understanding is that such rights as do exist are simply a right to have first refusal to buy, usually at market value, and it may be that, in the context of crofting land, such a right would have little value. At the end of the day, however, if the person is dissatisfied, it will be for the Scottish Land Court to decide whether a right exists, and the level of compensation that should be paid.

Tracing persons who have a statutory right of pre-emption can be a very lengthy and expensive process, and it will often be simply impossible. That is why the Bill puts a duty on the Government to publicise the transfer, so that any persons who consider that they have a right of pre-emption can lodge a claim for compensation. However, the Government are prepared to give an assurance that they will, in practice, notify any persons whom they think, on the basis of the information available, have a right of pre-emption.

The Bill allows four months for a claim to be lodged. Since all that will be required at this stage is the simple initial notification of a claim, four months would seem to be adequate. Any subsequent discussions between the Government and the parties concerned—for example, to obtain more information in support of their claim—would not be affected by this four-month period.

The Bill places a duty on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to advertise the disposal in such a manner as appears to him appropriate. Flexibility is

necessary, as the precise arrangement for advertisements will need to be according to the nature of the estate. For example, rather different arrangements may be necessary when a whole estate is purchased than when part of an estate that is still in the same family ownership is involved. Each case will have to be looked at separately in order to identify the best means of advertising for the estate in question.

Unfortunately, there are no established principles for valuing rights of pre-emption that could easily be incorporated into legislation. My right hon. Friend will consider all evidence submitted by claimants in respect of compensation for loss of rights of pre-emption. When agreement cannot be reached between the Government and the person concerned, provision has been made for appeal to the Scottish Land Court, which has considerable experience in dealing with crofting matters. We believe that the court is best placed to consider the facts of the case, and decide on an appropriate sum.

The Bill requires the Secretary of State to consult the Crofters Commission before disposing of any of his crofting property to a particular crofting trust. In giving its advice, the commission is required to have regard to the general interests of the crofting community in the district in question, the views of crofters in that district, and any other matters it considers to be relevant.

That gives the commission an important role, which is entirely right, given its position as statutory adviser to the Secretary of State on crofting matters and its knowledge and expertise. My right hon. Friend will therefore wish to give careful consideration to the views of the commission, but, at the end of the day, the Secretary of State must have the discretion to make the decision that he thinks is right.

During the debate, it was asked whether the Crofters Commission would be required to hold a ballot of those crofters who are affected before giving its advice on their views. That will be entirely a matter for the commission, which has a great deal of experience of consulting crofting communities in the course of its day-to-day work.

The Crofting Trusts Advisory Service was set up to provide advice to crofting communities interested in establishing trusts on public or private estates. It is doing valuable work in providing that assistance. Advice of the sort it offers will be vital to those who wish to take advantage of the provisions of the Bill to establish trusts on former Scottish Office estates. The longer-term future of CTAS will be decided in the light of developments following the successful passage of the Bill.

Iain MacAskill, chairman of the Crofters Commission, has made it clear that the commission has taken no position on the relative merits of different trusts. The commission has provided advice to successive Secretaries of State for four decades, and is well-placed to ensure that the interests of the crofting community and the views of crofters are properly represented in advice given to the Secretary of State. We see no need, therefore, for any additional body with the inevitable additional bureaucracy and resources that it would require.

The Bill will provide the necessary powers to put into effect my right hon. Friend's crofting trusts initiative. The initiative has received widespread support from all parties in the House, which support was shown on Second Reading in the sitting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Montrose, in Committee, and today on Third Reading and Report.

The Bill will allow my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, following consultation with the Crofters Commission, to transfer his crofting estates to bodies that are representative of the crofting interests in the property. It will allow my right hon. Friend to provide financial assistance towards the costs involved in establishing such a body. The Bill also ensures that any rights of pre-emption over the property are extinguished and makes provision for compensation to be paid in appropriate cases. This is a sound measure, which will devolve real responsibility to local communities to take decisions on the future of the land on which they live and work.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 34

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

5.2 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 16, line 33, leave out '1 to 24' and insert '1, 3 to 24'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 2, in page 16, line 35, at end insert—

'(2A) Section 2 shall come into force on the day after this Act receives the Royal Assent.'.

Dr. Godman: I have been advised that I should be brief, and I always follow wise advice.

The effect of the amendment is that section 2—now clause 2 of the Bill—would come into effect on the Bill's receiving Royal Assent. The reason for the amendment is powerful: the Bill provides that many sections will come into effect on such days as the Secretary of State will appoint; my amendment would ensure that there was no delay in bringing into force the provisions of section 2, which determines which payments will be affected by the Act.

What is the reason for the postponement? The Court of Session and the sheriff court in Scotland have co-extensive jurisdiction over cases for compensation. There are certain jurisdictional advantages in taking a case to the Court of Session rather than the sheriff court. The Minister is a lawyer and, while he may not have a degree in Scottish law, I know that he has some knowledge of Scottish law. Although I do not know what pertains in English and Welsh courts, a disadvantage in going to the Court of Session is that it can be difficult to stop proceedings in that court. Postponing matters in the sheriff court can also be troublesome, but the problem is particularly applicable to the Court of Session.

Given the area that I represent, The Minister will not be surprised to learn that asbestosis is all too common among my constituents. If Royal Assent and commencement were to coincide, would he not agree that that would obviate all clawback decisions that would arise if there was a time lag of some six to seven months between the two dates?

I should have said—although I suspect the Minister knows it—that I am not a lawyer and have had no legal training in Scottish law. Nevertheless, it seems to me that there is a real problem where cases are due to be heard. Several of my constituents have expressed deep concern about what they, as lay men and women, see as legal, technical and procedural problems. One man—a skilled tradesman who was severely injured at work a few years ago, who has a wife and children and who has not worked since the injury—asked me, "Why should there be these delays? Why October? Why not April?" Those are reasonable questions for the Minister to answer.

Mr. Frank Maguire, a Glasgow lawyer who advises Clydeside Action on Asbestos, wrote to the Minister as recently as 13 March and, after posting the letter to the Minister, he kindly gave me a copy. I know that masses of correspondence fall on the Minister's desk, but I should like to remind him of what Frank Maguire—a fellow lawyer—had to say. He wrote:

"While many personal injury lawyers are not advancing cases in anticipation of the Act coming into force so that their case is not settled or determined as at that date there are cases where trials have been fixed."

Although he is a good friend of mine, I have to say that he writes like a lawyer.

"The number of cases about which we are speaking is therefore limited."

I do not think that the Minister will challenge that statement. I cannot speak about what is happening in England and Wales, but in Scotland the number of cases is relatively small.

Mr. Maguire continues:

"Having regard to the limited number we cannot see how the Act cannot apply to cases which have not been settled or determined at the date of Royal Assent and CRU recoupment applied after October 1997."

He states that there is a precedent for that, and continues:

"While we appreciate you may not have been responsible for the original 1989 Act the Government then had no qualms in bringing into force an Act in the middle of 1989 which it applied to accidents or diseases after 1st January 1989."

I tabled amendment No. 1 because of my serious concerns for some of my constituents. The case of a young man in Port Glasgow is now being dealt with in the Court of Session and the sheriff court by a firm of lawyers in Greenock, who are highly skilled in such cases. Another man, who is an ambulance driver, was badly injured. He, too, is concerned about such delays.

I expect a positive response from the Minister, to make the dates of Royal Assent and commencement the same. If he were to do that, he would earn the gratitude of many people in constituencies such as mine.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) mentioned his constituent's simple question on why the provisions of the Bill come into effect only in October and not on Royal Assent—I think that he mentioned April. That request is straightforward. It is, "Please, let us have the Bill in force now, and let it catch all the claims that are in the pipeline as of today or the day of Royal Assent." I readily understand, accept and appreciate the force of that argument, but there are real and considerable practical difficulties.

On 12 March 1997, after discussion in Standing Committee on that and other matters, I wrote to the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, and sent a copy of the letter to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow as a member of that Committee. In it, I explained that, in the other place, Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish gave undertakings that there would be extensive consultation with all interested parties on the detailed regulations that would be consequent to the Bill's passage. Those undertakings were specifically asked for by the Opposition. The Labour party tabled about 10 amendments on consultation, and undertakings were given.

Therefore, even if the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow were to persuade Opposition Front Benchers to release us from those undertakings, the undertakings were given not only to the Labour party but to the world at large. The first difficulty is that the Government and Ministers are committed to consultation. Moreover, it is important that there should be consultation. There are important legal and technical issues—as I know the person in the street and the injured party will appreciate—and, in the interests of all those involved in the process, it is important that we get the regulations right.

As I explained, if we are to have proper consultation, it is probably necessary to allow the months of April and May for the process. "Consultation" means just that; it does not mean hitting people over the head with a tablet of stone and saying, "That's what we'll do." Therefore, it would be wrong to think that the process of drafting the regulations can be properly advanced beyond a preliminary stage until the consultation process has been completed.

In the timetable in the letter that I sent to the hon. Member for Fife, Central—which was copied to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow—I stated that we envisage that the regulations will be drafted in June and July, possibly extending into August. Our intention is that, at the beginning of the summer recess, the legal framework will be in place so that the legislation can be implemented from the beginning of October 1997.

It is a matter, however, not simply of legislating but of rewriting the software that runs the compensation recovery unit's computer systems. Although we can attempt to do both tasks in parallel, the people who deal with the programmes complain bitterly when we attempt to do so, because it infinitely complicates their job, adds to expense and can cause delays in itself. They prefer to have the rules made by the House in final-cast form before translating them into the necessary instructions and software for the computer programmes that run the system.

5.15 pm

There will also be some administrative adjustments. However, I stress to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow that one of the striking features of the evidence given to the Social Security Committee on the workings of the compensation recovery unit—very possibly some of the people who gave the evidence were slightly surprised to be giving it—was that, administratively, the system worked well. Accordingly, we think that not only consultation but a process of drafting the regulations and subsequently writing the software is necessary, so that the system will come into effect in October in a ready state that will not cause any technical or administrative hiccups for those who must deal with it.

Those who deal with personal injury actions—whether on behalf of the plaintiff and trade unions or defendants and insurers—cannot settle or dispose of cases under the old or the new rules without the vital certificate from the compensation recovery unit. If that process were not to work reliably and efficiently, considerable difficulty and inconvenience—if not chaos—would be caused. I therefore suggest to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow that—although I understand the point of view of his constituent, who would say, "Why can't we do it more quickly?"—there are real practical reasons, which I have partly explained in writing and amplified today, why a process of six months is necessary after Royal Assent, which I anticipate will occur soon.

I take the point made by the hon. Gentleman that that necessity will cause considerable difficulties for those with claims in the pipeline. The Government intend, and the legislation has been cast, to ensure that, on the day the provisions come into force at the beginning of October, all cases in the pipeline at that point that have not been settled or determined will be caught by the new rules of the new regime. If they are settled or determined before the beginning of October, they will be covered under the current regime. I readily accept and appreciate that that causes concern. Many hon. Members have written to me about specific problems of constituents, who ask, "What do I do between now and October?"

Individuals must take proper legal advice. It may well be that the change of rules will not affect their specific case to their advantage. We are talking about some hard cases that were identified—particularly by the Select Committee, and particularly the asbestosis cases from the constituency of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow—when the old regime was particularly harsh and unfortunate. In other cases, there will be no financial difference, whichever way individuals settle. Therefore, constituents must first take legal advice on whether they will benefit.

If an individual will be affected and it is a matter of settling, he must determine what he can do to postpone the settlement—if that is the advice—until after the beginning of October and the introduction of the new regime. It was once easier to do that than in these modern interventionist days, when the rules of court encourage progress. I have no doubt that, if one has commenced proceedings, it will be more difficult to postpone than if one has not. If one has not commenced proceedings and is within the limitation period, one is entitled to dilly-dally if necessary. One is ultimately at risk of being penalised with costs if one dilly-dallies too much, but if one has not yet started proceedings, there is an opportunity to slow up the process. Most plaintiffs hate delay. They say bitterly to their lawyers, "Why doesn't the process operate more quickly? Why can't we get it through faster?"

Let us suppose that postponement is not possible because proceedings have already begun. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow said, with more generosity than accuracy, that I might have some knowledge of Scots law. I have only a layman's understanding of what takes place in Scotland, so I am not in a position to comment in detail on the differences in procedure and litigation between the Court of Session and the sheriff court. Not having practised at the English Bar for nearly three years, I may also have forgotten—or not had occasion to attend to—the precise evolution of the rules of the Supreme Court and the county court.

In the bad old days, once a writ had been issued, one had a year in which to serve it. In other words, a person could do nothing for a year and probably even renew the writ within the limitation period. So the plaintiff, in the driving seat, could decide to park the car if he really wanted to do so.

Under the modern system of more instructions, both through the rules of court and through the operation of the listing procedures and the application of automatic directions, there is indeed a problem—people may be driven to proceed more quickly.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I detect that the Minister is being helpful, but he will realise that, when a case has already been prepared for court, the employers will apply pressure—even though the lawyers working on behalf of the victim may want a postponement. Because they stand to benefit, however, the employers will press for a case to be heard.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Ironically, one of the beneficial consequences of the Bill will be the strong financial incentive, for the first time, for the defendant's insurers to speed up the process. That will happen after October, because recoupment and liability stop at settlement or determination. So for the first time, once the Bill comes into effect, there will be a direct financial incentive for the defendant's insurers to press for haste.

As is well known, some such insurers have before now dragged out litigation on the basis that, five years down the line, the plaintiff may have died, or become exasperated, or gone away, or decided to accept a pittance, or not turned up on the day. It may have become easier to buy the plaintiff off by then, and in any case the money allocated will come from the sixth financial year, not the first or second—even though the latter might have been more just and commonsensical. That is all part of the workings of the insurer's mind.

In short, this legislation will act as a powerful financial incentive for insurers to get a move on, because recoupment will be more substantial. That is a good thing, but it may be awkward and unhelpful for the class of person to whom the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) referred, who may be wondering what will happen between April and October. Such a person, who may have begun the court process, may want to stop it reaching court before October because that will be to his advantage.

There may be quite powerful tools in the hands of the defendant's insurers, enabling them to make life awkward for the plaintiff. They can make generous payments—one can only hope, generous enough to compensate for the circumstances. At least in England and Wales—I cannot speak for Scotland—Lord Woolf's inquiries into speeding up the civil justice system have all been directed to the sort of judicial activism that speeds up these processes. In this context, that has led to a problem.

One of the difficulties inherent in a substantial change to the law, as this is, is that some people will be adversely affected if they are on one side of the line rather than the other. I can see the force of the argument for activating the measure earlier, but I cannot carry out the undertakings that the Government have given and, at the same time, implement the proposals earlier.

To make matters more complicated, I can well understand the purpose of the amendments from a purely humanitarian point of view. We all have constituents in this position; they tell us that the Bill is necessary and represents an improvement. It rights a harsh injustice for the limited class of people whom the Select Committee rightly identified as needing assistance from legislation. I regret to say, however, that complications arise when some people are caught out by the timing.

An additional problem is the fact that the amendments do not even accomplish what they are meant to. I regret to say that they would bring about general chaos, with unknowable consequences. Amendment No. 1 means that clause 2 alone would come into effect on Royal Assent. Clause 2 reads:

> "This Act applies in relation to compensation payments made on or after the day on which this section comes into force".

The problem with the amendment is that nothing else would come into force until the Secretary of State issued the appropriate commencement orders—I refer at this point to amendment No. 2.

The results would be complications beyond measure. One is that the clause in the Bill which repeals part IV of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 would not be implemented. We would thus have one law prescribing one regime, and a later section of the new Act suggesting that there was a new regime in force. Unless the Secretary of State then advanced the process of implementing the remaining sections, there would be no machinery to apply the new regime—no framework for regulations to come into force. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would not have the power to make such regulations unless the rest of the Act was in force, too.

I cannot predict what the courts might make of that. I can only respectfully suggest that it would generate such uncertainty that I cannot believe that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow would want to place us in that position. Litigation and/or chaos would be left to resolve the situation; it certainly would be an unfortunate one.

I fully appreciate the hon. Gentleman's desire for us to hurry up and activate the legislation at the earliest possible moment, but I cannot see how to do that practically. I am stuck with the undertakings given by the Minister in the other place. What is more, the 1948 scheme was riddled with anomalies and difficulties until it was swept away, on 1 January 1989, by the present arrangements. I suggest, in the interests of the expeditious disposal of personal injuries litigation, that we get the rules and regulations right and make them fair and comprehensible for all involved.

Accepting the force behind what the hon. Gentleman is attempting to achieve, I invite him not to press the amendment, for the reasons that I have outlined.

Dr. Godman: In mitigation I might point out that I am neither a lawyer nor a parliamentary draftsman. I sincerely hope, however, that the Crown Office in Scotland will be made aware of the Minister's remarks today so that, if need be, advice can be given to sheriffs and judges in the Court of Session—

Mr. Roger Evans: I do not know whether it is right for a Minister to attempt to give guidance to an independent Scottish judge, but I undertake carefully to examine what can be done.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister. He might mention my concerns in passing to his colleagues at the Scottish Office. I am sure that they will give him the appropriate advice.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 1

COMPENSATION PAYMENTS

Dr. Godman: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 17, line 15, at end insert—

'3A. Any payment to the injured person arising out of their contracting mesothelioma.'.

Mesothelioma is a pernicious form of cancer. I am not a medical man; my doctorate results from a thesis on the development of steam trawlers in the port of Aberdeen and elsewhere. This, however, is a serious matter and the prognosis for victims is almost always grim. I believe that there is no cure for the ailment.

In relation to the pursuit of a legal claim on behalf of a mesothelioma victim, is it the case, or was it the case hitherto, that if such a victim died before he was examined by a medical specialist employed by the Benefits Agency, any legal claim would fall, despite the fact that the death certificate stated that the death was due to mesothelioma? I sincerely hope that that is not the case now, but I seem to recall that it was hitherto. What is the situation if an examination has not been carried out? In Scotland, any death resulting from the ailment legally requires a post mortem, so a death certificate could state that mesothelioma was the cause of death.

Mr. Roger Evans: May I seek clarification in the interests of attempting to answer that question? Is the hon. Gentleman referring to a claim for some form of benefit from the Benefits Agency, or a legal claim for damages?

5.30 pm

Dr. Godman: I do not wish to be awkward, but both cases interest me. Naturally, the question concerning benefits looms larger than the second question. I hope that a death certificate is a legally valid document in terms of determining a person's death and that a legal claim would not fall because the person had died.

My hon. Friends with Clydeside constituencies and I share an abiding concern for the poor, unfortunate people who fall victim to mesothelioma. Victims and their families must be protected, not just by local Members of Parliament, but by the Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) has a long and honourable record in that regard. As the Minister well knows, my hon. Friend and I have been closely associated with Clydeside Action on Asbestos, a remarkable group of people who came together because of illnesses to which they and their families had fallen victim. They are remarkable campaigners, on behalf not just of their friends and families but of people throughout Scotland and elsewhere.

On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie said that the asbestosis issue interested him because,

"regrettably, Clydebank in my constituency is the national leader for male deaths from mesothelioma. Our death rate is 11 times the national average because of the deathly cocktail in our background of shipyards, ship repairing and an asbestos factory."

Delete "asbestos factory", and my hon. Friend could have been speaking about my constituency. I am sure that similar problems are also characteristic of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) in Yorkshire.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie went on to say:

"Between 1976 and 1991, in Greater Glasgow, there were 500 deaths from mesothelioma alone . . . According to the Government, the people who died came into contact with the dust between 50 and 60 years ago; as has been said, asbestos-related diseases are by far the biggest industrial killer, and the problem is getting worse."

In specific relation to my amendment, my hon. Friend said:

"there will be between 1,300 and 3,000 deaths from mesothelioma in 20 years' time".

An eminent consultant with whom I spoke in Inverclyde Royal hospital trust in Greenock this morning said that, in his opinion—he deals with about 10 cases a year and says that the number is increasing—we shall reach a plateau in 2005. We shall not see the end of the disease for a considerable time yet.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie said that that figure

"dwarfs all industrial deaths, deaths on the roads and deaths from any similar cause. If we take into account the fact that there are estimated to be one or two deaths from asbestos-related lung cancer for every death caused by mesothelioma, we realise the scale of the continuing problem."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1997; Vol. 291, c. 188.]

Mr. Frank Maguire made a similar remark in his letter to the Minister. He said:

"With respect, you misunderstand the distinction of mesothelioma from other cases. It is becoming increasingly the case that the younger claimants are suffering from mesothelioma. We are now encountering cases where a mesothelioma victim is in their 40s. There would therefore be and are a large and increasing number of cases where there are claims for wage loss and where the victim has been in full employment. The Act will do nothing other than hinder resolution of these cases."

The problem is found not only in shipyards. Two local men came to see me last Friday at my surgery. They are Caledonian MacBrayne employees and crew members of the Pioneer. They went on board the vessel recently and became alarmed when they saw a joiner working, equipped with a respirator and goggles. When they asked him why he was so equipped, they were told that there was strong evidence of asbestos in the deckhead materials lining the formica. There was a substance called ammonite, which gives rise to asbestos dust. That was confirmed by an official of Caledonian MacBrayne, who stated that health and safety inspectors had been called in to test for asbestos.

We must remember that there is no immediate indication of asbestos. The company told those men:

"As a result of compressed asbestos panelling being found on MV 'Pioneer', the company is aware of individual concerns with regard to health and the effect that asbestos may or may not have.

In order to alleviate such concerns, the company offer, at no cost to the individual, the opportunity to receive an x-ray at Greenock health centre. Should an employee wish to take up this facility he or she should present themselves at the health centre and at Dr. Hulme's reception where the necessary arrangements have been made."

We are, therefore, not speaking only about employees who were caught up in such circumstances years ago. That incident took place just a few days ago when the ship was being repaired in a yard just a few miles away from me.

Another note to the employees stated:

"As a result of compressed asbestos panelling being found on board M. V. "Pioneer", the company by way of compensation to cover damage to clothing incurred by crew members, offer the sum of £100.00. The award is given in full and final settlement of any claim made in this respect."

[Dr. Godman]

I should be grateful to the Minister if he would bring the case to the attention of his Scottish Office colleagues. If the Health and Safety Executive is involved, there may be a case for the incident being reported to the procurator fiscal in Greenock or Troon. The Minister should respond positively to the amendment, as he did earlier.

I refer again to the observations of the eminent consultant whom I questioned today—a man I have known for some years. He told me that he deals with 10 cases a year in the Inverclyde area. Not just shipyard workers, ferry crews or others in similar industries are involved; a recent patient of his was a bus conductress. Another victim was the wife of a shipyard worker. It was found that the regular hand-washing of her husband's protective clothing led to the woman contracting this dreadful form of cancer. Another patient was the secretary to the managing director of a shipyard. She, too, contracted this appalling illness.

The consultant told me that a plateau in the number of cases may be reached in 2005, and that there was a time lag of 30 to 40 years before onset. The average time of survival after diagnosis is nine months. Mesothelioma is one of the most resistant of all cancers. Less than 25 per cent. of patients get relief from pain by way of radiotherapy. Some of his patients suffer the most appalling pain from the disease, and radiotherapy is not effective in 75 per cent. of cases. He is one of our foremost consultants in the west of Scotland, but he said that, with the science and medical knowledge currently at our disposal, there is no cure. There is a case—south of the border, I think—of a woman who has managed to survive for two years. The consultant was astonished that she had survived for so long, as most patients die within six to 12 months.

For those reasons, I impress upon the Minister the merit of my amendment. He knows that I have been guided by members of Clydeside Action on Asbestos, Frank Maguire and the cases that have come to my—we are supposed to call them advice bureaux now, but being old Labour I still call them surgeries. I have a constituent who has that complaint, and it is heartbreaking to see. A friend of mine in my constituency, a shipyard worker, recently died of the disease.

There is a powerful case for giving victims the support that I seek through the amendment. The Minister, being skilled in both parliamentary draftsmanship and the law, will tell me that my amendment is, as we say up our way, going to Gourock—in other words, cock-eyed. On behalf of all the people in our Clydeside constituencies who have suffered grievously from mesothelioma, I want the Minister to give me a positive response. They deserve our continuing and abiding sympathy, and I sincerely hope that the Minister will respond in a way that they and their families deserve. Many victims live their last few months in agony; pain killers and radiotherapy are not much use, and chemotherapy is not used in such cases.

I appeal to the Minister to accept the amendment. I do not want to divide the House. We are speaking of people in dreadful pain, with an appalling prognosis. They deserve his deepest sympathy.

5.45 pm

Mr. Roger Evans: I entirely endorse the graphic description given by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) of this class of case and the victims' sufferings. There is no doubt that mesothelioma is a particularly pernicious cancer, as he said. Its effects are as appalling as he described.

Dr. Godman: It is just a minor point, but the Minister will be much more popular in my constituency if he pronounces Greenock correctly.

Mr. Evans: I represent a Welsh seat and we have the same sort of problem. I apologise to Greenock for the discourtesy, which was not intended. It was fair to pull me up for that, and I apologise.

The amendment is important and has been forcefully presented by the hon. Gentleman. I am well aware of the helpful and constructive role of Clydeside Action on Asbestos, the discussions that led to the legislation and the way in which it has developed. When we discussed the previous amendment, I meant to mention Mr. Frank Maguire, whom it is fair to say I have not seen recently, but to whom I had the advantage of speaking during discussions, which were helpful and constructive.

A debate on the Bill was encouraged, which was partly the responsibility of the Social Security Committee. Many practitioners representing different aspects have given their advice to the Government and participated in the discussions.

I was asked whether it was or is the case that, if a mesothelioma sufferer died before examination by a Benefits Agency doctor, the claim failed. I asked the hon. Gentleman to clarify which sort of claim he was referring to—benefits or damages at common law—to which he helpfully replied, "Both."

With regard to industrial injuries disablement benefit, I do not have the relevant expert advice to hand to give a confident answer. I will write to the hon. Gentleman on that matter. With regard to a claim for damages at law, at least in England, the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1934 would provide for the survival of the action in certain circumstances to some degree. If there is a widow and dependants, they have a fatal accidents claim. It then becomes simply a question of proof, and no doubt there are other means of proving what happened to establish the cause of action.

The hon. Gentleman invited me to draw the attention of my Scottish Office colleagues to the case that he described. It may assist us all if he would write to them or me. I appreciate the force of his observations.

This is a hard amendment to answer, as the situation is heart-rending. Mesothelioma is an horrific condition. I am advised—I asked for background information of the sort that the hon. Gentleman obtained from his constituent, the distinguished consultant and medical man to whom he referred—that the median time from contracting mesothelioma to death is nine to 15 months, depending on medical opinions. It is possible, I am advised, to contract mesothelioma without exposure to asbestos, but that is very rare. There has apparently been a small number of cases involving children who, as far as anyone is aware, have not been exposed to asbestos.

The number of deaths from mesothelioma is about one quarter, I am advised, of all the deaths caused by asbestosis. Indeed, as the hon. Gentleman again pointed

out with considerable force, one of the more horrific problems of the condition is the fact that there is a long period between exposure to asbestos and the striking down by mesothelioma.

I am advised that research by Whitewell and Rawcliffe in 1971 among 52 patients, mainly in Liverpool shipyards, revealed that the mean period between first exposure to asbestos and diagnosis of mesothelioma is 42 years—and that is the mean. That is what is so horrific, why it strikes people in old age and why that group of people was so affected by the existing legislation, which this Bill replaces. I am advised that the range can be anything between 13 and 63 years.

On the face of it, with that sort of situation, why do I not agree to the amendment? The difficulty is this: one of the horrific features of asbestosis is that one does not know how and when death will follow. Deaths from mesothelioma are about a quarter of all deaths from asbestosis. One of my constituents, whom I was speaking to this weekend, who has contracted asbestosis and who is pursuing his remedies through the courts, told me that one of the more horrific aspects of asbestosis was simply not knowing whether mesothelioma would strike.

One of the problems is that people can die of lung cancer, which is, I am advised, medically a separate and distinct form of cancer, as well as a result of asbestosis. Of course, even if they do not die of either of those two conditions, asbestosis sufferers face other horrific, unpleasant and on-going consequences. I recognise the force of the argument, but I respectfully suggest that it is difficult, if death is the consequence of asbestosis, to single out one particular group, albeit one for which one might reasonably and properly have the greatest sympathy.

Mr. Clapham: On mesothelioma, I think that the Minister will find that the Benefits Agency will take on a posthumous case. If that proves not to be true, will the Minister consider referring the matter to the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council so that we might get a decision on how the issue should be tackled? It is an important issue.

Mr. Evans: I am not entirely clear of the point that has been raised. The point that I was asked about involved someone dying of mesothelioma without medical examination by the Benefits Agency doctor. That is a specific point. I think that the hon. Gentleman is now suggesting a slightly broader point. I am aware of the considerable concerns on mesothelioma. It is the function of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council to keep Ministers advised on these matters. If the hon. Gentleman will write to me with his specific concerns, I will happily consider them and ask the council specifically to advise.

I point that I was developing was that it was difficult to distinguish one class of asbestosis sufferer from another, but it should also be borne in mind that there are other equally horrific and fatal forms of cancer which can result from exposure during working time and which cause death. A classic example is exposure in the dye industry, which causes bladder cancer much later. I am suggesting, therefore, that this is an area in which one is bound to have sympathy for any of the groups of sufferers. It is difficult to make the distinction that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow has made.

The hon. Gentleman said—I do not criticise it—that I might find technical difficulty with his amendment. There is one slight technical problem; he has managed to exempt defendants and their insurers in mesothelioma cases from having to pay anything to the compensation recovery unit. I should have thought that he would have wanted to do exactly the reverse: to protect particular sufferers.

For that combination of reasons, although I accept fully the force of the hon. Gentleman's argument, I respectfully urge him not the press the amendment, as I think he said he would not, to a Division.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister for his sympathetic response. I am sorry that there is a fault in the amendment—I would certainly not want to push it to a Division with such a fault. I am grateful to the Minister also for acknowledging the devastating nature of this ailment, and hope that the Bill, without my amendment, will give some consolation to the victims and the families concerned. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read—[Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

5.55 pm

Mr. Roger Evans: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill deals with a discrete and separate part of the social security system. It is probably not a sector familiar to most of our constituents, but it is an area of great concern for those involved in the personal injuries litigation process. A number of hon. Members know a great deal about the subject, on which trade unions classically give much helpful advice to their members. There is a great body of expert advisers in the sector: solicitors, lawyers of one sort or another and people who are concerned with the subject and deal on a day-to-day basis with the system.

The Bill's importance involves the fact that the current arrangements, which were enacted in 1989, succeeded well in doing certain things. It delivered valuable savings to the taxpayer without placing an untoward administrative burden on either compensators or victim representatives. It is worth noting that the Select Committee on Social Security made particular reference to those aspects of the existing scheme. More than £500 million has been recovered since the inception of the existing scheme.

The Select Committee also concluded that the recovery of benefits to prevent double compensation was justified, but it also drew attention to an unintended consequence of the existing scheme: in some cases, it can lead to the erosion of victims' damages for pain and suffering. It is to put that right that the Bill has been advanced and that its Third reading has been moved.

Before introducing the Bill, the Government consulted extensively with interested parties. Two separate exercises were mounted, the first on the implications of the Select Committee's recommendations, the second on the compliance cost assessment. I wish to restate our thanks to all the people who were consulted for the positive responses that we have received. I particularly thank Clydeside Action on Asbestos, which I mentioned earlier.

[Mr. Roger Evans]

We have had a constructive dialogue with that group, as well as with other people. That has enabled us to advance our thinking on some important issues.

The consultation process culminated in the introduction of the Bill in another place on 7 November last year, before it was transferred to the House on 21 January. I thank all those who have most carefully followed the Bill in the House and shown considerable and keen interest in the measures proposed. I particularly thank the hon. Members who considered the Bill in Standing Committee.

I have referred to the importance of the Bill. I suspect that that is why it has taken the course that it has.

This important topic has not had a happy past. We are talking about phase three. Phase one existed between 1948 and the coming into force of the present scheme on 1 January 1989. Under the first scheme, the defendant or his insurers were entitled to deduct against special damages half of certain specified benefits. That curious arrangement was condemned by the Public Accounts Committee in 1986. It had the perverse and extraordinary consequence of providing a subsidy out of public funds for the tortfeasor or his insurers. That cannot have been right. The Public Accounts Committee and others consequently recommended that it be changed, as it was in 1989.

The second striking and unsatisfactory feature of the 1948 scheme was that it began with three named benefits that existed at that time. Thereafter, the benefit system altered, with benefit succeeding benefit. The consequences for the arrangement were not clear. As a result, litigation—going in many cases to the House of Lords—occurred on a series of different benefits paid by the Department. Certain issues of day-to-day importance for those engaged in litigation were unclear.

Some classic examples include supplementary benefit, which was introduced in 1966, but not sorted out until 1982. Benefit paid up to the date of a damage award was taken into account, but not thereafter. It was determined in 1980 that unemployment benefit should be deducted in full. It was also eventually decided that statutory sick pay should be deducted in full.

One of the advances in the Bill that I particularly commend to the House is schedule 2, which, for the first time, lists not only the heads of compensation, but the benefits that can be recouped against them or set off. Under the new scheme, the set-off arrangement is specified in detail and a power is provided by regulation passed by affirmative instrument to alter that from time to time. The arrangements between 1948 and 1989 were not satisfactory. We have corrected them and introduced a better mechanism to enable adjustments to be made later, as the benefits system develops.

The main advantage of the Bill is that it protects plaintiffs—particularly asbestosis sufferers whose diagnosis was made in retirement—who suffered enormous recoupment against their pain and suffering damages. That has been put right. The 1989 scheme put more of the burden on the plaintiff. The Bill puts more of the burden on the defendant and, in particular, his insurers.

That is surely right, because the defendant and, by secondary implication, those who cover his risks, commit the tort of negligence—or whatever it happens to be—that causes the injury. It is right that he should bear the greater part of the burden, subject only to a set-off against the plaintiff in circumstances in which the plaintiff might be said to be doubly recovering in a way that would not be fair and appropriate in comparison with an ordinary private contract of indemnity insurance.

The Bill strikes a balance between the parties and for the public, because we have preserved the principle of the protection of public funds embodied in the 1989 Act and extended it. The whole may now be recovered from the defendant and his insurer, subject only to the right of set-off.

I respectfully suggest to the House that the Bill strikes a far better balance between the three parties involved. The plaintiff has a fairer deal in cases that were adversely affected by the 1989 scheme, more burden is properly placed on the defendant and his insurer and the public interest is protected. It would be rash to suggest that the scheme will last as long as the 1948 scheme, which was in force for 40 years. The 1989 scheme was not so long-lived. This time, bearing in mind the long gestation of the arguments and the full discussions and consultation processes that we have had, we may have produced a measure in this important area that should endure at least for a generation and, I hope, for longer. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.4 pm

Dr. Godman: I promise to be exceedingly brief. I am immensely relieved that the Bill is going through, when there are just a few days left in this Parliament. My constituents will be relieved that it is to receive Royal Assent. I have reservations about it, but I shall not voice them now, because I expressed them when speaking to my amendments this afternoon, as well as on Second Reading and in Standing Committee. There are still problems. I am still bothered about delays in appeals. The Minister kindly responded to my concerns.

The Minister said that this is the third stage. The schemes have a remarkable history in our parliamentary democracy, largely because of the lobbying from a number of pressure groups, particularly Clydeside Action on Asbestos. The Select Committee agreed to investigate the modus operandi of the compensation recovery unit. It came up with a first-class report, and now we have the Bill. I have reservations about the Bill, but it demonstrates what can be done when there is good will on both sides of the House. Such good will has been noticeable by its absence during my years here. I give a qualified welcome to the Bill, which will give some relief to many of my constituents and thousands of others in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

6.7 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I shall not detain the House. I welcome the fact that the Bill will receive Royal Assent before the general election campaign proper. I am delighted that some of my constituents and people across the country will benefit from it. I have always felt it wrong that any amount over £2,500 was clawed back by the Treasury from injured people in receipt of state benefits. The Bill will be to the advantage of those who have been injured, the taxpayer and the Treasury.

The Bill is long overdue. Let us hope that it helps the injury victims whom it is designed to help. As I said on Second Reading, I am worried about clause 8 and would have liked some changes to it, but the Minister is well aware of my reservations on that, and I welcome the Bill.

6.8 pm

Mr. Clapham: I, too, welcome the Bill, but I would not like the House to run away with the idea that there will not still be substantial deductions. On Second Reading, I put some figures to the Minister that were not as clear as they should have been. He suggested that I should clarify the matter. I ask him to consider the case of someone in his 40s with a multiplier of eight years and earnings of £10,000, giving a loss of earnings of £80,000. In addition, he would have his amount for pain and suffering. Such a serious case would be likely to have to wait some time for the medical evidence to be resolved. The five years deduction of benefit could well exceed five years of loss of earnings and may move towards wiping out most of the person's loss of earnings. I gave the Minister an example of a case in which the deduction for loss of earnings was £50,000.

Mr. Roger Evans: I need more facts to be able to answer the hon. Gentleman's point. Surely the point is that, if the deductions will exceed such a sum, it is likely that there will be serious disability benefits of an expensive nature paid on top of loss of earnings benefits. There is a combination of those two benefits. If disability benefits are being paid, there will be a claim at law for damages for those costs as well.

Mr. Clapham: I take the Minister's point. We are talking, however, about a man or woman having to wait a considerable time for the medical condition to reach stability. During that time, benefits continue to mount, and the result can be substantial deductions, leaving a man or woman with a payment for pain and suffering on which they will have to live. Under the present regime, they would have to continue to draw on that benefit for their livelihood until the amount dropped below £8,000.

Although I welcome the Bill, I have grave concerns about it. I hope that, after it has been enacted, we may be able to return to it and deal with some of those concerns.

6.10 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): I welcome the opportunity to make a brief contribution to the debate, because, like Opposition Members who have spoken, I have taken an interest in this matter based on my work over a number of years in practice at the Bar. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, I used to do quite a lot of personal injury work. It is of concern to all of us who have worked in that field that there is an anomaly, which the Bill happily corrects after many years, as my hon. Friend the Minister explained.

Will my hon. Friend and his officials bear in mind the fact that there will still be some problem cases? I ask my hon. Friend to confirm that he and his officials are prepared to respond on specific cases where there have been problems. He and his officials will be aware that I have a constituent, Mr. Mullender, who had a great deal of difficulty in dealing with officials at a low level in the Benefits Agency. I hope that, if I write to my hon. Friend with some further details, he will be able to respond.

Mr. Roger Evans: I am, of course, happy to respond to any request.

Mr. Hawkins: The Bill achieves the objects that my hon. Friend the Minister set out. There have, however, been a number of concerns to which, in my role as deputy chairman of the all-party group on insurance and financial services, I would like to draw attention.

The results of the consultation exercise from organisations such as the Association of British Insurers and the Law Society are extremely important. I hope that my hon. Friend will continue to look at them carefully as this welcome Bill becomes an Act.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Business of the House

6.12 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the business to be taken tomorrow.

The business will be as follows:

WEDNESDAY 19 MARCH—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Remaining stages of the Police Bill *[Lords]*.

Committee and remaining stages of the Police and Firemen's Pensions Bill.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the Protection from Harassment Bill.

Motion relating to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee.

Motion on the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations etc) Act 1996 (Cessation of Section 3) Order.

Motion on the Northern Ireland (Emergency and Prevention of Terrorism Provisions) (Continuance) Order.

Motion on the Public Order (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order.

Motion on ministerial accountability.

At 10 pm, the question will be put on all outstanding estimates.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill.

Remaining stages of the Police (Insurance of Voluntary Assistants) Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill *[Lords]*.

The House may also be asked to consider any Lords amendments which may be received.

As all hon. Members can attend, I should remind them that on Wednesday 19 March, there will be a debate on structural funds and cohesion policy in European Standing Committee B. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

I expect to make a further statement tomorrow about business on Thursday.

The House will also wish to know that Prorogation is intended to be at 11 am on Friday 21 March.

[Wednesday 19 March 1997: European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community Documents: 11382/96, Structural Funds; 12614/96, Cohesion Policy. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report HC 36-xi (1996–97).]

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Leader of the House, but I believe that there will be some disappointment that he has made such a limited statement, and that we do not yet have the business for Thursday.

On a minor point, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the private Members' Bills to which he has referred will be taken in the normal way at this stage and that what is being proposed is not that Government time be given for such Bills, but that the House simply be given an opportunity to accept or reject Bills that have reached the appropriate stage?

Many hon. Members will feel that the programme over the next two days is not very balanced, because so much business is to be completed tomorrow. Will the Leader of the House confirm that the only three items outstanding from those that he has announced today are the Crime (Sentences) Bill, which is in another place today, the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill and the Education Bill, all of which may be subject to Lords amendments?

If there is no further clarity today on those issues, hon. Members will be placed in a difficult position. Some may wish to participate in debates on those issues, and there may be votes. It will be difficult for Members to plan and to ensure that they are present in the House if they do not get the longest possible notice. We all accept that this is a difficult situation, but I believe that hon. Members have the right to as much warning as possible. I hope that the Leader of the House will accept that we have been co-operative, but that there may have to be votes on some items of outstanding business.

On a different note, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) is particularly pleased that co-operation has extended to the Government dropping clauses 1 to 19 of the Education Bill. That will allow us to make progress.

Mr. Newton: First, I say straightforwardly that I share the hon. Lady's disappointment at the fact that I have not been able to make a statement covering Thursday as well. In a way, that point links with what she said about the Crime (Sentences) Bill and the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, and perhaps to a slightly lesser extent with what she said about the Education Bill, and the difficulties of planning. She will know that proceedings are proceeding in another place at this very moment on the Crime (Sentences) Bill. Inescapably, there are a number of uncertainties which put me in the position of not being as clear-cut with the House as I would otherwise wish to be. I take note of the hon. Lady's point, however, about the desirability of gaining certainty as soon as possible. I will do anything I can to achieve that.

I can confirm what the hon. Lady said about the private Members' Bills. We think that it is right to give the House a chance to express its opinion on the two Bills that have completed all stages in the Lords and are awaiting final stages in the Commons.

I agree that the Opposition have been co-operative in facilitating the passage of business in this unusual period. I note the hon. Lady's point about votes, and I also note her rather more political point about the Education Bill. I can say only that the Government are pleased that we have agreement to proceed with all the measures on discipline and standards, which account for three quarters of the Bill. We shall come back to the selection and grant-maintained deregulation measures at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): There were some rumours earlier today about the Adjournment slot tomorrow morning. Will the Leader of the House confirm that the debate will proceed on the basis of titled debates rather than involving a generality of subjects as it used to do when we had the debate on the Easter Adjournment and the rest? It would be for the convenience of the House if the right hon. Gentleman could clear up that matter.

I was pleased to be able to contribute to the agreement on the Education Bill; that is substantial progress. However, I must contrast that with the lack of the Official Opposition's continued opposition to the crime Bills. May I say in no uncertain terms so that there is no doubt that my right hon. and hon. Friends will resolutely use every opportunity that the dying hours of this Parliament afford us to oppose both the crime Bills and the Police Bill? Can the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that amendments to the two crime Bills will not be tagged on to the Lords amendments at the end of Wednesday's business to which he referred in his business statement, and that they will be dealt with in a proper, substantial debate on Thursday?

Mr. Newton: If I may take those points in reverse order, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the clear-cut undertaking that he asked for at the end of his remarks. The matter must inescapably be considered in the light of progress in another place. Apart from that, I note what he said on those matters. I am rather less able to confirm the co-operation of the Liberal Democrat party in these unusual days, as I have called them, because it is being totally unco-operative on Bills to which many people outside as well as inside the House attach very considerable importance in maintaining the fight against crime. I can confirm his understanding that the debates tomorrow will be of the kind that he indicated.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend give some assurance that, if not tomorrow at least on Friday, the recommendations dealing with tax simplification and the revision of Standing Orders will be put to a vote in the House so that they can be dealt with before Parliament is prorogued?

Mr. Newton: The basic answer to that question is yes. I hope that there will not be a vote, because the basis on which I am putting forward my right hon. Friend's Committee's proposals is that there is general agreement on them.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House explain why the Government in their last few days are subject to all this dither? This is the third business statement in two days in the last few days of this Parliament. Is it any wonder that "The Soaraway Sun" has deserted the tired, old Tories, who cannot even manage the last few days of this Parliament? It has obviously reckoned that it is time that they were gone. Get on with it, and let us get this other lot in.

Mr. Newton: All that I can say is that, on this occasion, if those on the Liberal Bench behind the hon. Gentleman were as co-operative as he is, we would not be having all these difficulties.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Albeit that it was drowned in ribaldry, during Prime Minister's Question Time the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) asked a perfectly legitimate question on cash for questions. Having now looked at—I will not say that I have read the entire thing—the complaint against the Home Secretary to which the Leader of the House referred me yesterday, may I say that some of us think that Mr. Mohammed Al-Fayed is something of a fantasist? If that is true, may we have an interim report for the protection of the good name of the House from what I gather is an absolutely massive amount of evidence in front of Sir Gordon Downey? Will the Government at least make an interim statement especially in relation to Mr. Mohammed Al-Fayed's claims, which were seen by so many people?

Mr. Newton: For reasons that I have rehearsed on a number of occasions in responding to the hon. Gentleman, I am not in a position to speak on behalf of the Government, as distinct from the Committee on Standards and Privileges, concerning the matter. Equally, were I to respond in quite the way that he has suggested, I would, in effect, be going beyond my powers as Chairman of a Committee whose reports have been the reports of a Committee and not produced at my dictation. I shall, however, certainly bring his remarks to the attention of the Committee. Indeed, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), who is a distinguished fellow member of it, has heard them.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): Can the electoral registration figures for England and Wales be published in the Library tomorrow? I understand that they are to be made available on Thursday. Whether any hon. Member may approach Madam Speaker about trying to use a procedural device in order to debate the figures depends on the time at which they are made available.

Mr. Newton: This is a little uncharitable of the hon. Gentleman in view of the efforts that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, the Director of the Office for National Statistics and I have made to meet his concerns. After what has been said on a number of occasions about the expectation that the statistics would be made available on 26 March, they will in fact be made available in the Library on Thursday 20 March in a pre-publication version entirely to respond to his pressure. What is more, the Office of National Statistics wrote to him very courteously and told him so.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Leader of the House aware that these daily piecemeal statements are totally unsatisfactory? The responsibility undoubtedly lies with the Prime Minister, who refused to disclose the date of the election, despite the fact that everybody knew that it would be 1 May. The Government are clearly ending in the same shambles in which they have been for the past five years—although I do not put any blame on the Leader of the House. If this is to be my last business question of this Parliament, may I thank him for the courteous manner in which he has dealt with business?

Mr. Newton: Those last remarks have completely blocked the answer that I was about to give the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I reminded the Leader of the House in last week's business questions of the statement by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that efforts were being made to table an all-party view of ministerial accountability in the form of a resolution. Has there been progress on that matter? Will there be such a resolution?

Mr. Newton: I realise that I announced so much that, as it were, hon. Members' eyes and minds may have

[Mr. Newton]

glazed over during it. I said that there will be a motion on ministerial accountability tomorrow, but I cannot say that it will necessarily be on an all-party basis because I understand that, as on a number of other issues, the Liberal Democrats have taken an idiosyncratic view.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The Leader of the House has responded to me on more than one occasion, the most recent occasion being Thursday, about the House debating the best option for dealing with the grotesque stockpile of the remains of more than 1 million cattle. Half an hour ago, I received a written answer that said the remains were being

"incinerated or stored safely pending destruction by the best practicable environmental option".

We have still not had the opportunity to debate or hear a ministerial statement on the best practicable environmental option for such destruction and what that might mean for future generations, who may be put at risk by the horrible stockpile that is building up all over the country.

Madam Speaker: Is the hon. Lady asking for a debate tomorrow?

Mrs. Jackson: I am.

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position to promise a debate tomorrow—unless you, Madam Speaker, indicate something about the debates you have chosen or the changing of them on the motion for the Adjournment. Once again, I undertake to draw the hon. Lady's concerns to the attention of my ministerial colleagues, although the answer that she was given seems reasonably clear.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South–West): Will the Leader of the House ask the Foreign Secretary to make a short statement tomorrow on the chaotic evacuation of over 65 British citizens—including a constituent of mine—from Albania on Wednesday? They were kept on the quayside in Durres for 14 hours without food and water and under constant threat of being killed by gunfire. I understand that HMS Birmingham, which was supposed to be there at the time, did not arrive until two days later.

Mr. Newton: I shall bring that request to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, although I cannot undertake to see that a statement is made. Without revealing any state secrets, I can confirm that I have read the telegrams from our people in Albania. It is clear that they have made every effort, in a difficult situation, to assist British citizens to the best of their ability.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will the Leader of the House comment on the complaint by Lord Justice Ackner earlier this afternoon in another place? He complained about the way in which the Government are bouncing through some of the criminal justice legislation without due consideration by either House. He called the Government's actions unconstitutional. While I recognise the need for collaboration by both sides of the House to get business through, we have a massive backlog of legislation because the Leader of the House has not properly programmed Parliament's time. Too much is going through in too short a time, without due debate. That is unfair and unconstitutional, and makes a mockery of the work of Parliament which is supposed to debate legislation and vote after due consideration.

Mr. Newton: In view of the attitude that the hon. Gentleman's colleagues on the Front Bench have taken to the legislation, his remarks might be directed to them, not to me. Beyond that, I have enough difficulty commenting on what is said in this Chamber, without committing the offence of commenting on what is said in another place.

Sir Michael Grylls (North–West Surrey): Will my right hon. Friend find time tomorrow to debate the excellent state of the British economy? I am sure that everybody in the House, and people outside, would like a debate so that they can understand the great strength of the British economy and how it is the best in Europe.

Mr. Newton: That is a very good idea, but, to my great regret, I cannot accommodate it.

BIRDS (REGISTRATION CHARGES) BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Read the Third time, and passed.

POLICE

Resolved,

That the draft Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Codes of Practice No. 4) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th March, be approved.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Criminal Law

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 (Code of Practice) (No. 2) Order 1997, dated 27th February 1997, which was laid before this House on 3rd March, be approved.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

6.32 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I would be grateful if the Minister would clarify one point on the powers of stop and search. As I understand the guidance that the Minister has published, the new powers depend on clearly identifying members of a gang and do not, therefore, amount to the reintroduction of wider powers of stop and search that might give rise to concern. That is an important point and concerns many people, so I would be grateful if the Minister could put his advice on the record.

6.33 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I am delighted to be able to confirm that the changes proposed are a response to the development of a perceived knife-carrying culture among some young people, and the formation of gangs in which knives are used with intent to maim or kill. There are additions to the code. If it is helpful, I will read out briefly the crucial part of the code, which is still there and which the order does not dilute. Section 1.7 of the code states:

"a person's colour, age, hairstyle or manner of dress, or the fact that he is known to have a previous conviction for possession of an unlawful article, cannot be used alone or in combination with each other as the sole basis on which to search that person. Nor may it be founded on the basis of stereotyped images of certain persons or groups as more likely to be committing offences."

I trust that that will assure the hon. Gentleman, on the record, that the new power cannot be twisted in any way and used as an excuse to stop people of an ethnic minority group or a certain age or colour. The additional powers to stop people who bear a distinctive insignia and who are part of a knife-carrying gang will be helpful to the police, who have warmly welcomed them.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the Minister. That clarification is important.

Question put and agreed to.

Treasure

6.34 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I beg to move,

That the Treasure Act 1996 draft Code of Practice (England and Wales), which was laid before this House on 13th March, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

That the Treasure Act 1996 Northern Ireland draft Code of Practice, which was laid before this House on 17th March, be approved.

Mr. Sproat: I apologise to the House for the fact that, because the statutory instruments are complex, I may have to take slightly longer than has been taken on the previous measures. The instruments seek the approval of the House for two draft codes of practice on the Treasure Act 1996.

It may be useful if I briefly remind the House of the scope and purpose of the Treasure Act 1996. The Act was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for South–West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant), to whom the House is deeply indebted, as a private Member's Bill, and it received Royal Assent last July. It was debated at some length both in the House and in another place, and it received all-party support.

The Act replaces the common law of treasure trove in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Treasure trove hitherto provided effectively the only legal protection afforded to antiquities found in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Under the old law of treasure trove, all finds of objects made of gold or silver had to be reported to the coroner. However, before an object could be declared treasure trove and be the property of the Crown, it had to pass three tests: it had to be made substantially of gold or silver; it had to have been deliberately hidden with the intention of recovery; and its owner or his heirs had to be unknown. Finds of treasure trove were offered to museums, which had to pay the full market value for them, and that was passed on to the finder as a reward: if no museum wished to acquire the find, it was returned, usually to the finder.

The Treasure Act 1996 reforms that ancient law. It removes the need to establish that objects were hidden with the intention of being recovered, except in a very few cases; it sets out the precious metal content required for a find to qualify as treasure; and it extends the definition of treasure to include other objects found in archaeological association with finds of treasure. The Act confirms that treasure vests in the Crown or the franchisee if there is one, subject to prior interests and rights. It simplifies the task of coroners in determining whether a find is treasure, and it includes a new offence of non-declaration of treasure. Lastly, it states that occupiers and landowners will have the right to be informed of finds of treasure their land on, and that they will be eligible for rewards.

A recent survey suggested that perhaps 400,000 archaeological objects are found each year with metal detectors. Over the past 10 years, 22 finds a year on average have been declared treasure trove. Those finds comprise on average 6,000 individual objects, so they

[Mr. Sproat]

amount to about 1.5 per cent. of the total number of objects found. We believe that the Act may double the number of cases of treasure, but that would increase the proportion covered from 1.5 per cent. to only 3 per cent. of objects found.

Section 11 of the Act requires my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to prepare a code of practice relating to treasure, to keep it under review, and to revise it when appropriate. The code has to set out the guidelines to be followed by my right hon. Friend when considering whether treasure should be offered to a museum, or to the finder, or to any other person, when determining a reward and when deciding whether to disclaim the Crown's title to treasure. The code may—and does—also provide guidance for finders, museums, coroners and others who are concerned with treasure.

Before preparing the code, my right hon. Friend was required to consult such interested parties as appeared to her to be appropriate and the code, or any revision of it, will not come into force until it has been approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament. My right hon. Friend is required to publish the code in such a way as will bring it to the attention of all interested parties, and she may publish separate codes for England and Wales, for Northern Ireland, and for different parts of England, Wales and Northern Ireland if deemed appropriate.

When the Treasure Bill was passing through Parliament, I gave a commitment that it would not come into force until the codes of practice had been approved by both Houses. I should explain why two codes have been drafted, the first to take effect in England and Wales, and the second in Northern Ireland. It was necessary to have two separate codes because of the different legislative regimes that exist in Northern Ireland and in England and Wales.

In the Province, under the terms of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, there is a statutory duty for finders to report all archaeological objects, and anyone excavating on any land for the purpose of searching for archaeological objects requires a licence. Neither of those provisions exists in England and Wales. The Northern Ireland code therefore follows the policy laid down in the code for England and Wales, but has been adapted to take account of the different statutory regime in the Province.

It may be helpful if I summarise what the codes do, and then describe the consultation process that we have gone through. As I have said, the codes have three main purposes. They describe the requirements of the Act, they provide guidance to finders of treasure, and they set out the guidelines on the payment of rewards.

First, the codes set out what objects should be reported, and where. Importantly, the English and Welsh code proposes that the Department will draw up local agreements for each coroner's district, setting out arrangements for the delivery of finds of treasure. Secondly, the codes give clear guidelines on which objects qualify because they are found in association with treasure. In addition, they urge metal detectorists to seek advice from archaeologists as soon as they come across any large or unusual finds, and state that they will not lose out if they do.

The codes urge archaeologists to involve finders in any archaeological investigation resulting from their finds, and confirm that objects that no museum wishes to acquire can be disclaimed without the need to hold an inquest, thus streamlining the system.

One issue that proved controversial when the Treasure Bill was debated in Standing Committee concerns the position of the bodies that held franchises. However, I am glad to tell the House that all the regular exercisers of franchises—there are only four of them—have agreed to abide by the principles of the code.

The codes set out revised guidelines on the valuation of finds of treasure that museums wish to acquire. At present, the independent treasure trove reviewing committee advises my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on such valuations, its role being to determine the full market value of the objects discovered. Under the old system, the national museums—that is, the British museum for England, and the national museums and galleries of Wales in the case of finds in Wales—used to submit valuations to the committee, which would then take further advice if it thought that necessary.

The codes propose that the national museums will no longer submit valuation reports. Instead, in all cases the committee will issue reports from independent experts drawn from the trade. Finders and museums will be able to comment on the valuations before the committee makes its recommendation, and finders will continue to be able to commission their own reports, as they can at present.

On the payment of rewards, the codes set out for the first time a comprehensive policy. The aim is to strike a balance between the interests of finder, occupier and landowner. The responses that we received from the consultation exercise suggest that we have done so.

To summarise, the codes state that, where the finder has permission to be on the land, rewards should continue to be paid in full to him or her. The burden of proof as to whether he has permission will rest with the finder, and if the finder has made an agreement with the occupier or landowner to share a reward, the Secretary of State will be prepared to follow the terms of the agreement.

Where the finder has been trespassing, he or she may expect a reduced reward, or none at all. For the first time, landowners or occupiers will be eligible for rewards in such cases. Lastly, the codes define the respective interests of the landowner and the occupier in cases in which they are eligible for rewards. The Act requires my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consult such persons as appear to her to be appropriate.

The first draft of the code was therefore issued for consultation on 17 December, with a request for comments to be made by 14 February. About 1,500 copies of the English and Welsh codes were sent out, and all the main interested parties were given an opportunity to comment. Those included all metal-detecting clubs, leading archaeological societies and museum bodies, selected museums, antiquarians, coin dealers and landowners' groups.

Although we had already fulfilled our legal obligations to consult to secure the widest possible consensus, on 28 February we circulated the revised draft of the English and Welsh versions of the code to the 50 or so organisations and individuals most closely interested in it.

Provided that the House and another place agree to approve those codes, we need a period during which the final version will be circulated as widely as possible

before the Act comes into force. That is why we propose that the commencement date of the Act should be 24 September. We expect to print up to 30,000 copies of the codes, and we shall also produce a leaflet or leaflets summarising the main points, which will be distributed even more widely. I commend the codes of practice to the House.

6.43 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (South–West Cambridgeshire): Over 32 years I have despairingly endeavoured to introduce private Members' Bills of one sort or another, so I am especially gratified that one of them—the Treasure Act 1996, as it now is—reached the statute book successfully.

The motion before the House is the final act and deed to put that excellent measure into effect. I hope that the House will pass it. I believe that if it does, we shall have put on to the statute book a measure that will contribute greatly to the heritage of our nation, and in which everybody can participate, whether they be detectorists, archaeologists or anyone else.

The measure brings common sense to a law that has been in need of reform since mediaeval times. I should like to say how grateful I am to the Department of National Heritage for all that it has done. I am especially grateful to Dr. Roger Bland, and, if I may say so, for the splendid co-operation that I have always had from the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). I wish the measure well.

6.44 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke–on–Trent, Central): We welcome the code of practice, and I am grateful to the Minister for laying out the detail. Many people have battled for years, both inside and outside the House, to bring the measure about, and I congratulate the hon. Member for South–West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) on his perseverance, and also Lord Perth on his work in another place.

I hear what the Minister says—that it makes sense to wait until September for the instrument to come into force. Indeed, we have been patient so long that I suspect that all the interested parties outside the House will understand that argument. They will also understand the part of the code that says that, because we shall be in new territory, in spite of the availability of the best expert advice—I might mention Dr. Roger Bland and others—nobody quite knows how the legislation will work in practice.

We appreciate the Government's caution in scheduling a review to take place in three years' time, so that we can see how the Act and the code are working. We welcome that, and I congratulate the Minister and the hon. Member for South–West Cambridgeshire on the new legislation. We look forward to its contributing to our cultural life and to a more orderly organisation of such matters.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Treasure Act 1996 draft Code of Practice (England and Wales), which was laid before this House on 13th March, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Treasure Act 1996 Northern Ireland draft Code of Practice, which was laid before this House on 17th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Sproat.]*

LEGAL AID AND ADVICE

Resolved,

That the draft Legal Aid (Functions) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

Resolved,

That the draft Legal Advice and Assistance (Scope) (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

POLICE AND FIREMEN'S PENSIONS BILL

Ordered,

That Standing Committee A be discharged from considering the Police and Firemen's Pensions Bill and that the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

PETITION

Prepayment Devices (North West Water)

6.46 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The petition is signed by 12,000 electors who live in the area served by North West Water, and arises out of their concern about the health and safety aspects of the company's plans to introduce prepayment devices that cut off households' water supply when the money runs out.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons render prepayment water devices illegal as a means of payment for water and sewerage services for low income families.

To lie upon the Table.

Child Poverty

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

6.47 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I have served as a Member of Parliament for 26 years, having entered the House 30 years ago, been rejected for four years by Slough but then been embraced in a love affair with Eccles. During that time I have done many things and had many interests as a parliamentarian, but the issue that has dominated my life has been that of children both here and abroad, and I wanted to go out on a note that highlighted that interest.

Next month, the Save the Children Fund will launch a national campaign concerning child poverty and nutrition. Later this week, the Child Poverty Action Group and the King's Fund will publish a report documenting for the first time the wide range of health problems associated with poverty among young people, including accidents, depression, drug abuse and suicide. The report also reveals that poorer young people run a four times higher risk of early death than those who are better off.

Those facts cannot be ignored; they describe our society today. Many Conservative Members might prefer to deny them, but there are appalling levels of poverty and inequality in this country.

I am sure that many people must have been shocked when Oxfam announced that it was to extend its poverty work to the United Kingdom, a full five years after the Conservative Government signed the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, which specifically called on states to take appropriate measures to combat disease and malnutrition through the provision of adequate nutritious foods, and to ensure that all segments of society were informed, had access to education and were supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition.

What is the Government's record on these issues? The Prime Minister, in what I thought was a breathtakingly complacent written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) last October, claimed:

"The United Kingdom has extensive social protection and assistance arrangements, among the most comprehensive in the world. It is by working to maintain and improve living standards through economic and social policies that we will fulfil the aspirations of the United Nations Year for the Eradication of Poverty, and in a way that is relevant to our society."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. 650.]

That statement should be considered in the context of the 3 million families on income support, or the 14.1 million people living in households with an income that is less than half the average. Of those people, 4.3 million are children—one in three children in the United Kingdom. The work of the family budget unit at York university shows the inadequacy of income support levels to provide minimum acceptable standards of living, including nutritional standards, for children.

If the Government are unwilling to acknowledge the existence of poverty, it follows that they will not be too keen to acknowledge the link between poverty and poor health. I pay tribute to health visitors: the professionals in the front line of defence against disease, ignorance and social inequalities. They are well equipped to report back on the nation's changing health profile. They are concerned about the mounting problems associated with poverty and poor nutrition among our children, and yet the health visitor service is being cut again.

Cambridge and Huntingdon district health authorities agreed on 26 February to cut the funding of health visiting and the school nursing service by £300,000. Buckinghamshire health authority and South Buckinghamshire NHS trust are proposing a 60 per cent. cut in school nursing. South and West Devon health authority is planning to reduce the number of school nurses by up to 50. I could go on. At least one national health service trust, the Mid-Anglia NHS trust in Bury St. Edmunds, has tried to take a do-it-yourself approach to health care by advising parents of rising two-year-olds to carry out their own developmental assessment of their children.

When the Health Visitors Association's report was mentioned in the House in January, the Deputy Prime Minister dismissed it out of hand and said that he did not accept its findings. I have not heard of any other research that has contradicted that report. It was a nationwide survey of social conditions at the end of the 20th century. It uncovered disturbing new evidence of widespread child malnutrition. Families live in overcrowded and inadequate accommodation, and suffer as a result of fuel debt and disconnections.

The Government must have a twinge of conscience about the return of rickets and tuberculosis among the child population. The report's conclusions were not the generalisations of a politician or political party, but based on first-hand information provided by concerned professionals who have had to pick up the pieces after almost 20 years of Tory government and, in the process, have discovered the return of the diseases and social conditions of the 19th century. *[Interruption.]* The Minister shakes his head, but that was in the report. If it is wrong, I hope that he will explain the position.

Jackie Carnell, director of the Health Visitors Association, said that great strides have been made in public health, due in no small part to the work of health visitors in preventing ill health. It is a tragedy that, as we approach the end of the 20th century, the many improvements in health and welfare are being undermined by the effects of desperate poverty on a national scale. Health visitors are uniquely placed to tackle many of those problems, so the service should be strengthened and expanded, not watered down and dismissed in the cold climate of Scrooge-style economics.

The survey found that almost one third of health visitors had had cases of tuberculosis in the previous 12 months, 61 per cent. had come across iron deficiency and 83 had had cases of failure to thrive. Those findings are more than backed up by an inner-city area report by Wendy Doyle for the British Medical Association. It shows that one third of 12 to 13-year-old girls in Hackney are calcium-deficient, one quarter are deficient in magnesium, and a quarter are deficient in zinc. Two thirds of health visitors have cases of families whose gas or electricity supply has been disconnected. Of the more than 5,600 families in the sample, 5 per cent. had had their water cut off.

Findings from the survey give an insight into the number of families suffering from disease and nutritional defects that are made worse by poor living conditions. Health visitors are frequently asked to help families who

live in unsuitable, overcrowded and inadequate accommodation, with poor facilities for preparing food. Half the health visitors in the United Kingdom deal with families living in unfit buildings with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities, which seriously hampers the hygienic preparation of food.

The "Milk for Schools" campaign produced a report last year called "The Hunger Within", which showed that the Government have given nutritional provision for children a low profile. Poor diet and poverty in childhood have long-term implications. Some of the effects are immediate, such as children falling asleep in their classrooms because they have had no proper food or breakfast. I know one teacher who keeps a supply of biscuits and fruit juice in the cupboard, which he gives to children whom he feels are undernourished.

The Minister may try to dismiss my comments as hearsay, but can he deny the evidence of a ward sister in a hospital in Romford in Essex, who yesterday wrote to me that tonsil operations were being delayed because a significant number of children were too anaemic to take the anaesthetic? A dental clinic in Leeds could not extract children's teeth, for the same reason.

Since the 1980s, the National Heart Forum has been concerned about the poor quality of children's diets, and the diet-related ill health that often begins in childhood. The poorest 20 per cent. of families spend on average £12.82 per person per week on food, and many spend far less. The effect of such low nutritional standards is appalling. Until 1980, school meals had to provide one third of a child's daily intake of energy and nutrients. It was a Tory Government who removed the obligation on local education authorities to meet nutritional standards.

More than 1 million school meals that are served daily are free, but the number of children in need of nutritional support is far greater. For example, children from families who do not qualify for income support but receive other benefits are not currently eligible. According to several surveys, 5 per cent. of children do not have a breakfast, and more than one quarter of them have no cooked meal, often because they are in accommodation that does not provide the wherewithal, so the school lunch is probably their most important meal of the day. We must ensure that it contains the essential nutrients for good health in both the short and the long term.

Several studies show that school meals play an important role for children from low-income families. Children from poorer families receive a significantly higher proportion of the day's nutritional intake from school meals than from any other source. It has been a cause of concern that the only meal provided at lunchtime is a sandwich.

Today's children are physically less active, but they still need a nutritionally dense diet. What they are currently offered is a diet that is high in fat, high in sugar, low in non-starch and low in iron and calcium. Research has found that an average school meal contains 46 per cent. fat, which exceeds the Government's recommendation of 35 per cent. A poor diet will affect children's general level of activity and their academic performance.

Without a proper nutritional base in childhood, people may suffer heart disease later on. That, as we know, is one of the major causes of death in the United Kingdom. An estimated 30 per cent. of such deaths are attributed to a wrong or poor diet. The disease process begins in childhood: thickening of the arteries has been seen in children under the age of 10. Obesity is on the increase. A study published in the British Journal of Nutrition estimated that the number of obese children doubled between 1980 and 1990. A change in school meal cooking methods and content could make a significant difference.

Dental decay is one of the most common diseases of childhood, with more than half of all children having dental decay before their second set of teeth. That is one reason why I am appalled by the widespread introduction of sweet-laden fizzy drinks and snack dispensers in schools—it is doing the children no favours. Iron deficiency—the main cause of anaemia—is three times more common in girls than in boys, for obvious reasons. As well as affecting tissue growth, it can lead to adverse effects on intellectual performance and behaviour.

I know that the Government are not entirely unaware of this problem, which is partly of their own making. Just as the Education Act 1980 abolished nutritional standards in school meals, so the Local Government Act 1988 introduced compulsory competitive tendering to the school meals service. Very few school meals contracts have mandatory standards for nutrients built into them—often, the cheapest bid wins the contract, with no compulsory nutritional base line. Caterers often opt for a cafeteria system, providing burgers and chips. Much of the monitoring of school meals contracts focuses on hygiene and health and safety, rather than on nutrition.

Last night—after intensive lobbying by trade unions such as Unison and health professionals—the Government issued guidelines for school meals which were welcomed by, among others, Professor Tim Lang, chair of the School Meals Campaign, but he added:

"We look forward to the guidelines becoming compulsory rather than voluntary. Ofsted could be given the power to ensure that school food providers are complying with the guidelines, highlighting the school meals service in the same way as they do educational performance."

The shadow Education Minister has pledged our determination to address the problem of inadequate nutrition in school meals and to introduce national nutritional standards. Some 4 million United Kingdom children eat just one meal a day, and the Government have a duty to ensure that that meal is a good one.

The poorest 25 per cent. of society spend £1.64 a day on food—that is a fact. Official food consumption statistics, according to Suzi Leather's excellent book "The Making of Modern Malnutrition", show that the people in the largest poor families eat, on average, the equivalent in nutritional terms of a couple of Brussels sprouts per person per day for their nutritional value. The fresh food consumption of the largest poor families is the equivalent of one quarter of an apple a day. In large poorer families, the consumption of fresh green vegetables has dropped to one third of the amount eaten in 1980.

The growth of out-of-town shopping has had an enormous impact on the diets of the poorest. In a six-year period, 30 per cent. of greengrocers closed. As one mother of two put it:

"It costs money to go to the shops. It costs us £7 to get to the shops and back—and we are only spending £30 a week on food for all four of us."

[Miss Joan Lestor]

A recent study carried out by the London school of economics compared the shopping basket prices of small shops and supermarket chains, and the price difference could amount to between 10 per cent. and 30 per cent., depending on the food bought.

We underestimate the considerable psychological stress that results from food poverty on parents, who feel that they are failing their children by not providing the right food, and on children, who see their parents going without to feed them. In the words of one mother of two with a husband on a low wage:

"I don't always eat. I sometimes have breakfast, about four times a week. I always go without lunch, just a cup of tea, and very often without an evening meal. I might eat up what the kids leave. Saturday evening is the only good meal of the week."

That is happening in 1997.

As we approach the millennium, official concern about child nutrition and poverty seems to be reaching an all-time low. As Suzi Leather so effectively points out, the last decade and a half has seen the systematic reduction in state support for the diets of the most vulnerable—especially our children. Let us look at the details. In 1971, Thatcher's milk legislation abolished free school meals. In 1980, school meals were deregulated and nutritional standards abolished. The Social Security Act 1986 cut the number of children entitled to free school meals by one third, and made the provision of schools milk discretionary.

In 1988, special dietary additions were abolished, compulsory competitive tendering was introduced to the school meals service, and single payment grants for items such as cookers and fridges were replaced with social fund loans. In 1992, further social security changes took away from 35,000 of our children entitlement to free school meals, and removed the educational entitlement of all secondary school children to education in nutrition and cooking skills under the national curriculum. Finally, the 1995 Budget saw the Government opt out of the EU scheme which subsidises the use of milk as an ingredient in school meals and the provision of milk for drinking in secondary schools.

As we approach the millennium, these facts are affecting a large number of our children. We tend to look at the children of successful people and those who come from homes and families which can afford proper food, but there are thousands of children who do not eat proper food and who are deficient in a variety of ways. Child poverty, poor nutrition and ill health—both short and long-term—are linked. To ensure healthy children, society must help their parents by achieving improvements in income and living standards. We need access to healthy diets in schools and we need to help parents.

I believe that the Government have failed our children, and have neglected to see what is taking place in schools and the poverty being experienced by many of our children. The Government have a duty to ensure that proper investment in our children should include a substantial nutritional element. I am sure that the next Labour Government will do that.

7.6 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I should like to pay tribute to the speech we have just heard from the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), in which she displayed the social conscience that she has shown whenever she has spoken in the House. The subject of her speech is dear to her heart, and has a local bearing, but during her time on the Opposition Front Bench she has spoken robustly in favour of assistance for countries overseas that are not as well provided for as we are. In doing so, she has displayed her social conscience and fought her corner with a robustness which sometimes has not received the recognition it deserves. I am sure that the House will be much diminished following her departure, and I wish to use this opportunity on behalf of Conservative Members to pay tribute to the work that she has done as an honourable Member of this House.

7.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) in paying tribute to the hon. Member for Eccles. She said that she wanted to go out on a high note because of her continued commitment to children, both in this country and overseas. I would like to pay tribute to her for her work over the past 20 years, and for the passion of her views. Obviously, she will not be surprised to learn that I do not share her concluding views, and she was unduly harsh on the Government. As she has wide experience in this House, she would not expect me to necessarily agree with everything that she said in a well thought out, detailed and knowledgeable speech.

The vast majority of households are better off as a result of the Government's policies: average income has risen by more than a third—by 37 per cent.—between 1979 and 1993-94, and those rises are not confined to a few top earners. Average income is up for all family types throughout the country.

It is a fallacy to claim that there are more children living below the poverty line than ever before. Such a claim, which rests on equating the poverty line with the income support level, would imply that any increase in benefit levels brings about an apparent increase in poverty, and that, conversely, by cutting benefit levels we could reduce the numbers on low incomes.

The facts are that those usually thought of as poor have also seen their income increased in the past 18 years. For example, a typical unemployed couple with two children, receiving income support, is 20 per cent. per week better off in real terms than in 1979. The less well-off, the bottom 10 per cent., now possess more consumer durables. The possession of such items as telephones and central heating is up by more than a half, and half those people now have cars and video recorders.

We have continued to concentrate help where it is most needed, on low-income families, less well-off pensioners and sick and disabled people on low incomes. Extra help is available to low-income families through income-related benefits worth about £1.4 billion a year more, in real terms, than in 1988. More than 706,000 families benefit every week from family credit payments.

Family credit, a benefit introduced by the Government, plays an important part in helping families with children to break out of the poverty trap, making easier the jump from the state benefit system back into work by raising their incomes through the early stages of their return to work. That is an important help, which has enabled 706,000 families to get back into work and enhance their standard of living.

The biggest cause of low income is unemployment, which has fallen by 1.1 million since December 1992. We are building on that, as recent unemployment figures have shown. I cannot anticipate what the figures will show tomorrow, but I have no reason to doubt the continuing economic recovery of this country. We have an economy that is the envy of our European partners, and that should continue to develop and strengthen in a stable and excellent way, bringing benefits to both individuals and their families, and to manufacturing, the retail sector and others.

About 750,000 people a year will benefit from a range of innovative measures announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in his 1994 Budget to help people to move into and stay in work. From April this year, the parent plus initiative will offer help to up to 100,000 lone parents on income support to get back to work: £20 million will be invested in the scheme and supporting initiatives. It will be piloted for three years in 12 Benefits Agency districts, covering almost one tenth of Britain.

Of course we acknowledge that there is an association between health and socio-economic status: that is not unique to this country, but is seen throughout the developed world. There are also variations in health between different areas and social and ethnic groups, and between men and women. The experts agree that there are likely to be many factors at work: living and working conditions, resources, individual preferences and social relationships.

The Government are determined to work towards improving the health of the nation and breaking down the barriers between the different factors that can have an adverse impact on individuals' health, be they adults or children. Through the "Health of the Nation" initiative, we have set targets for improving health. We are the first Government to do so. Within those targets, we have asked health authorities to work with others to concentrate efforts on those whose needs are greatest. That means that we can focus on those who face poorer health than others, whether because of low income, gender, ethnicity or geography.

I want now to concentrate on the more narrow and focused area of children's health and nutritional requirements. The hon. Member for Eccles mentioned a number of issues relating to children's health, on which I am afraid that I cannot agree with her conclusions.

We know that children of all ages and in all population groups are taller and heavier than before. No group shows the signs of faltering growth that could result from under-nutrition. Indeed, Government surveys of food, nutrition and diet over the past 20 years have shown consistently that there is no evidence of malnutrition in British children. The average intake of nutrients for all groups surveyed is above the appropriate dietary reference value. The exceptions are for iron in women and girls, and calcium in some adolescent girls, but those exceptions cut across all socio-economic groups.

It is important at this stage to define a healthy diet, because I believe that there is a great deal of confusion on the subject among too many people. A healthy diet, as the hon. Member for Eccles will know, is a well-balanced and varied diet. It should consist of foods in the following groups: bread, other cereals, potatoes, fruit and vegetables, milk and dairy foods, meat, fish and alternatives.

It is important for people to understand the fundamental basis of a healthy diet. The diet of British schoolchildren is important. The growth of primary school children between the ages of five and 11 in England and Scotland was monitored between 1972 and 1994 by the national study of health and growth, which was funded by the old Department of Health and Social Security and the current Department of Health.

In 1995, the health survey for England took over that responsibility. The NSHG has demonstrated consistently over the years that children of all ages, in all population groups, including low-income, inner-city and ethnic-minority groups, are growing taller and heavier than before. That is significant, because it suggests that there is no evidence of under-nutrition among young people and children in this country.

A summary of the results of the survey, "Trends in Growth in England and Scotland", was published in a scientific journal on 11 March and generated much media attention, as it claimed to show that, although children in all groups studied had grown on average taller and heavier year on year, that was not wholly good news, because fatness among the children had also increased markedly. It was speculated that that was due to increasingly inactive life styles over the period.

The heights and weights of children were measured by the national diet and nutrition survey, which was published in 1995. It showed that children in all groups had heights and weights at or above the national standard—again, no sign of the faltering growth that may be due to under-nutrition. It is important to have that on the record, so that people do not misunderstand the results of the expert research.

There is no recent representative study of children in secondary school, but the Department of Health and Social Security survey of the diets of British schoolchildren carried out in 1982–83 found that both 10 to 11-year-olds and 14 to 15-year-olds were growing taller and heavier than ever before. That reflected the evidence of the research I mentioned earlier, on the younger age group. The field work suggests that there is no evidence of under-nutrition. A survey of the diets of more than 3,000 children aged 10 to 11 and 14 to 15 carried out in 1982–83 showed that, for intakes of all nutrients, children were above recommended levels. That adds weight to the argument that there is no under-nutrition.

Some recent surveys claim to show that a significant proportion of women on income support are seriously deficient in several essential vitamins and minerals, causing low birth weights and a high rate of infant mortality. However, our records show that infant deaths—deaths of babies under one year—which is accepted internationally as an indicator of general health, are at their lowest rate ever.

In social classes IV and V, infant death rates have fallen by more than half over the past 15 years. Infant death rates in social class V are better than those of social class I only 15 years ago. The trend is towards steadily improving health. I am sure that the hon. Lady welcomes that, because it is a great step forward for the infant mortality rate to drop so dramatically over a relatively short period.

The hon. Lady mentioned reports on nutrition-related diseases. The claim that children are living in poverty on inadequate diets concerns us all and cannot be lightly

[Mr. Simon Burns]

dismissed, even if we are not prepared to agree that there is evidence from proper research to back up that claim. In recent years, several reports have claimed exactly that. As she said—they are her words, not mine—they claim that we are returning to 19th-century levels of illness, with rickets and iron deficiency on the increase. Those claims are not borne out by the facts. I repeat that, because it is important: the claims are not borne out by the facts.

Let us take, for example, rickets. There is no reliable evidence that rickets, which is caused by vitamin D deficiency, is on the increase. In fact, there is good evidence that rickets, which used to be especially prevalent among Asian communities, is no longer a significant problem for those groups.

We know of occasional cases of rickets associated with extreme diets. Every effort is being made to identify their causes, with a view to reducing even those isolated cases by, for example, making available vitamin drops containing vitamin D for pregnant and lactating women, and for children under five. They are available free to families on income support, income-related jobseeker's allowance or family credit. They are available at low cost through child health clinics to the rest of population.

I caution against relying on anecdotal reports of rickets in the medical literature on extreme diets. As I have said, there is no reliable evidence that rickets is on the increase, and we have evidence to show that it is declining. The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy has established an expert working group to consider the nutritional aspects of bone health in the UK population. A report from the group is expected in 1998.

On 2 January, field work for the national diet and nutritional survey of young people aged four to 18 years started. That will measure all aspects of the diet and nutritional status of young people, and will be an important enhancement of our knowledge and understanding, based on scientific and medical research.

The hon. Lady mentioned tuberculosis, which is also worrying. I agree that no one should downgrade or dismiss the problems, suffering and misery associated with it. However, the UK has an excellent record of TB control, and we are determined that that should continue. TB notification in England and Wales has reached the low level of fewer than 6,000 cases a year, compared with around 50,000 a year in 1950, only 47 years ago. She will agree that that is a dramatic drop over a relatively short period in the history of medical science.

Our success has been achieved against the background of a worldwide resurgence of TB, which is having a small but important impact on UK trends. The Government are responding positively to adverse developments abroad by strengthening our policies to protect the health of the nation against TB. Notifications of TB tend to be higher in more deprived, inner-city areas, but that does not mean that poverty and TB go hand in hand. That is down to the co-existence of some key risk factors, including a high proportion of ethnic minority groups, higher levels of HIV infection, and homelessness. We are working to deal with the specific needs of those groups by the following measures.

We are considering how to improve screening procedures for immigrants from countries with a high incidence of TB, which will allow us to treat them more effectively. A working group on TB set up by the Department of Health to recommend further improvements in TB prevention and control published two reports last summer. One, entitled, "Tuberculosis and Homeless People", considers in detail the special needs of homeless people. We are acting on its recommendations.

Finally, and most importantly, our BCG immunisation programme to protect against TB is continuing. BCG immunisation is routinely recommended for all schoolchildren aged between 10 and 14. In addition, immunisation of high-risk groups and babies continues. That wide-ranging package should allow us to continue our proud record of TB control. I hope that the hon. Lady is reassured by those Government actions.

I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive for me dealing with anaemia, which is an important problem associated with children, but one that she did not mention. Anaemia is the clinical manifestation of iron deficiency. Its prevalence among young children has been monitored by the national diet and nutrition survey of children aged one and a half to four and a half years, which was published 1995. Seven per cent. of males and 9 per cent. of females in that age group had haemoglobin levels below the 11 g/dl World Health Organisation level which is considered indicative of anaemia.

On 2 January 1997, field work for the national diet and nutrition survey of young people aged four to 18 years started. It will include measures of iron status. The joint Department of Health/Medical Research Council nutrition research programme will fund research to help develop better measures of iron status. The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy has agreed to convene an expert group to assess the iron status of the population. Although the group has not yet started work, it will do in due course.

Related to anaemia and iron deficiency is the question of healthy eating, which is important for everyone. Research shows that many young people could eat a better balanced diet that was less rich in fat. The hon. Lady devoted a significant proportion of her speech to the problems associated with the quality of the diet given to children by their parents. With the advent of fast food, that is a problem, because young children and teenagers are attracted to hamburgers, beefburgers and fried chicken rather than to what nutritionists consider a more responsible, sensible and healthy diet.

May I briefly explain the background to school food? As the hon. Lady will know, under sections 512 and 534 of the Education Act 1996, local education authorities and grant-maintained schools were given the responsibility for the presentation, content and cost of school meals. They must provide free meals to children whose parents receive income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance. They are not obliged to provide meals for other pupils, but in practice most schools do. The price of meals can be subsidised by LEAs and schools.

The development of practical national guidance for the school catering sector was taken on by the nutrition task force's catering working group, which set up a sub-group consisting of representatives from the catering world, the health education world, school meals providers and local authorities. The guidance is based on detailed nutritional guidelines for school meals, drawn up by the Caroline Walker Trust.

The project team has developed voluntary guidance in three parts. The first is aimed at head teachers and governors; the second at LEAs and grant-maintained schools; and the third at school caterers. There are no plans to introduce compulsory nutritional guidelines, and the guidance makes no reference to recent food scares, but it provides guidance which should have a positive and beneficial effect on the balance of the diet of school children.

If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I shall stray into controversial politics, briefly and in narrow terms. I do not want to let pass one of her comments. She said that, in 1971, my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven withdrew free school milk. The hon. Lady is factually correct, but, if my memory serves me right, there was a Labour Government between February 1974 and May 1979, and they made no attempt to reintroduce school milk.

My memory is now getting better. I think that the hon. Lady was a junior Education Minister during part of that period. I should be interested to know why the policy was not reversed, especially given the hon. Lady's ministerial capacity. Did she passionately believe in reintroducing school milk? Did she fight her corner vigorously and discreetly outside the glare of the media? Was she, unfortunately from her point of view, unsuccessful?

Miss Lestor: I will not go out on a note of discord. All that I will say is that it was wrong to abolish free school milk, because milk is essential to the diet of all our children.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the hon. Lady.

To get off controversial political issues, I turn to food and the national curriculum, which the hon. Lady mentioned. Food is now a compulsory part of the design and technology curriculum up to key stage 2. It is a voluntary topic in key stage 3. Nutrition is already a specified part of the science curriculum, so children are now assured of a better grounding in nutrition than ever before.

As in so many other things in life—such as the age-old problem of litter and the problem of drink-driving—good nutrition requires a process of education. A lost generation of parents in their 20s and 30s are not interested in nutritional balance in the diet, so they are not the people best qualified to provide guidance to their children at home on a properly balanced diet.

As the hon. Lady rightly said about the school education system, we may have to educate people from the bottom up through their children. That is important. The nutrition components of the curriculum at key stages 2 and 3 are a way of seeking to undo some of the damage that has happened, because a lost generation of parents all too often take the easy option. Now Kentucky fried chicken and Big Macs and other hamburgers are popular. When I was a teenager, the less glamorous fish and chip shop provided almost the only source of fast food.

When I was at school, school food was notorious for its poor quality and variety. Although life has probably improved, I suppose that it has not done so all that dramatically. At my school, if it was Monday it was Irish stew. If it was Tuesday, it was minced beef. If it was Wednesday, it was Irish stew with a pastry top. If it was Thursday, it was shepherd's pie. If it was Friday, it was fish fingers. If it was Saturday, it was something cold, such as spam or ham. If it was Sunday, we got roast beef, roast lamb or sometimes roast chicken, depending which Sunday of the month it was. The quality was appalling. The variety was non-existent, because there was no choice.

Most children will vote with their feet if they do not like the food that is put before them. They refuse to eat it. They go out and spend their money on fast food, or badger their parents to buy it for them. It is easier for some parents to take that option than to go through all the trouble of preparing and cooking vegetables and meat, or whatever, at home, then sitting down and eating it and clearing up afterwards. It is easier to go to a fast food outlet and buy meals with few nutritional benefits for children or adults.

Mr. Colvin: I am interested in what my hon. Friend is saying about fast food and the importance of school meals. I happen to represent a constituency—or rather, I hope to represent the constituency after the election—in which one of the largest apple farms in the country, run by the John Lewis Partnership, is situated. We produce Cox's orange pippins.

There is a good case to be made for ensuring that an apple a day is on the menu of every child in school. It is an old adage, I know, that an apple a day keeps the doctor away, but it is true. It is also important that the apples distributed in schools are British, not apples drawn in from continental suppliers, under whatever name. There is nothing like an apple a day, and it ought to be a Cox's orange pippin.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend is extremely fortunate to have such an orchard in his constituency.

Mr. Colvin: Constituency-to-be. We have had a boundary change.

Mr. Burns: I am sorry. I am about two weeks ahead of my time—or six weeks.

I am sure that the owners of the orchard will have heard his comments today. I was brought up on an apple a day to keep the doctor away. I agree that there is a great deal to be said for it.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I was interested in what my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) had to say about apples. I must first declare an interest, in that my father-in-law was an apple grower, and some of my wife's family are still apple growers.

My hon. Friend said that all apples served in British schools should be English apples. Although that is clearly preferable, is my hon. Friend aware that a Cox can only keep for about eight months, and that there is therefore always a window in which one cannot supply the market with English apples? It is one of the great tragedies of the British apple industry that, from April to August, there can be no English apples on the market. Will he bear that in mind when considering the issue?

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that highly technical information. It is wonderful what one can learn from one's colleagues while standing at the Dispatch

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Box, and I shall certainly bear his remarks in mind. A British apple would be best, but, given the problem of the window in which, for seasonal reasons, one cannot find or buy British apples, we are fortunate to be living in a society that can import apples, so that people are not be deprived of their daily apple, even if it is not their daily British apple.

Returning to the question of food and nutritional benefits to children and young people, it is appropriate to mention the welfare food scheme, which provides a nutritional benefit in kind, rather than in cash, for pregnant and breast-feeding mothers, and for children under five in low-income families.

As the hon. Member for Eccles is probably aware, the main provision of the scheme is that expectant and breast-feeding mothers and children under five in families in receipt of income support or an income-based jobseeker's allowance receive the following free of charge. Welfare milk beneficiaries receive a milk token per week, which may be exchanged for seven pints or eight half-litres of liquid milk. Infants under one year who are being bottle-fed may receive instead 900 g per week of a range of specified brands of infant formula. Vitamin supplements beneficiaries receive either vitamin drops or tablets containing vitamins A, D and C.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister—having only just come into the Chamber, it is rather impertinent of me to intervene in his speech. He has been talking about a range of benefits, but is there not some rumour that, dependent on the election results, there might be some risk to child benefit and related allowances? May I take it that the Conservative party is committed to the existing position, and that, along with the benefits about which he has been speaking, those benefits will be maintained? If, perchance and by severe misadventure, there should be a change of Government, is it not true that some of those benefits might be at risk?

Mr. Burns: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's perspicacious views. As he rightly points out, the Conservative Government pledged—and have honoured the pledge throughout the life time of this Parliament—to maintain child benefit for all mothers with children under a certain age. I do not know how much the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and his spin doctors have been arguing with the shadow Cabinet, but there have indeed been rumours and announcements that the shadow Chancellor was going to get tough and cut off child benefit for 16 to 19-year-olds who are still in school.

That would have an impact on the financial position of many families. If a universal benefit paid to all mothers with children of the qualifying age was cut off, those on low incomes would suffer, as well as those in middle or high income brackets. I know that any such proposal would be ring-fenced, so that anyone in receipt of a state benefit such as income support would not have their child benefit cut off, but there are many families who are above income support level but are not rich or well-off, and their family income would be cut. That tax-free sum would be taken from them, and they would have less money to spend on good-quality food to help to give their children a proper balanced diet.

Miss Lestor: The hon. Gentleman is being rather unfair, and is taking advantage of a situation. As I understand it, what has been discussed or said is that there is a problem whereby the children of the rich stay on at school, such as those at Eton college which is in my old constituency, and their parents, who can well afford to keep them at school, receive child benefit for them; whereas children of poorer families would often like to stay on at school if the benefits made if possible for them to do so, but they cannot.

The proposition that was discussed—there has been no policy announcement—was how resources could be switched away from those who do not need them towards those who need them most, and thus encourage them to stay on at school because it is in their interests to do so. That is what the argument was about; it was not about removing child benefit from poor families, and the Minister knows that.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that clarification. As a member of the Labour party, she may be better equipped to know exactly what was going on in the internecine wars of the shadow Cabinet. One of the problems currently facing the country is that, all too often, the Labour party does not tell us what its policies are, whether on child benefit or a windfall tax.

From the announcements on child benefit, which might affect the diet and the nutritional value of meals for teenagers, my understanding was that the benefit was going to be cut for all 16, 17 and 18-year-olds in this country except those whose families were on benefit. That would hit the less well-off who are above benefit level as much as it would hit the families mentioned by the hon. Lady whose children are at Eton college. Poorer families would be hit far harder than rich families, and it could adversely affect not only their diets but the quality of the food in their homes.

Mr. Colvin: I very much doubt whether any families with children at my old school actually claim child benefit, but, were they to do so, a fair way of solving the problem would be to tax the benefit. I cannot understand why either party cannot have a policy stating that that sort of benefit should be taxed, because that would ensure that no one had an unfair advantage.

Mr. Burns: I shall not stray into taxation policy, because I may incur your displeasure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which is the last thing I want to do.

I should like to say to my hon. Friend that there are assisted places at Eton for young boys—as far as I know, Eton college is not co-educational—so many families benefit under the assisted places scheme. As he knows, the Labour party plans to phase out that scheme and reinvest the money in health education. That will affect the psychological health of a child who previously thought that, because of his academic achievement, he would benefit from an assisted place, but then found that he would not be able to do so, because some future Labour Government had phased it out.

That raises another interesting point, which puzzles me. I do not know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether you saw Mr. Jeremy Paxman in a razor-sharp interview of the

right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on "Newsnight" last night. If not, I strongly suggest that you go to the House of Commons Library and get a video of it. It was an eye-opener. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield did not seem to be very persuasive about the money that would come from the assisted places scheme, which would be phased out and would therefore not provide a lot of money at once. I also do not think that he has considered the psychological effects of Labour's pernicious policy of depriving bright people of the opportunity to attend a school to which their parents could not otherwise afford to send them.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend said that there were one or two things that he did not know about Labour party policy. He should get a copy of tonight's *Evening Standard*, which says that there are 50 things we do not know about Labour party policy. To return to the issue of food and nutrition—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman is right to do so.

Mr. Marshall: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was about to deal with the subject of food, nutrition and young children.

Does my hon. Friend agree that income is one of the factors determining the amount of nutrition that parents can afford to give their young children, and that that income is very much a function of whether they are in employment? Does he not therefore agree that there are very real risks to young children's nutritional standards from certain proposals that will be made in the United Kingdom?

Does my hon. Friend agree that a national minimum wage would affect young children, because their parents will become unemployed? Does he also agree that the social chapter would affect them? On food and nutrition, is he aware that the Brewers Society has suggested that the minimum wage would add 7p to a pint of beer?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that interventions are almost becoming tedious repetition. I hope that it will not be necessary for me to pull up him or any other hon. Member on that point again.

Mr. Burns: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will certainly do my best not to be tedious or repetitive.

I was explaining to the hon. Member for Eccles the important welfare food scheme. I should like to return to one point—not for the purpose of repetition but because, due to the enthusiasm of my hon. Friends, I suspect that the hon. Lady would like me to jog her memory. I was saying that welfare milk beneficiaries receive one milk token per week, which may be exchanged for seven pints or eight half litres of liquid milk. Infants under one year who are being bottle-fed may receive 900 g per week of a range of specified brands of infant formula. Vitamin supplement beneficiaries receive either vitamin drops or droplets containing vitamins A, D and C.

Parents of children aged under one in families in receipt of family credit are entitled to purchase at a reduced price—currently £3.65—900 g of infant formula per week from clinics.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Burns: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I should like to finish the section on welfare food schemes. I shall then be delighted to give way.

Liquid milk means whole or semi-skimmed liquid cows' milk, including long-life or UHT milk but not fully skimmed milk. I am sure that the hon. Member for Eccles will agree that that is a wide range, in a time when consumers want choice and shop around for the different types of milk that they think is particularly suitable for their family. The scheme has embraced that principle.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend think that it is not consistent or logical to say that children's nutrition and their family's wealth necessarily go together, and that there is not necessarily such a correlation? Cannot people spend large sums on food that is not nutritious? Does he not agree that it is fundamentally important that schools across the United Kingdom should have programmes to educate people on family nutrition?

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid and important point, which is similar to the one about the person who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing. Any individual can spend a considerable sum on food, but merely because the food is expensive does not mean that it is good food with nutritional value, or that it has as much nutritional value as other types of food that might be infinitely cheaper. As he said, the important factors are knowledge of the type of food one buys, why one should buy good food, and how one's family and oneself can benefit to the maximum extent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) has rightly said that education is fundamentally important. As he will be aware, key stages 2 and 3 of the national curriculum provide for such information and knowledge to be provided to young children. As I told the hon. Member for Eccles—to avoid being out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not elaborate in detail—we may well have a lost generation of parents, who are aged in their 20s and 30s, who never received such education. They do not understand the problems, and think that they can put any type of food in front of a child. That is why we may have to educate those parents through their children.

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend almost anticipated my supplementary question. What about that lost generation of parents who do not know how best to feed their children? What about that lost generation of parents who spend disposable income on Haagen-Dazs ice cream, which may taste nice but is not nutritious? What is his Department doing to educate parents who did not benefit from current educational programmes?

Mr. Burns: As my hon. Friend will be aware, the Department of Health is extremely concerned about

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educating individuals—whether they are children, teenagers, young adults, adults or the elderly—on all health matters, such as nutrition, preventative medicine and looking after themselves. It is also concerned about ensuring that we improve, through "The Health of the Nation" targets, the health of the nation; it is as simple as that. One method is through diet.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Notwithstanding Haagen-Dazs ice cream and its nutritional qualities, and the states in which some people eat it—I gather that some people like to eat it in various states of undress—does not the matter have some bearing on a slightly attached but distant subject: how people are educated about food in schools, such as in domestic science? We know that that is not a specific part of the national curriculum. Does my hon. Friend not think that perhaps we should be thinking of pushing people down that road in the future, when we return from the general election?

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; education has a key role to play, as I was saying to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire. As I said, part of the national curriculum, in key stages 2 and 3, deals with nutrition, food and dietary requirements. It is an important function of the national curriculum.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Was not there a little bleeping just now in the Chamber?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There has been a little bleeping going on for quite a while. I did not hear the latest one.

Mr. Burns: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there is a bleeping, and it puts me in a rather difficult position. I am not being paged by a spin doctor, and I have set my pager to vibrate rather than to bleep. Unfortunately, however, the battery in my pager has run down. If you will allow me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will turn it off.

I should now like to make some progress.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, because I know that there have been many interventions in his reply to this important debate. On the subject of education, would he say that his Department is in constant correspondence and linking with special needs education in the Department of Education and Employment, with which I am involved?

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend has raised an important subject. The Department of Health is in constant touch with all Government Departments and, through the Children's Services Strategy Group with local authorities, discussing children's issues—special needs, diet and nutrition, and many other important areas that affect the lives of children.

Healthy eating is important for everyone. A balanced, sensible diet is critical. Education is needed; we must make sure that everyone is aware of the best nutritional foods, so as to enhance and maintain the health of families and the community at large.

If this was the hon. Lady's swan song, she certainly went out on the high she hoped to reach when she began her speech, on which I congratulate her. Given her commitment and interest, she will be sorely missed by hon. Members, who have never once questioned the sincerity of her commitment to improving the lives of children, in this country and around the world. She will indeed be greatly missed.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 19 March 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Earth Summit II

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Madam Speaker: Mr. Cynog Dafis.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I do not wish to delay proceedings this morning, but I should be grateful if you would give me guidance. The day before yesterday, I sent you a written application to launch a brief emergency debate under Standing Order No. 20 about the drastic situation concerning the future of Edgware general hospital. I am not commenting or complaining about the fact that I have not received a reply—I am sure that you are very overloaded with work, Madam Speaker—but I wonder whether I may press that point further by way of a point of order, and raise the matter briefly, either now or at 3.30 this afternoon, at your discretion.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may not raise the matter now. I am sure that he has been in the House long enough to know that the Speaker does not respond to applications under Standing Order No. 20 or applications for private notice questions unless the response is positive.

9.35 am

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I thank you, Madam Speaker, for allocating time for this important debate. It has been sought by an informal group of Members working together on a cross-party basis, as a way of highlighting Earth summit II and the issues with which it is concerned.

It is fair to give notice of the fact that, if the members of the informal group are re-elected, which we fully intend to be, we shall continue to be active on the subject after the election—reinforced, I hope, by the increasing number of people, including other Members of Parliament, who see sustainable development as the central issue of our time.

Nothing could be more important than the cluster of issues brought together under the term "sustainable development"—the maintenance of a healthy environment, which is the basis of all our prosperity and success, as well as of all our cultural and spiritual fulfilment, and the issue of social and global equity regarding the satisfaction of human needs.

Those two themes convey what sustainable development amounts to, and what Earth summit II—the United Nations General Assembly special session in June, which is part of the Rio session—is about. Earth summit II offers us a chance to put new and much-needed urgency and impetus into the process.

We have been glad to receive assurances both from the Prime Minister and from the man whom I must describe as the likely next Prime Minister to the effect that whichever of them is elected to that office will attend Earth summit II. In his letter to me, the Leader of the Opposition said:

"I certainly agree with you about the enormous significance of the event",

and the Prime Minister speaks in similar terms.

"Enormous significance"—that is strong language, and there is every justification for using it. We should make no mistake about the fact that sustainable development is a radically different way of organising the economy and society. I do not think that enough people have managed even to begin to comprehend that. Mainstream economists, politicians and the public at large have barely begun to understand the concepts underlying sustainable development, much less the means by which they can be given substance.

Mr. Dykes: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it has been noteworthy throughout the argument, all over the world and within the United Nations, that the European Union has played a leading and united role in promoting those good causes? Is not strength through unity another example of the way in which the United Kingdom can play an efficient role within a united European Union?

Mr. Dafis: That is a useful intervention, and I emphasise the fact that the European Union has a potentially key role to play. It has prepared an enlightened and advanced position paper that stresses the importance of moving now to implementation—actual action—on sustainable development. The Rio process emphasises global and regional activity—that means European activity—as well as national and local activity. All those levels of activity have a role to play. There is an enormous task in providing basic education which has still to be done.

I can do no better than quote Klaus Topfer, the former chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development and German Environment Minister, who is one of the great leaders in the global movement for sustainable development. He says:

"We need a radical ecological structural change in the economy and society and the extension of economic and social systems to include the ecological dimension. We must alter our technologies and we must alter our behaviour. Our guideline in doing this is sustainable development. In a nutshell, this means: preserving our natural capital, preserving the branch we are sitting on. We can no longer afford to go on living beyond our natural means."

Taking that seriously, and treating the resources of the natural environment as capital, has far-reaching implications.

What progress has been made since Rio, where the countries of the world signed up to Agenda 21 and to sustainable development? Things have not gone well, and the world is now less sustainable—if anything—than it was in 1992. Poverty is on the increase, except in south-east Asia and the countries of the Pacific rim. Per capita income among 1.5 billion of the world's people has declined during the 1990s. The disparity between the

[Mr. Dafis]

wealthiest and the poorest is becoming greater. Indicators of social development show a decline in many countries. Life expectancy is down in 32 countries, and the improvement in Latin America is negligible, as life expectancy there is far too low.

I wish to refer to the natural environment. Taking soil as an example, according to the Secretary-General of the UN, 10 per cent. of the earth's dedicated surface is at least moderately degraded. Water is emerging as a crucial environmental and resource issue for the next century, and it is projected that, by the year 2025, two thirds of the world's people will be living in countries suffering from water shortages.

Forest cover is being lost, and we are using non-renewable energy resources, at an alarming rate—that has serious environmental and social effects. There is a massive impact in extraction, transportation, processing and combustion. The use of fossil fuels has a massive effect. Energy consumption—mainly of fossil fuels—is up by 40 per cent. since 1973. The pressure from developing countries to increase energy use is intense: one has only to think of China and the huge implications of that country beginning to use its coal resources. Things are not going well in that sense.

What about the political process? The creation and implementation of policies to turn this matter around is important, and that is what the Rio process was supposed to achieve. Agenda 21 and the convention signed at Rio were supposed to contribute to this work. It would not be true to say that nothing has been achieved—one might say that the show is still on the road, and that is no mean diplomatic achievement.

In climate change, it is true that the show is still on the road, but progress has been painfully slow. In its response to the United Kingdom Government's position paper for Earth summit II, the World Wide Fund for Nature agrees that progress has been very poor, and gives examples. There has been no progress in implementing or funding the desertification convention. Neither in the convention on climate change nor in the biodiversity convention have we managed to agree a programme of actions or mobilise sufficient financial resources to implement their aims inside developing countries. The United States has not even ratified the biodiversity convention, to its eternal shame.

As far as the financial mechanisms are concerned—the global environmental facility is the key one—there is no clear strategic direction, and the GEF has a derisory budget, amounting to less than 0.004 per cent. of OECD GDP per annum. If one compares that with military expenditure worldwide—expenditure intended to ensure global security—one sees that it is absurd and grotesque. The best means of ensuring global security is to ensure sustainable development, and we need to put resources into it.

What is to be done at this time? First, we need to apply the political will with the greatest urgency to achieve sustainable development. I very much welcome the announcement by the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), that he intends to make the environment central to a Labour Government's foreign policy. That is very good. I hope it will be central to a Labour Government's economic and social policy as well, but there is precious little indication of that.

However, to be positive, the statement by the shadow Foreign Secretary is seriously encouraging, and the task force he has put together has an impressive membership. If that kind of spirit informs the UK contribution to Earth summit II as part of a strong and serious EU commitment, that is good news.

What should we look for this year? The EU has produced an excellent position paper, although I hope that the EU means what it says—that does not necessarily follow. The paper states that Agenda 21 needs to complete the transition to the operational phase. That is an admission in itself, as it suggests that we need to start doing something, rather than talking about the theory.

What do we need to do? First, we need action in relation to key sectoral issues. Climate change is to be discussed at Kyoto at the end of the year, and a reasonable—or at least adequate—target is a 20 per cent. reduction from 1990 levels in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions by 2005. Some say that that is unrealistic, but I would ask whether it is realistic to allow the climate to change as it currently is, bearing in mind the effect that that will have.

On forests, we need effective action linked to climate change and biodiversity. On fresh water—a very important issue—the EU calls for a recognition of the interaction between fresh water and soil erosion, demography and security of food supplies. These are terribly important issues, but there are others, including toxic chemicals, oceans and energy. But these specific sectoral issues will not be addressed unless certain key cross-sectoral themes are seriously tackled. The most important of these has to be finance for sustainable development in third-world countries, where the situation is appalling.

We have seen a decline in overseas aid from the developed world in GDP terms. There is profound disenchantment about the process in third-world countries, because the developed world has not begun to deliver. Private investment flows are increasing, but they are not geared to the poor countries or to sustainable development.

The commitment to 0.7 per cent. of GDP for overseas development aid targeted on sustainable development must be fulfilled by 2005—a reasonable target. We must move towards more debt cancellation, and there has to be a firm commitment to the replenishment of the GEF. I hope that we get that commitment this morning. But we also need new financial mechanisms, and an aviation tax on international flights—with the proceeds earmarked for sustainable development—is perhaps the most immediately feasible. The call for an intergovernmental panel on finance is a perfectly reasonable one, which I back.

The United Kingdom Government should go to New York with an unshakeable commitment at least to financial matters, because, if we do not get that right, we can say goodbye to sustainable development, and the consequences will be disastrous. It is a key foreign policy issue.

The link between sustainable development and trade must be taken seriously. By all accounts, the World Trade Organisation—the key organisation in this—is not doing so. Earth summit II should tell it that it has to take it seriously.

Sustainable consumption and production is another underlying cross-sectoral issue. I do not know whether all the other members of the group I have been working with would agree, but I believe that modern consumerism—the very engine that drives our economic system—is ultimately incompatible with sustainability. It is as if it were designed to impose stress on the natural environment that makes it possible.

Weaning ourselves off consumerism is a daunting task, but we have to begin the process. Two mechanisms are essential, and the first is new indicators of economic success. Progress there has been slow, and we need those quickly. We need a radical revision of our accounting system, and we need not only to develop the indicators but to use them to describe the extent of our economic and social success.

Secondly, the internalisation of environmental and social costs simply has to be faced. A glaring example where that is not being done, even remotely, is in transport. That requires a change in the basis of the taxation system, which we are beginning to talk about. A commitment about that should come out of the Earth summit. Of course, the constant need to include social equity must be borne in mind in doing so. One cannot internalise environmental costs unless one is concerned about social equity at the same time. Sustainability is about social equity and social inclusion as much as it is about the environment.

Much has been said about the international institutional structure to drive forward Agenda 21 and the whole agenda. Briefly, we need to renew and strengthen the United Nations Environmental Programme, which is important and has a key role to play. I hope to hear a commitment this morning to ending the suspension of UK funding to UNEP.

Secondly, the CSD has clearly shown itself to be a useful body. Mr. Topfer, the former chairman, said that we need it to become a sort of environmental security council. There is general agreement that it needs a more focused agenda, and the UN Secretary-General has set out a timetable for it leading up to 2002. I agree with WWF's suggestion about the need for a stronger and better resourced mandate for the CSD.

I look forward to hearing the response of the spokesmen on the two main Front Benches, as well as that of the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats. We do not want to hear complacent self-congratulation from the Government, and I hope that we will not, although I am perfectly prepared to acknowledge the Secretary of State's important achievements in this regard. From Labour, we do not want a lot of electioneering and slagging the Government off. We want to hear clear signals that we regard Earth summit II as an historic opportunity to start a course of radical action globally, regionally and nationally at last to begin the transition to sustainability.

9.53 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I welcome this debate. It is good to see at least some hon. Members here, wishing to take part. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) on his contribution, this morning and throughout this Parliament, on environmental issues. It is essential that some hon. Members are prepared continually to take up such issues, and I pay tribute to him for doing so. The way in which he opened his speech is important. He drew together all the strands of environmental destruction that are taking place, and underlined the importance of the Earth summit that is to take place later this year.

Frankly, the current rate of exploitation of the world's natural resources is totally unsustainable. The current process of economic planning and growth is leading to increased unsustainability, rather than greater protection for the world's natural resources. We have to change course—not just in this country, but worldwide—or we will be looking at total destruction within the next century.

Unfortunately, I do not suppose that environmental issues will be the main feature of the coming general election campaign. I wish that they would be, but unfortunately I doubt it. In some parts of the world, environmental issues are a major concern, and they ought to be here. They are a major concern where children are growing up in urban areas and suffering—as in London—from chronic asthma because of the use of fossil fuel-driven vehicles when electric vehicles would be better, or because of toxic waste dumping. They are a major concern for children growing up in west Africa, where toxic waste dumping on the beaches is routine as a way of evading European and north American regulations; or children growing up in shanty towns throughout Latin America and south Asia.

We have to deal with environmental issues and with the way in which people live, and, above all, the way in which we plan the future of the world. Although the Rio summit had many shortcomings, it at least recognised that there are limits to the growth that one can undertake and to the way in which we can exploit the world's natural resources. In that sense, it was a bringing together of all nations. Agenda 21, which came out of the summit, was extremely important.

The downside of the summit, however, was the side agenda that was not on the table at Rio. Closing down the UN office on multinational corporations, and the way in which western nations have cajoled third-world nations into supporting the general agreement on tariffs and trade, are leading to increased food dependency, world trade, pollution and environmental destruction for the poorest people in the poorest countries.

That shows the power of the mega-corporations of Europe and north America to squeeze the poorest people in the poorest countries. Increasingly, those issues will dominate political debate in the next 30 or 40 years, as the lack of natural resources for economic development in the northern countries becomes more apparent, and the dash for everyone else's oil, uranium, copper, gold, tin or whatever in the poorest countries comes to dominate politics.

There are signs of hope, however. This Parliament has at least signed the Antarctic treaty, which recognises that one cannot continue to exploit every section of the globe for ever. We have achieved the end of mineral exploration in Antarctica, and when all countries have finally got round to ratifying the treaty, we will achieve an environmental secretariat, which I hope will guarantee the

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permanent protection of that important area for scientific research and peaceful exploration rather than the exploitation of its natural resources.

I mention Antarctica because it acts as a laboratory for the whole planet. By taking ice-core samples there, we can see what we are doing to the world's air quality, what pollution is taking place, the amount of lead being pumped into the atmosphere and the amount of nuclear waste being pumped into the atmosphere as a result of testing. We can see the effects of global warming, as glacier movements speed up and the rise in sea levels begins to become very apparent. Those issues are crucial to our long-term survival.

In Islington, I am the chair of our local Agenda 21 forum. Such forums have been set up throughout the country in response to the Rio summit, and they are very exciting affairs. Large numbers of people come to take part in serious discussions of how they can try to create a more sustainable environment in a heavily built-up urban area. My constituency is the most urban part of the United Kingdom, yet we have a determined group of people trying to ensure that we have a better environment for everyone in the community to live in, but above all, that we try to play our part in sustainable economic planning. However, that cannot be done on a solely local basis, and we cannot plan the traffic policies of the country as a whole or stop the Government building roads that force more and more cars into London. That has to be done by national economic planning.

A future Labour Government must support Agenda 21 initiatives, and, above all, bring people together regionally, nationally and internationally to ensure that there is coherent policy making. It is no good our arguing for better public transport within our community if, at the same time, the car and fossil fuel lobby is so successful that more roads get built and there is more pollution and damage to the environment.

We must consider the serious consequences of the process of rapid economic growth and exploitation of natural resources. Every time that a crisis appears, something is done. The damage done to the ozone layer by chlorofluorocarbon emissions became apparent, and something was done, but an awful lot of CFCs were then offloaded on to third-world countries, and are still in use today.

The refrigeration industry in many parts of the world is still dependent on outdated ozone-damaging technology, partly because of the way in which western countries protected their technological advances during the GATT negotiations to maintain their pre-eminence, showing little concern for environmental damage in other parts of the world.

Deforestation emphasises the way in which we wantonly and ridiculously use and waste vast quantities of paper without even troubling to recycle it. Much paper ends up in landfill, and much is used to print totally useless advertising material in bulky newspapers. It is all very well to talk about recycling, but we should also talk about not using the paper in the first place. Levels of forest destruction are horrendous, and we will all pay the price.

Many people do their best to save and increase forests, but, if we tell a third-world country with serious poverty and unemployment that is finding it difficult to feed its population that the only way forward is to build an export-led industry and destroy its natural resources to pay a totally unpayable debt to the west, we must accept that our trade and economic system is responsible for those mahogany trees being chopped down and that virgin forest being destroyed, never to be replaced.

We must also consider the way in which food and food production systems are developing. Many African and south Asian countries had a large degree of food self-sufficiency until 20 or 25 years ago, but GATT insists on a world free market in food, which means that the most powerful grain producers—basically, North America and to some extent Europe—can dominate, which leads to good agricultural land in the poorest countries being taken out of use, making those countries more dependent on what goes on in the west.

The British Government must play a role in GATT that encourages sustainable economic development. That does not mean an increase in ships passing each other carrying refrigerators one way and refrigerators the other, cars one way and cars the other; it means seriously considering the environmental costs of transporting consumer goods around the world that could be produced much nearer to home, and examining the question of food production, food dependency and the type of food that is being produced.

The thrust by the culture of the United States, in particular, for everyone to eat beefburgers is a major factor in the destruction of a large amount of forest land. Using agricultural land as pasture for beef cattle is of itself extremely wasteful of resources. We must seriously examine life styles as well as all the other factors.

I have asked many parliamentary questions of the Department of the Environment over the past year or so about climate change and global warming. If one looks at temperature levels historically, it is obvious that the problem is serious and that there is an accelerator factor: it is a question not of a 0.1 per cent. or a 0.05 per cent. increase over a given period, but of an exponential increase. Ice is melting in both the Arctic and the Antarctic, and sea levels are beginning to rise.

The implications of global warming are massive: not only rising sea levels and huge climatic changes but the creation of desert areas and the serious loss of food production capability in many areas. The situation is urgent: some Governments are committed to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions by 2010, but they need to revise their estimates and bring forward the reductions, as well as considering seriously the implications of economic development elsewhere in the world.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North spoke of the problems of the growth of the consumer market in China. If a quarter of the world's population suddenly wants to have motor cars in the same proportion as even the poorest European country, there will be another 300 million cars on the road in a short time, and all the pollution that goes with that.

We should recognise that the people campaigning for a safer environment, be they opposing unnecessary road building in this country or forest destruction in other parts of the world, are all basically arguing for exactly the same thing.

Last year, I had the privilege of meeting some visitors from Ecuador, who explained the problems they are having with the destruction of the forest and mangrove

swamps, the way in which North American and European oil and gas companies wantonly destroy the environment in their mad dash to find more oil and gas to sell cheaply elsewhere, and the way in which the Government of Ecuador is constantly told by outside economic advisers that such exploitation is an economic necessity.

A briefing document on Ecuador says:

"On a recent visit to Ecuador a US AID adviser on environment said that 'Ecology is a luxury for Latin America'".

In other words, Latin America should destroy everything it has as quickly as possible, and hang the consequences.

However, many people in the poorest areas of the Amazonian region of Ecuador are determined that that should not happen. They want a sustainable life style to continue, and they do not want forests to be destroyed and rivers polluted. They want a sustainable economic system in their country, as many of us do in many other parts of the world, but they cannot achieve that alone, because of the power of market forces from around the world and because of the way in which Ecuador is told that the way out of its economic problems is to export more goods, destroy its natural environment and exploit its natural resources as rapidly as possible.

I look forward to significant changes in Government policy in this country when my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) becomes the responsible Minister, and above all to the ability of ordinary people to say that they want a sustainable world, not one that it is busy destroying itself. It is possible to achieve sustainability, but not if we predicate everything we do on the myth that rapid economic growth and consumerism can solve all the problems. There need to be fundamental changes in attitudes. At least this debate gives us an opportunity to say something about that.

I only wish that the general election campaign was going to be dominated by crucial environmental issues. If this one is not, future elections will be. It is wrong that our children suffer from asthma throughout urban Britain because of air pollution, that the rivers of Latin America are being destroyed by industrial waste, and that mammals that have existed for far longer than human beings are being destroyed because we cannot be bothered to live with the environment, but instead try to exploit it.

10.9 am

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): We have been faced with serious challenges since the Rio summit, with continuing global environmental destruction. I do not want explore the full range of issues, which have already been covered by previous speakers. I want to keep my remarks short to allow others to comment.

Perhaps the greatest and most intractable problem has been the financial resourcing of our commitments to achieving environmental and social sustainability. Finance is likely to be at the centre of debates at the UN General Assembly special session in June, the so-called Earth summit II, and will be fundamental to its success.

The need of developing countries for external funds is as great as it was in 1992. Since then, forests have continued to be cleared, wetlands have been further destroyed, and the earth's biodiversity has been substantially further eroded. In too many cases, this is not through wilful neglect but because many developing countries lack the resources to pursue more sustainable forms of development.

I visited Brazil two years ago to see construction on the Amazon. One key problem was the poverty of farmers who cleared land in a desperate attempt to grow the food they needed, which led to the early destruction of that land, for which their agricultural techniques were inappropriate. They have neither the information nor the training to make better use of their resources.

Another key problem was the inability of the Brazilian Government to fulfil their commitments, not least because they cannot afford the immensely difficult task of policing their policies effectively. Similarly, when the Environment Select Committee visited Thailand and Malaysia, it found the same problems: there were difficulties with tackling illegal logging, let alone getting policies right in the first place. Continued economic pressures hit Governments' ability to tackle the problem.

The developed countries have not fulfilled their commitments at Rio to provide new, additional resources. Official development assistance fell from a peak of £62 billion in 1992 to around £53 billion in 1995. The £3 billion pledged to the global environmental facility since 1992 has not come close to making up the shortfall, let alone meeting the increased need identified at Rio. If developing countries are to remain committed to the ambitious agenda agreed at Rio, and it is imperative for all our futures that they do, we must demonstrate at Earth summit II that we are prepared to live up to our financial commitments and ensure that adequate financial resources are available.

The developed world has only 20 per cent. of the world's population, but consumes 80 per cent. of the world's resources. That level of consumption is already leading to the destruction of the global environment. If the developing world follows our path of wasteful consumption, the destruction will accelerate fivefold. As we have been the beneficiaries of the destruction up to now, no one should argue that we should not bear a fair share of the cost of putting it right. That means a majority share, including helping the developing world to avoid the path that we have so destructively followed.

An incoming Government, of whatever colour, will face two immediate challenges, both of which are opportunities to make their mark on the environmental political scene. On 2 May 1997, negotiations will begin on replenishment of the global environmental facility. We must argue vociferously for an increase in funding from developed nations. That would send a clear signal of co-operation to developing nations before the Earth summit, and will make it far more likely that we can achieve the necessary progress.

The second challenge is a UK one: to make a commitment to meeting the aid target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product within 10 years. Only the Liberal Democrats of the major parties are costing that into their pledges for the general election. Before the manifestos are launched, I urge that the other parties do so as well. The Government's commitment stands at only 0.28 per cent. of GNP, which has fallen from the 1980-84 average of 0.37 per cent. The cuts must be reversed, or we will share the vastly larger costs of environmental destruction and climate change.

The cuts are a practical obstacle to solving the developing world's environmental problems, but, even more important, they are a major psychological block to winning co-operation from the developing world in setting

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the necessary targets and strategies at the Earth summit. At the same time, the quality of aid must be improved. Although progress has been made, all too often aid continues to focus on large-scale, technology-intensive projects, rather than small-scale, sensitively planned projects that yield environmental and social benefits to the communities involved and further the aims of the Rio agreements and subsequent conferences.

Although international private investment has grown dramatically since 1992, the bulk of it goes to a handful of fast developing countries, hardly any of which are among the least developed. Almost three quarters of foreign investment in the developing world goes to only nine countries.

In any case, we should have no illusions that private finance is a panacea. Private funds are driven by market imperatives, and will not automatically deliver public goods such as environmental sustainability or the elimination of poverty. Because they are driven by an economic priority set largely in the developed world for goods that we continue to waste and with which we destroy the environment, they are even more destructive in countries where they bear little relation to the needs of communities. There will remain a substantial need for public funds, and for private finance to be regulated to ensure that it is consistent with those aims.

I recognise that public spending in the developed countries is under domestic and international pressure. Conventional development assistance budgets will never be able to provide sufficient funds to meet demand. That is why debates have started at the Commission on Sustainable Development about new ways of generating funds, such as new international taxation. Liberal Democrats want more debate in Britain about how to progress along the route of environmental taxation.

A charge on aviation fuel on international flights is one currently mooted proposal, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis). We should push that up the agenda in our international negotiations. However, it needs international agreement and co-operation to achieve action. We cannot go it alone, but that is all the more reason for the UK to take a leading role in arguing for it.

The time is ripe to make swift progress on the issue, because the EU is to consider at the end of 1997 the expiry of the exemption of aviation fuel from excise duty. The money raised could be channelled back into the global environment facility to promote the aims of Agenda 21 and other Rio commitments in the developing countries. Much global environmental damage could be avoided and substantial funds raised for environmental protection, and not only in developed countries. That could be done with funds that currently subsidise operations that actively damage the environment.

The Worldwatch Institute has estimated that Governments worldwide subsidise environmentally damaging activities, such as over-fishing, and excessive road transport and coal production, to the tune of more than $500 billion a year. It is vital that we start working out how to eliminate those subsidies and put them to better long-term sustainable use.

Non-governmental organisations working in the field suggest that a new forum may be need to facilitate debate and political consensus on new ways of financing sustainable development. An intergovernmental panel on finance, situated in the Commission on Sustainable Development, is their preferred option. We should consider that seriously, and I hope that the Minister will say that the British Government will it give their encouragement and consideration. The CSD could also have more formal links with key international financial bodies such as G7 and the World bank. That would help to put sustainability at the heart of the world's most powerful financial and economic centres.

All funds in all countries need to be not only used in the way intended but seen to be used as such. That will happen only when we have proper accountability of funds and full transparency. Far greater efforts are needed to eliminate corruption and make sure that social and environmental priorities remain paramount. That is a matter in which the British Government, while they may have their faults at home, have considerable expertise, which, as well as practical help, they can offer to countries around the world.

Much was achieved at Rio five years ago, but an awful lot still needs to be done. Over-consumption in the north and population growth in the south are combining to put huge pressure on the dwindling stock of natural resources and on the earth's ability to absorb pollution. The developed world contributes disproportionately to those problems, so we must disproportionately take on the burden of overcoming them. We must help developing countries to develop in a more sustainable way than we have done, at the same time as we put our own house in order.

We should never think that developing countries are not concerned about the environment. Polls show that people in countries such as Brazil and Poland are as concerned about the environment as people here. But people in such countries have far fewer resources and far less room in their economy to tackle the problems. That means, at the very least, that Britain must meet our internationally agreed targets for financial support.

The optimism and consensus of Rio show that the world knows what needs to be done. We must not let it break down in bickering about who does what. Britain must show that we are willing to play our full part, and that, having identified the problems, we will take our role in finding the solutions.

10.21 am

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I begin with two sets of congratulations. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) on obtaining the debate. The issues he raises go far beyond party divisions or the commitments made in any of the party manifestos. They are the biggest challenge to our society and civilisation, and political parties have yet to face up to them.

On a smaller scale, I ought to pay tribute to the Government. At least they have met one of the obligations on funding for biodiversity. It is new and additional funding. However, we must put it in context and view it on its proper scale. It is like to trying to find enthusiasm about the receipt of a new pair of laces when someone has stolen one's shoes. It is the theft of shoes that I want to talk about.

The world that confronts us now is poorer than it was in 1992. There are more poor people in the world. The gap between rich and poor is wider. The rate of depletion

of our fish resources and forests is accelerating faster. It is running away from us. All the small contributions that are being made are dwarfed by movements in the opposite direction. They are cynically dwarfed by the amounts of money that go into the arms trade, but no less cynically by our active part in the accelerating investment in exploitation.

There is no point in our saying in the House that we want a few more million or perhaps even a billion pounds to go into development aid, when we refuse to close the door on unsustainable trade. That is the heart of the contradiction that the industrial world has to face. It is enshrined in the absurdities of the general agreement on tariffs and trade. The recent treaty presented a new deity to the economic world. It suggested that the pursuit of unregulated free trade would be to the general benefit of humanity, whereas in fact it is the greatest threat to humanity.

Three main proposals have come out of discussions at European level to promote serious alternatives to a deregulated view of the world, which can only accelerate the depletion of our natural resources and pose real threats to the sustainability of not only our life but all life forms on the planet.

The first proposal is that we have failed to do anything to check accelerating consumption in the industrial world. The nature of that acceleration does not make sense. Almost 60 per cent. of the foodstuffs imported into the United Kingdom are products that we could produce ourselves. There is no costing of externalities in global trade. We import green beans 6,000 miles from Kenya. We import apples from South Africa.

We are a net importer of parsnips, which travel 11,500 miles from Australia. I have to confess that, when I was a child, there were times when we kids used to pray that my dad would not bring in any more bloody parsnips from the garden. There are only so many parsnips that one can know and love at any one time. For Britain to be a net importer of goods that we can produce ourselves seems the height of folly, and it is all for the sake of getting goods into the supermarkets a week or a month earlier, irrespective of the social and environmental cost.

I marvel at the fact that we subsidise the over-use of pesticides, fertilisers and growth hormones in agriculture, all of which make their way into the food chain and the water chain, make the land water-hungry, and add to the momentum of increasing water shortages. By 2025, two thirds of the world's population will face water shortages. We also subsidise non-production. Set-aside is Britain's second biggest agricultural industry. The one thing that we will not subsidise is traditional and organic farming—the sustainable methods of farming which have made societies stewards, not owners, of the planet, from one generation to another. We need to consider how to reverse that position.

Sustainability has to involve not simply aviation fuel taxation but measures to reduce food miles. A recent article explained that the average pot of yoghurt on a supermarket shelf would have travelled 1,000 km before it reached the hand of the purchaser. It seems crazy that so much unnecessary transportation is built into the way in which we over-consume. It would be extremely helpful if we tackled that problem.

We must re-localise production. That would also allow us to consider how we can deliver food guarantees. When staff in a supermarket are asked what has gone into the produce on the shelves, with the best will in the world they do not know. The more we break the link between urban communities and the rural, farming hinterlands, the more food accountability is impossible in our pattern of consumption. The same applies to goods.

Instead of continuing to go along with the assumptions behind GATT, we need to argue the case for reversing them. In parts of America, states are beginning to say, "Site here to sell here. If you want access to our markets, you must be part of the terms of production which generate jobs. You must have accountable forms of production which we find acceptable." We cannot leave it to the public to achieve this by running their own consumer boycotts. As nation states, and as coalitions of nation states, we should be imposing ethical constraints on the nature of our assumptions about production, distribution and exchange.

That would allow us to return to the concept of local labour agreements. We used to be able to build those, not only into our domestic economic policies, but into our international aid packages, which included good labour agreements. All that is being stripped away in a regime that is dominated by global giants, whose interest in other people's economies is simply the interest of the locust.

There has to be an international dimension to this issue, and I want to try to set out a potential framework. We must challenge another part of GATT—the issue of patents and licences, which is almost GATT's sole protectionist element. Global corporations are now even seeking to patent trees in India because of their potential medicinal and curative properties.

We must reverse that attitude; we need a new gift relationship. I grew up believing that the best example of a gift relationship in this country was the blood transfusion service: we gave blood not on the banking assumption that we would get our own investment back, but so that there would be enough in the common pot to see us right in the event of an unforeseen accident.

For the next century, we have to have a new gift relationship—a technology gifting relationship, which donates sustainable technologies to the developing countries, so that they are not forced down the path of production processes that deplete resources for themselves and everyone else. If we can address that, we will begin to make life sustainable, not only in other parts of the planet, but in our own countries, for our own people and as stewards of our own environment.

10.31 am

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) on having obtained this debate, and on the eloquent and reflective way in which he introduced it. It has been a valuable and wide-ranging debate—indeed, it has been one of the most interesting that I have heard for some time.

The environment will be a central issue for the incoming Government. That is why Labour has set up the green globe task force, which the hon. Gentleman applauded. It is a key issue, not only for the United Nations General Assembly special session in New York in June—the current Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), has made it clear that, if elected, he will attend it as

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Prime Minister—but for the Kyoto meeting on climate change in December and for the British presidency of the European Union in the first half of 1998.

The original Rio summit in 1992 was a mixed affair. It achieved two important legally binding conventions on climate change and biodiversity that were signed by more than 150 countries. It established a set of principles for the sustainable management of forests worldwide and it launched Agenda 21.

However, its weaknesses are equally obvious: no targets were set, so there is no measure of progress or backsliding. No one would disagree with the assertion that the action taken since Rio has not been nearly enough. Nevertheless, the key frameworks are in place: just as action on chlorofluorocarbons tightened progressively after the original signing of the Montreal convention in 1987, so it must tighten now on climate change and biodiversity.

Opinions divide sharply on what now needs to be done. For the wealthy nations in the north, sustainable development means conservation, energy efficiency, recycling and reversing global warming and ozone depletion; but for the poor countries in the south, it means equity, redistribution of wealth, transfer of technology and a fairer trading system. The fact is that both north and south need each other: the north needs the co-operation of the south to cut greenhouse gas emissions caused by mass industrialisation, but the south will not co-operate without a far more extensive programme of redistribution.

The north is right to be concerned about worsening degradation that seriously threatens the viability of the planet, even though the north is itself often the main perpetrator. Global warming, which will generate hurricanes, droughts, floods and severe crop losses across the world, is primarily driven by rising carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere, which are set to double within the next century compared to pre-industrial times. Therefore, halting and ultimately reversing those excessive CO_2 concentrations is a critical goal for global ecology.

On the key issue of climate change, Labour has set a target of a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon monoxide in the UK by 2010—[Hon. Members: "Carbon dioxide."] Sorry, I meant to say carbon dioxide.

Mr. Corbyn: That is the heavyweight.

Mr. Meacher: Yes.

It is disappointing that the Secretary of State gave way at the European Union Environment Council a fortnight ago, and offered only a 10 per cent. cut by 2010. On his own boast, Britain has already achieved up to an 8 per cent. cut, largely because the Government have decimated the coal industry and engineered a long recession, so what he is proposing over the next decade is, in effect, a cut of a mere 2 per cent. or so, which is pretty feeble when Germany and Austria have offered cuts of 25 per cent. by 2010. We all know that the Secretary of State will bow out at the election, but his much-vaunted green leadership has fizzled out with a whimper.

We shall achieve our more ambitious target of a cut of one fifth by 2010.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: How?

Mr. Meacher: I am coming on to that.

We shall achieve it through policies that we already have in place. We are committed to an integrated public transport strategy, which is more environmentally friendly, in conjunction with pursuing a public-private partnership to develop a greener car, and a task force to advise on how best to achieve ultra-low emissions.

We are committed to promoting a big increase in renewable energy, with the objective of one fifth of our electricity being generated in that way by 2025. That will be achieved not least through an increase in the use of wind power: Britain has 40 per cent. of Europe's potential wind power—I must say, it sometimes feels like it—but we currently use less than 1 per cent. We are also committed to stepping up a national programme of energy efficiency measures.

I should make it clear that we do not support a carbon tax, because that would impact heavily on poor households, just as the VAT increase on fuel has done. It is important to note, although it is not often said, that such a tax would also bring comparatively little environmental benefit, because of the low elasticity of domestic demand. We believe that the same ends, on which we all agree, can be achieved through a more focused policy, via a changed regulatory regime for energy companies, improvements in building regulations, minimum efficiency standards for appliances, and measures to facilitate energy efficiency programmes by local authorities.

Trade and environment is another key issue that will feature strongly at the coming Earth summit. We believe that protection for the environment should be paramount in the development of a managed sustainable trading system, which means that international environmental treaties should be exempt from any challenge under the GATT/World Trade Organisation rules. That should include the Montreal convention on substances that deplete the ozone layer, the Basel convention on hazardous waste, the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species, the biodiversity convention, and the climate change convention. They should all be protected.

We also believe that there is a strong case for extending the range of these paramount conventions—perhaps in the case of forests, certainly in the case of chemicals. About 100,000 chemicals are in commercial use, and their impact on human health and ecological function represents largely unknown risks. Highly toxic hormone-imitating chemicals such as DDT, the polychlorinated biphenyls, dioxins and alkylphenols have increasingly been leaching into aquifers and rivers worldwide and thence into the food chain, causing serious damage to the endocrine and reproductive tracts of mammals, including humans. Many people think that the dramatically falling sperm count in men is most likely to be due to oestrogen-like chemicals in detergents, plastics and other man-made materials.

We believe that what is needed at the UN in June is a binding convention that will reduce and eliminate those dangerous chemicals. That should be linked, in our view, to a prior informed consent procedure for international trade in all hazardous chemicals, 51 of which have been identified as hormone disruptors. The banning of those highly toxic chemicals—DDT is already banned—must not be subject to haggles over trade: they are environmental absolutes.

Action on forests is less advanced. Although we would, in principle, consider a convention on forests, it is doubtful, in the light of experience of the convention on desertification—mentioned by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North—which has not been a great success, whether that is the most appropriate way to proceed. We might do better pursuing the same goals, which we strongly support, via bilateral agreements and consumer pressure.

As many of my hon. Friends have powerfully argued, the central problem at New York is likely to be that of reconciling the demands of the north with the huge needs of the south. Already, a fifth of the world's population—more than 1 billion people—lacks access to safe water, and half the world's population does not have safe sanitation. Every year, more than 5 million people die from diseases caused by unsafe drinking water or lack of sanitation.

Adding 3 billion people to the planet since 1950 has brought huge destruction of forests, devastation of grasslands, soil erosion, crowding, poverty, land hunger and growing water pollution. One can only imagine what will happen if 4.7 billion more people are added by 2050, more than 90 per cent. of them in the third world, as predicted by the UN.

The result is a growing divide of epic proportions. In the 1890s, the income of the average Indian was about half that of the average European. By the 1940s, the gap had grown to 1:40. It is now 1:70. Not only the poorest have suffered. World grain production, which has actually fallen by about 1 per cent. a year since the mid-1980s, has been falling fastest in the 40 poor countries containing a sixth of the world's population.

However, using a more realistic and comprehensive system of economic accounting, which takes account of the loss of natural topsoil and forest and productive grasslands, it could be argued that a majority of humanity suffered a decline in living standards in the 1980s. That is the task that confronts us.

How can the needs of north and south be reconciled? A reduction or write-off of debt for the most severely indebted countries might be linked to a commitment by them to preserve their rain forests and biodiversity. The damage to the environment caused by mass industrialisation in the developing countries would be reduced if the north made available the most advanced technology, especially clean coal technology. A forestry convention might suit the needs of the north, but the south's concerns over finance, which the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) eloquently spoke to, and the issues of land ownership and a code of conduct for transnational corporations must be addressed at the same time.

When a quarter of the world's fisheries are already being exploited at maximum productivity and a third are over-fished, the north must accept that we need an intergovernmental panel on oceans with the same clout as the panel on climate change, to protect the oceans as a vital food source, as a carbon sink and as the home of some of the most diverse species on earth.

Those will be the central issues at the UN meeting, but other items will feature on the agenda, including tourism, which is fast becoming the world's largest industry. Of course everyone is in favour of it, because travel broadens the mind and people deserve holidays, but we need to make it sustainable and not spoil places that people want to visit. Disappointingly, little has been done about that in the European Union, despite the fact that tourism is one of the five priority sectors listed in the "Fifth Environmental Action Plan." That may be another task for the British presidency.

On biodiversity, the next conference of the parties will take place in May 1998, during the British presidency, but, if I may say so to the Minister, a main priority is to set our own house in order in various ways, such as strengthening protection for sites of special scientific interest and safeguarding our hedgerows. The Department of the Environment has taken 17 years to designate 136 sites as special protection areas for bird conservation under European law; another 130 sites await designation. In response to the UN biodiversity convention, the Department has completed only 116 "action plans" detailing its efforts to conserve declining species; it still has 278 to prepare.

The UN special session is obviously important as a signal of political commitment, but perhaps we should not become too fixated on it. As others have said, the meeting in Kyoto of the Commission for Sustainable Development may prove more significant in the long run, as may the on-going work in the World Trade Organisation trade and environment committee.

As preparation for those meetings, there is already an extensive dialogue with non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders. Labour will seek to build on that dialogue in government as we have in opposition. Unlike the present Government, we shall not be hampered by deregulatory dogma in responding to the concerns of NGOs and other stakeholders.

The Labour party stands ready, as a Government-in-waiting, to make progress on all the measures I have outlined, and to infuse a new sense of leadership and drive, which is much needed for the sake of our world.

10.46 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) on raising this subject and securing the debate, and I agree with him that the subject has central importance and needs the widest public understanding.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the United Kingdom preparations for and contribution to the UN General Assembly special session, which marks the fifth anniversary of the Earth summit in Rio. It is an important occasion for looking back at the achievements since Rio, and for charting the course for the next period. I shall seek to obey the injunction by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North to look to the future as much as possible.

We are making every effort to ensure the success of the special session. The Prime Minister was one of the first Heads of Government to announce his intention to attend. At the end of 1996, my Department published a consultation paper, setting out its objectives for the special session and giving its views on the issues that urgently require the attention of the international community.

Since the Rio summit, sustainable development, in the sense that the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North defined it, has been at the heart of the

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Government's environmental economic policy, and we believe that the special session is an opportunity to persuade other countries that sustainable development should be the cornerstone of their policies too.

Much has been achieved since Rio, and the UK has played a leading role in pushing those successes through. The biodiversity convention has been negotiated, and action put in hand. In the United Kingdom, we have been the pioneers for the idea of national action plans for biodiversity.

We have been asked during the debate for targets. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and other hon. Members know that we have, through our action plans, set out clear targets and measurable objectives. We have provided a model for others to follow, and many others are interested in the pioneering way in which we have approached biodiversity.

Another biodiversity success which the Prime Minister announced at Rio was the Darwin initiative, a bilateral aid programme; and last week my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the 1997 awards, to 32 projects in 26 countries, ranging from the conservation of marine turtles in Egypt to the revision of the Galapagos marine management plan.

We have heard a good deal today about the UN framework convention on climate change. We fully accept that we in the north have a special responsibility to take action on controlling emissions of greenhouse gases. Unless the richer nations take responsibility for dealing with the pollution that results from our development, we cannot expect other countries that are—rightly—seeking to raise their standards of living to take up their burden as well.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West attributed some importance to this subject, but he might have acknowledged more graciously that we come to the negotiations in Europe, and later in Kyoto, from a background of success in meeting our obligations—unlike many other countries. We are among a minority of industrialised nations in having met our obligations. We also have one of the best records among European Community countries.

At the discussions in Kyoto and in Europe, we must look ahead to targets that can be achieved by others, too. As the House will know, we have just secured agreement with our European partners to a target reduction of 15 per cent. by the year 2010, with appropriate burden sharing.

We believe it to be vital that Heads of Government in June send out a clear political signal that effective action is required when the convention parties meet at Kyoto in December. The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North said that the show is on the road as a result of Rio; we now need to make more progress.

I agree with the hon. Member for Oldham, West that climate change is important. We have accepted the scientific advice that we have heard on the subject. Scientific opinion differs, but we have taken the side of what we believe to be good advice about the dangers. We look to other countries to follow our lead by reducing their emissions, so that we can ensure that the pace and extent of change are manageable. We will be pressing hard at the special session for new commitments in this area.

The hon. Members for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North and for Truro (Mr. Taylor) raised the question of tax on aviation fuel, which we regard as an important subject. The hon. Member for Truro rightly said that it needs to be dealt with at international level. We have been pressing for international action through the international civil aviation organisations convention. We believe that to be the right forum for dealing with aviation fuel tax, but we accept that progress in that forum has been slow. We are also, therefore, pressing for commitments at the Kyoto convention to action on aviation fuel tax.

There have also been many other institutional developments since Rio: the convention to combat desertification, and agreements on migratory fish stocks, on the protection of the oceans from land-based sources of pollution, and on the sustainable development of small island developing states. The establishment, funding and replenishment of the global environment facility was a great advance.

I can assure hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Truro, that the Government remain strongly committed to the global environmental facility, and we intend to play a positive role in the replenishment negotiations and to achieve a satisfactory replenishment. We come to the discussions from a background of being one of the major contributors to that facility—we are the fifth largest contributor, having put in £130 million. We are therefore punching our weight. We think that it is an important fund, which must be replenished and which will provide the links needed between the north and south.

Hon. Members have also mentioned the Commission on Sustainable Development. In its first five years, the commission has looked at the whole of Agenda 21, which the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) discussed. In our view, the commission needs to concentrate its efforts on a limited number of issues on which it can make a distinct contribution.

The commission has already shown that it has a role to play in launching initiatives—for instance, setting up the intergovernmental panel on forests at the 1995 session. At the 1996 session, the decision on oceans showed that it can provide a lead in calling for improvements in the international institutional machinery for dealing with this pressing issue. We also see the Commission on Sustainable Development as a forum for inter-sessional meetings on the subject of finance—

Mr. Corbyn: What resources is the Department prepared to put into co-ordinating the excellent work done locally by Agenda 21 all over the country? The danger is that energies will be devoted to the local programmes, without co-ordinating them at a wider level.

Mr. Clappison: We have certainly given a lead; we have also given satisfactory support to local government finance in this respect. The very success of Agenda 21 locally shows that our approach to it has been successful.

In the United Kingdom, we have made great progress in bringing sustainable development principles into our national governing structures. Our annual reports on progress set out clear targets for action and explain the progress made against them. We have pioneered new ways of drawing together advice on sustainable development. Hon. Members will know of the work of the Round Table on Sustainable Development, and of the many other groups to which we have listened.

It is important to look ahead to necessary future priorities for UNGASS. Hon. Members mentioned the significant threats to a number of areas—for instance, the threat to fresh water, a most important subject. Deforestation is another problem that must be dealt with by UNGASS.

The Government certainly agree that action on forests is a priority. The UK has participated fully in the intergovernmental panel on forests, and welcomes its achievement in reaching consensus on a wide range of forest issues. Our task now is to ensure that agreed actions are implemented, and that international dialogue on sustainable forest management continues. At the special session, we will press for negotiations to begin on a forests convention, because we believe that a legal instrument is the best way to ensure comprehensive implementation of the panel's recommendations.

Hon. Members also mentioned poverty in the context of economic relations between north and south. We believe that the roots of poverty have still to be tackled in many developing countries. The world is still a long way from reaching sustainable production and consumption levels. Inevitably, methods of finance and technology transfer will be key issues for discussion at the special session.

The Government believe that, in general, financing for the implementation of Agenda 21 should come from a country's own public and private sectors. In this decade, external private sector investment in developing countries has tripled; it is now more than twice as great as development assistance. Aid naturally continues to be important, but it should be concentrated on the poorest countries. Our aid programme is targeted on the poorest countries in Asia and Africa, and is widely recognised to be of high quality.

We also think that private sector funding has an important role to play in technology transfer. Foreign direct investment offers the best opportunity for transfer of environmentally sound technology, provided that national environmental standards are in place. At UNGASS, we must move the debate forward to ensuring that new financial mechanisms and new opportunities for technology transfer are fully explored. We should not get stuck in debates on aid and technology transfer that bear no relation to changes in the real world.

In this respect, the development of new markets for trade and investment will be crucial. We regret that the WTO meeting in Singapore last December made such little progress on integrating environmental concerns into trade policy. We will continue to promote greater integration of environmental considerations in developing trade policies.

Another emerging issue which UNGASS must address is fresh water. In many parts of the world, the decline in the quantity and quality of fresh water is becoming critical. We support the development of a global framework convention on the uses of shared river basins to agree principles of application. Lack of clean water leads to disease and poverty; it also inhibits economic development. Unless we solve fresh water problems, we cannot expect sustainable development to become a reality. We need to take the same approach to ocean management, which we regard as equally important.

I have had time to mention only some of the subjects to be covered at UNGASS. We hope that world leaders will also deal with energy consumption, urbanisation and tourism—three problems that will have a large impact on development over the next five years.

I emphasise that we shall go to the Earth Summit later this year from a background of having fulfilled the obligations that we entered into at Rio. We have taken a lead in establishing those obligations and in following them through. The UK has a good record on meeting its obligations with regard to the important conventions on biodiversity and climate change, and on giving a lead to other countries. We have tried to take the approach of putting sustainable development at the centre of Government policy, where we believe it belongs and will continue to belong in the future.

We also believe in having an open debate on those important subjects, and listening to the views of, for example, the Round Table on Sustainable Development and other important pressure groups. I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. Member for Oldham, West when he said that he wanted to listen to NGOs' views, because there have been some interesting developments in that area. I hope that, in future, his policies in opposition will offer an open door to important pressure groups such as Friends of the Earth.

We believe that this is an important subject, in which Governments should give a lead. We shall continue to give such a lead.

Middle East Security

11 am

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): It is an enormous pleasure and privilege to initiate this important debate. It is the third debate that I have initiated on this subject in this Parliament and it is gratifying to see that there is interest across the Floor of the House. I hope that I shall be able to make the remarks that I want to make in a fashion that allows all those right hon. and hon. Members who wish to contribute to do so.

On my way to the House this morning, I was reminded of some advice given to me by my distinguished right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) some years ago, when he said that, if and when I came to the House, I should think about specialising. I had heard that from other people and, as a result of my membership, with my right hon. Friend, of the Transport Select Committee, people probably thought in my first two or three years that that was my main interest. However, as many people know, I have always had an interest in the middle east. Unlike my distinguished predecessor in Southport of 100 years ago, the former Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, who, after he was elected to Parliament, went off for two years under his own steam around the world to fact find, I spent my first two years nursing my constituency. I am pleased that I did so, because an election is coming up in a few weeks' time.

It is a great pleasure, towards the latter part of this Parliament, to raise these important matters, because we cannot have prosperity throughout the world unless we have peace and there is no doubt that a vital piece of the jigsaw in that respect is the middle east region. One immediately thinks of the problems between Israel and Palestine, which have existed for a long time. I have drawn attention to the progress towards peace between Israel and Palestine, but there is still an enormous amount to do. I pay tribute to the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the unique role that it and Britain as a whole have played in trying to bring about peace. Britain gives the largest share of aid to the Palestinians—some 16 per cent. of the European Union contribution. This country has a unique role to play in furthering the cause of peace in the middle east. I do not seek in this debate to oppose a European Union involvement, but I am at least a little suspicious of a Community-wide foreign policy.

In the first 100 days of the Netanyahu Government, I expressed concern that, all too often, Mr. Netanyahu was reacting to events rather than trying to set the tone for his period in office. All too often, we heard suggestions that he might have delegated the task of deciding what to do in the first 100 days to other members of his Cabinet. When one journalist tackled a leading Likud moderate on the issue, he said, "I know nothing about being tasked with the first 100 days' planning." In the last Israeli election campaign, we heard too much from senior Israeli politicians who said that they were against the Oslo accord, denounced Mr. Arafat and opposed the Hebron redeployment.

In office, Mr. Netanyahu in particular has realised that there is no alternative to the Oslo accord, meeting Mr. Arafat or the Hebron redeployment. However, I pay tribute to the Israelis for the 80 per cent. withdrawal and hope that those in the Arab world will give credit to Israel and its Government for that courageous move. I hope that we shall see further progress shortly.

I referred to the problems of the first 100 days of the Israeli Government, which is often a matter of public perception. The perception—it is my perception, too—is that Mr. Netanyahu may have met Mr. Arafat when he did only because of pressure from President Weizman, which is not necessarily a good thing. During the elections, Mr. Netanyahu took the view that the Oslo accord should be renegotiated but, now that he is Prime Minister of Israel, it is not tenable that Israel should be able to renegotiate while Mr. Arafat should stick to written agreements.

There must be give and take on both sides, and I have never doubted that land for peace was the way forward. Mr. Netanyahu must hold out further real hope towards the Palestinian people. He must make it clear that, if there is no terrorism, there can be no reason why more and more Palestinian workers should not come to work in Israel. They do not stay there; they often return home overnight, unlike many other migrant workers who stay on a permanent basis and cause difficulties in Tel Aviv.

Because of the impasse that we have reached, there has been an enormous cooling of relations, particularly with Egypt. I note, too, that Qatar, Tunisia and Oman have, to some extent, gone back on previous pledges on improving diplomatic relations between their countries and Israel. It is incumbent on those of us who are friends of Israel to make it clear that we want the existence of an Israeli state within secure boundaries, defending itself where necessary, internally and externally, from terrorism. However, we are not prepared to turn a blind eye to some sort of neo-imperialism or colonialism that shows contempt for the legal process and a refusal to accept that a Palestinian identity exists and must be recognised.

I underline the fact that I pay credit to Mr. Netanyahu for the 80 per cent. withdrawal.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Given that those who are friends of Israel take the view, as the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) does, that land for peace is a good arrangement, should not they accept the importance of bringing pressure on Israel to accept that taking away land for the Har Homa settlement will not create peace, and may lead to a complete shutdown of the peace process?

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He makes his own point in his own way and I have some sympathy with it.

One of the most important friends of Israel is the United States. I referred to US policy in the middle east on previous occasions in this Parliament. In view of the changes of Defence Secretary and Secretary of State in the United States, with Mrs. Madeleine Albright coming into office, it is important that a second Clinton term in Washington does not allow things merely to tick over in the middle east. Given that Congress is rather right-wing, it is important that the British Government do what they can behind the scenes to bring pressure on our American friends to ensure that they play a full and proper part in bringing peace about, using the Oslo accord as a firm foundation. That is the impression that many of us have gained—too much ticking over and not enough action on the part of the United States in recent times.

I take the opportunity to pay tribute to His Highness King Hussein of Jordan, who, in recent years, has had a remarkably difficult role to play, which I believe he has

played extremely well. He is a key player in bringing about peace between the various sides, and Britain must continue to give him our full support.

If time will allow, I should like to expand on other issues, but before I move away from Israel and Palestine, I want to make it clear that—given the interest in the debate and the fact that several other hon. Members want to take part—although I shall not cover in detail the importance of the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, those are inextricably bound up in finding a solution to the problems to which I referred.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): As my hon. Friend may know, I recently had the privilege of visiting Israel, Lebanon and Syria. Will he take it from me that the great majority of the people of all three countries wish only for peace? From time to time atrocities will be committed, such as the recent atrocity against the Jewish children in the Jordan valley, but does my hon. Friend agree that such atrocities committed by madmen or by religious or political extremists should never be allowed to throw the entire peace process off course?

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; that is an important point. It is recognised on all sides that the remarks made by people such as King Hussein have underlined the importance of his role.

I shall touch on two or three other trouble spots in the Middle East, to which other hon. Members might also refer in their contributions. I am particularly concerned about Iran, Iraq and Libya.

It is not acceptable for Iran to occupy the islands around Abu Musa and the Tunbs and to build serious gun emplacements. I pay tribute to the United Arab Emirates for the way in which they are trying to resolve that dispute, especially in relation to the International Court of Justice. I do not seek to isolate Iran. It is extremely important that she is not isolated, but the issue involving the United Arab Emirates must be addressed quickly.

With reference to Iraq and the recent difficulties, although we cannot interfere directly in the affairs of a state in the region, as has been wildly suggested by some, I hope that in the not too distant future the Iraqis themselves will replace the present regime, which ignores all its international obligations and brutalises its people.

Regarding Libya and our trade links, there are those who suggest, understandably, that British companies should no longer be prevented from competing for business. Nevertheless, there are serious issues, such as the gas factory that is being built and the question whether the Americans might bomb it. There are further issues, and I shall highlight just one. If Libya's peaceful intentions are to be recognised as real, we need an explanation of what she is doing. I have no doubt that the gas factory to which I referred will become an issue in the next Parliament.

Although there are trouble spots, there are a number of shining examples of the ability within the region to solve difficulties by peaceful means. I pay tribute to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia for trying to broker an agreement between Bahrain and Qatar. Who would have believed last autumn, when we last debated the subject, that, almost over a cup of tea at a London hotel, some of the difficulties would be resolved? That meeting between the two sides in London went a long way towards resolving the dispute.

Elections have recently taken place in Kuwait, and the new Government are settling in. Enormous improvements to the Kuwaiti economy are evident. Moving in line with our own democracy, Kuwait has given a greater say to Kuwaitis through elections and the formation of a new Government. There is no doubt that the people have had their say, not always to the liking of the Al-Sabah ruling family, but that is a shining example of the way that things can be done in the middle east, if the right of self-determination in an Arab form is allowed.

Although that may be appropriate in one country, I recognise that it may not necessarily be so in another. On a recent visit to Bahrain, I was pleased to see the improved and enlarged shura council. Similarly, there are better relations between this House and its counterpart in Riyadh.

I have a particular concern about those who abuse our hospitality in London—dissidents who overstay their visas, and those who claim political asylum and are granted it by Britain, and then abuse our hospitality by supporting terrorist acts here and abroad. I very much hope that, within the laws of this country, the police will not hesitate to act and bring charges against those found to be overstaying their welcome or breaking our laws. As a specific example, it is not acceptable for demonstrations to take place in London, from whatever quarter, where death threats may be made but no arrests follow. If a British citizen chanted some of the things that have been heard on the streets of London, he would be arrested for at least a breach of the peace.

In view of the interest in the debate, I draw my remarks to a close, to give other hon. Members an opportunity to contribute. I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister and the Foreign Office for recognising over the years the good fortune that I have in my friendships with several ruling families in the middle east. For someone of my age, I have been hugely fortunate. I thank my friends in the middle east for the trust that they have placed in me. That has helped me as a Member of Parliament to understand the difficulties that we in Britain face in supporting our friends in the middle east to bring about further peace and prosperity.

I pay tribute to those in the Foreign Office not just for their diplomacy at British posts overseas, but for the work that they undertake in batting for Britain in a trade context. The middle east is important not only for world peace, but for British jobs. I know that over the years the Foreign Office and trade representatives overseas have played an extremely active part in helping British companies to win orders. I hope that, in the years ahead, they will continue to do so.

I have skated over, all too quickly, some extremely important issues. The debate is one of enormous importance, and I have no doubt that we shall return to these subjects fairly soon in the next Parliament.

11.18 am

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) and thank him for his initiative in raising the debate before we close this Parliament.

I came into the House exactly 32 years ago this week as the baby of the House, and I am now ready to depart. My maiden speech was all about the problems of the Scottish Borders, which had been the subject of my

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by-election campaign, but as I have—to use a good Scottish word—deeved the Scottish Office on that subject endlessly over recent weeks, I am glad to make my last speech to the House on a different and important topic—the middle east peace process.

I do not propose to follow the hon. Gentleman on wider issues in the middle east; otherwise, I should make too long a speech. I want to cast my mind back over events that have taken place in the middle east in which I have been involved, and to say a few words about how I hope policy may evolve in the future.

Over the past four years, I have not been as regular an attender in this place as previously. As president elect and then president of Liberal International—I totted up recently the number of visits that I made to other countries in those capacities—I visited no fewer than 56 countries, some of them more than once. This announcement will not surprise my hon. Friends, who seemed to think that I was permanently in an aeroplane. I was concerned with promoting democracy, human rights and economic development. Over the past three decades during which I have been a Member of this place, however, nowhere has there been a greater consistent threat to peace than in the middle east.

In 1967, I was fortunate to be a member of the annual parliamentary delegation to the United Nations when that distinguished representative at the United Nations, Lord Caradon, was largely instrumental in having resolution 242 drafted and passed at the UN. It is my view that that resolution has remained the bedrock of a policy that has been supported by successive British Governments and by the global community in its attitude to the middle east peace process.

It was not until 1980, when I was the leader of the Liberal party, that I took a delegation to the middle east. On that occasion I spent two weeks in the region. I had the good fortune as a party leader to be received, with my delegation, by the various Heads of Government. It was a fascinating process to meet President Sarkis of Lebanon, President Assad of Syria, who continues to be president of that country, the late President Sadat of Egypt and King Hussein in Jordan, for whom, like the hon. Member for Southport, I have considerable admiration.

The one Head of Government whom I did not meet was in Israel, and there was a clear reason for that. I had earlier met Chairman Arafat, as he then was, in Syria. Nowadays everyone meets Mr. Arafat, and very happily, on the White House lawn or anywhere else. In 1980, however, it was thought outrageous that a party leader in Britain should shake hands with that unknown person. When I went to Israel I was not received at any high level by the Israeli Government. I met Opposition leaders, however, and I got to know Shimon Peres.

During my time in Israel—I have been there several times since 1980—I came to understand the geographical fragility of the state of Israel and its need for long-term security. Indeed, I have never doubted that need. The great breakthrough came undeniably during the Government of Mr. Rabin and Mr. Peres with the Oslo accords. It must be a great sadness to us all who have watched events in the middle east over the years to see that peace process running into the sand under the change of Government in Israel.

One of my friends in the former Israeli Cabinet told me that he regarded Mr. Peres as a great statesman and a hopeless politician. It is usually the other way round, in that we regard people as good politicians and hopeless statesmen. There was some truth in my friend's judgment, however, and it was unfortunate that by his mistiming Mr. Peres lost power. As a result, Mr. Netanyahu, with his rather reactionary views on the peace process, came to power.

What can we do as part of the outside community? At this stage I must disagree with the hon. Member for Southport that we in the European Union have a responsibility towards the middle east peace process. I believe that my view is shared by the Foreign Secretary. I do not share the hon. Gentleman's scepticism about a developing common foreign policy in the European Union. I believe that it is a healthy process. We have an opportunity in terms of all-party early-day motion 657, which relates to the Lebanon. Given the present agreement between Israel and the European Union, we have a unique and new position of influence in the middle east, and one which we should use. We should not be dependent all the time on the so-called superior power of the United States in these matters.

In terms of the current settlement proposal in occupied east Jerusalem, it is a matter of deep regret that the American Administration used its veto in the Security Council. The wrong signal was sent to Israel. I know that the Minister has described that as a disagreement over tactics rather than one of substance. He may be right about that, but that is not how it is perceived in the middle east by those who represent both sides of the argument.

The United States Administration made a grievous error and I hope that we and other members of the Security Council will constantly remind it of that. We do not want to see any repetition of such an error. The outside world must stand together if we are to ensure that the peace process moves on.

Over the years, I have come increasingly to the view that security cannot be found through military means alone. Security will not be provided for Israel if the occupation of southern Lebanon continues. It does not provide security for Israel or its Arab neighbours to acquire vast amounts of weaponry from the outside world.

In 1993, together with the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), I went to Uganda to try to ascertain what could be done in arguing for debt relief for that country. I pay full tribute to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the steps that they have taken at the International Monetary Fund to help establish a programme of debt relief for Uganda.

I noted recently, however, that defence expenditure by Uganda, while debt relief has continued, has increased from 13 per cent. of its budget in 1993 to 20 per cent. now. What is true of Uganda is true, unfortunately, of many other countries, especially those in the middle east. Peoples who are in need of development within their countries see their Governments forced, in the interests of what they believe to be security, to spend an increasing proportion of their budgets on arms.

Over the three decades that I have spent in the House, there have been many acrimonious and intense debates about the spread of nuclear weaponry and about nuclear disarmament in its various shapes and guises. Yet no one has been killed by nuclear weapons since the end of the

second world war. Unhappily, in the world today, thousands of people are killed each week by conventional weaponry.

The arms trade is one of the great evils that the world faces. I am talking about all types of weaponry and not only land mines. Those of us who are interested in real security for human beings must make the conventional arms trade a subject of greater public debate than it has been. There is no greater hypocrisy in the world today than the readiness of the developed nations, east and west, to supply weaponry throughout the world and then wring their hands the moment that weapons are used.

I came upon an interesting statistic recently that reflected on the first world war. War memorials in this country and in others bear huge lists of names of those who were slaughtered during that war. Ninety per cent. of the casualties in the first world war were members of the armed forces and nowadays 90 per cent. of casualties of conflicts are civilians—women and children. The nature of conflict has changed. We must recognise that the arms trade fuels conflicts. Indeed, conflicts could not take place if it were not for the arms trade.

I do not suppose that in the coming election the arms trade will be a matter of great moment. It is not a matter of division between the parties. I hope, however, that in the heat or noise of the battle to come we shall not lose sight of some wider issues that are crucial to the future peace of our globe and to the future development of the growing population. I refer especially to the younger generation both in the United Kingdom and in the middle east.

With those words I shall take my leave of the House.

11.28 am

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): When I glanced at the Order Paper this morning and noted that my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) had secured this debate, I little thought that I would have the great privilege, largely thanks to my hon. Friend's self denial in making a short speech, of taking up the remarks of the right hon. Gentleman who represents what I call the border trinity, the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel).

The right hon. Gentleman has been a distinguished Member of the House for a very long time—indeed, 32 years. There is no Member of this place who has more justly deserved the title of right hon. Member. It is fitting that a number of his Liberal party colleagues, a party which he led with great distinction, should be in their places this morning to hear his short but wise speech. Although this Chamber will be deprived of his wisdom and counsel in future, I hope that I will not be accused of being too provocative if I express the hope that Parliament will not be so deprived—

Sir David Steel: Is that an offer?

Sir Patrick Cormack: I can express a hope; I cannot, alas, bestow a gift. I believe that he still has an enormous amount to offer, and although he will want to spend more time enjoying the border solitudes that he so rightly loves, Westminster needs his contributions. I trust that we shall continue to get them even if they are from another place.

I understand, from his rather frenetic activity, that the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) is likely to seek to catch your eye in the near future, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He, too, is due to make his dowager speech—I suppose that that is the opposite of a maiden speech. I know that the House will look forward to hearing him.

I did not know who would seek to take part in the debate, but I was anxious to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it is fitting, in the closing hours of this Parliament, for the House to turn its attention, in a bi-partisan capacity, towards the middle east. Although all the topics touched on by my hon. Friend in his admirable and lucid speech are important, what is surely uppermost in all our minds today are the events taking place in Jerusalem at the moment.

I am proud to call myself a friend of Israel, and I wish to see Israel with recognised secure borders, as my hon. Friend said, but if I am a friend to Israel, I am a friend to peace first, and what is happening in Jerusalem at the moment is jeopardising the chances of peace in the middle east. I appeal—carrying, I hope, the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House—to the Prime Minister of Israel to think again. In his high office, Mr. Netanyahu carries with him the hopes and fears of people all over the world.

I appreciate that it is not easy to hold together an uneasy coalition. Indeed, in recent years some in Israel have paid with their lives for their political courage, in particular Prime Minister Rabin. No price is too high to pay for peace. Mr. Rabin knew that: he paid it. His successor worthily donned his mantle and fought for peace in the middle east, recognising that when one fights for peace it is always necessary to compromise, and when one compromises, no one is wholly satisfied. There is, however, a goal that is above personal satisfaction, and it is crucial that Mr. Netanyahu recognises that.

What happened at Oslo was of crucial importance. It set in train a series of events that brought, for the first time, true hope of lasting peace to the middle east. That hope is now at risk. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister, and the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), who speaks for the Opposition, will link themselves with my remarks and will appeal to Mr. Netanyahu to recognise that, if he persists with what he seeks to do, not only will he be unleashing bulldozers on a hill in Jerusalem, but he will be putting a metaphorical bulldozer through the prospects for peace. He has a duty to the country of which he is the Head of Government; he also has a wider duty to everyone in the middle east.

In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) referred to the yearning for peace. Mr. Netanyahu has a duty to everyone beyond the middle east who sees it as a potential cauldron from which world conflict could still erupt to try to ensure that the peace process is put back on track. Only this week, he was given a lead and an example by His Majesty the King of Jordan who, in the wake of that appalling tragedy, which brought back memories of Dunblane—almost on the anniversary of Dunblane—went and grieved with the grieving and mourned with the mourning. He went not only as a Head of State but as a human being, saying, "These things are more important. Let us, for goodness sake, sit down and work together."

If Mr. Netanyahu persists with his ambitions for the building project in Jerusalem, he is, whether he intends it or not, spurning the gesture of peace from the King of

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Jordan. If Mr. Netanyahu does that and persists with a narrow nationalism, he will jeopardise the future of his country far more than he will jeopardise the future of his Government by ceasing to appease the more nationalist members of it and those who support it.

In what I suppose will be my last speech in this Parliament—I trust that I might be able to make one or two in the next—perhaps I might be allowed to say this to Mr. Netanyahu: "The eyes of the world are upon you, and although the British Parliament is moving towards dissolution and begins to focus on a general election, nevertheless we do not neglect our responsibility as British legislators wanting to play our part in creating a true and lasting peace. We appeal to you to make that task possible by backing off from the course on which you have embarked, the end of which can be only disaster for you and your people."

11.37 am

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) for initiating the debate. I intended to intervene in his speech but could not find anything much with which to disagree. It was the first time that he has spoken in the House and I have agreed with him. I thank him for that, and thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to say a few final words.

My first words in the House were some 27 years ago, in defence of the rights of the people of Leicester, North-West—which has now become Leicester, West—following my father, who served that seat for 25 years. It is the first hereditary Labour seat in this House, and it will maintain its right to vote to the last breath. I am so sorry that there will be no Janner available for the people of Leicester in the future. I thank them so very much for their kindness to me, for voting for me and for allowing me to serve them for so long.

This is another subject with which I have been deeply connected, both as a proud Member of the House and as a proud Jewish leader. I am glad to be able to speak immediately after my hon. Friend—he is both honourable and my friend—the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), with whom I have fought many human rights battles. I pay tribute to him for his service in the House.

When listening to the debate, I wondered just how much people understood of the pressures that are on Mr. Netanyahu. I have spent the past 18 years trying, unsuccessfully, to get rid of the Conservative Government, and I am not very good at getting rid of the Governments of other countries. I did not vote for this lot in here and would not have voted for that lot over there, but we have to understand what Prime Minister Netanyahu has achieved. He went into an election saying, "No land for peace," and he broke his election manifesto promise. Conservative Members should understand that—although he did it for good reasons. He did so at a price: alas, the price is now being paid to members of his unruly Cabinet concerning matters in Jerusalem. I do not disagree with the points that have been made, but we must understand the political balance in a vibrant, vehement and difficult democracy. In that part of the world, it is almost alone in that.

I have been privileged to visit almost all the Arab countries that are happy to accept a Jewish visitor, and one or two that usually are not, such as Saudi Arabia. I have been received with great courtesy, and I hope that I have played some part in the continuing peace process. The greatest moment of this aspect of my life was when I attended Oslo, not for the agreement, but when Prime Minister Rabin, Foreign Minister Peres and President Arafat jointly received the Nobel peace prize. Rabin was my friend, and he was a great man. Shimon Peres is my friend, and I value him and am deeply attached to him, his philosophy and his person. Arafat I have become friends with, and I hope so much that the peace process will continue.

I am one of only two or three people in the House who speak Arabic. I am the only one who speaks both Hebrew and Arabic, unless the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) has been learning to speak them in his long periods away from the House during this Session. What matters to me is that we can converse, communicate and understand each other. I am not sure how much good it does to lecture Prime Ministers of other countries about how they should do their job, when we are so desperately unsuccessful in getting the Prime Minister of own country to do his as we want him to, but it is the privilege of democratic friends to try. It is a privilege that we have exercised to its full.

It is a privilege to serve in this House. It is a privilege that I shall miss dreadfully. I am grateful to hon. Members, to Ministers and to members of the Foreign Office team, with whom I have often disagreed, but who have done so much for me so courteously. I thank them all, and I bid farewell by saying how deeply appreciative I am of the privilege that I have enjoyed for so very long thanks to the good people of Leicester, West.

11.42 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I was greatly moved by the speech of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), because if there was ever an issue-cause politician, he is it. I remember his maiden speech and that of my right hon. Friend—I shall call him that—the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) when he was the hon. Member for Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles. I was moved by what he had to say also.

I shall be crisp. I have had 10 debates on Libyan sanctions, but the Minister will be relieved to know that I just want to make two new points.

First, will the Government reflect on what happened in the St. Albans Crown court in the case of Regina *v.* Rees and Rotheroe? Judge Colston said:

"In my judgment, the material which has been disclosed today indicates that there was within the Department at the material time concerns about the application of relevant sanctions legislation, and the way that it was being applied by the DTI."

Why did Judge Colston stop an important case and describe the actions of the Department of Trade and Industry as an "affront to justice"?

How much did the case of Regina *v.* Rees and Rotheroe cost the public in preparation and lawyers' fees?

Lawyers told the Department of Trade and Industry of their massive concerns about inconsistencies in the application of sanctions against Libya. Will the Government disclose the relevant documents to Parliament? Do Ministers agree that there is cause for urgent public concern?

Does this matter not fly in the face of the rigorous implementation claims? I refer to the answer given to me when I asked

"the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his discussions with the US Government on Libyan sanctions, and the cases of British nationals who have allegedly transgressed UN sanctions."

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) replied:

"I have been asked to reply.

We regularly discuss UN sanctions against Libya with the US Government. Both Governments remain committed to the rigorous implementation of the sanctions until Libya has complied fully with UN Security Council Resolutions 731 and 748.

Any contravention of the legislation implementing these sanctions in the UK is a matter for the competent prosecuting authorities."—[*Official Report*, 26 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. *150*.]

In one sense, it seems like Matrix Churchill revisited, but I come from a different direction on the whole business of Libyan sanctions. The people who really lose are those in British industry, because Libya was one of our traditional markets.

I do not doubt that Libya did bad things in the early 1980s when it supplied arms to the IRA. It is questionable whether it was responsible for the terrible murder of Yvonne Fletcher, but I am certain, for reasons that I have endlessly outlined to the House, that it was not responsible for Lockerbie, which is the immediate cause of sanctions, which deeply harm one of our traditional markets, where most of the decision makers were educated at British universities and not at American universities. I believe that we make a mistake by following America's lead on Libyan matters.

Secondly, I want to ask about Iraq. To demonise the leadership, rightly or wrongly, is hardly a mandate to punish the whole population. Unfortunately, that has been the fate of the Iraqi people since the imposition of a draconian sanction in 1990.

I want to ask about Ambassador Ekeus's mission. The special commission was established in 1991 to oversee the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programme. Ekeus has since expressed a reluctance to define a programme of completion, and to provide a proper framework of inspection.

Regrettably, earlier this month, Ekeus was forthright in stating without reservation or remorse that Iraq may be developing or acquiring a long-range missile capability. Paradoxically, Iraq, before and during the Gulf war, was in possession of a sizeable arsenal of chemical weapons, but failed to use them. Incidentally, the technology and materials for those lethal weapons were sold to Iraq by all the countries that are permanent members of the Security Council.

If Ekeus and his team were diligent in their task, surely they would have come up with more confirmed reports. There is no "maybe" about it. One wonders whether they are aware of the commonly known fact that Iraq's economy is mortgaged for generations to come: its whole infrastructure is in tatters. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale visited Iraq with Bishop Tom Butler, the Bishop of Leicester. He is nodding because he knows, as I do, what the terrible situation is on the ground. To embark on such a mammoth advanced technological programme, Iraq must have free access to the necessary financial and technological means.

Furthermore, the weakness of this statement by Ekeus may lie in his commission team's lavish life style in a ghetto created in Iraq, totally unaffected by the tragedies evolving around them, engulfed in the unrelated pursuit of historical site visits and acquiring antiquities and valuable antiques by the advantage of the strength of the US dollar—the dollar was equal to 1,300 dinar—in other words, stripping whatever is left of Iraqi national heritage.

One of the saddest experiences in the human tragedy was to go to the famous Iraq museum in Baghdad, and see how the great treasures of Sumeria and the earliest civilisations of the Tigris and the Euphrates had been treated. I believe—I have heard the same from museum personnel who are unconnected with politics—that it is disgraceful that people who are supposedly serving the United Nations are bringing home, either for themselves or for commercial profit, treasures from ancient Iraq.

It remains the case that the benefactors of this human tragedy are the western arms manufacturers. Democracy, human rights and Arab nationhood are a mirage on occasions, used by politicians to delude public opinion. Many advocate concern about the humanitarian situation in Iraq, but the harsh practicality is totally different. One cannot set aside recent replies by Madeleine Albright—

"We think the price is worth it"—

on the sanctions-related death of 500,000 Iraqi children.

Having visited a children's hospital in Baghdad, I know that, whatever the politics involved, to see those infants expiring in one's presence is a dreadful thing. God knows what that is laying up for future generations. It will affect the attitude of a whole section of the Arab world towards the west. That is a disaster, which ought to be looked into by the incoming Government, whoever that will be.

11.51 am

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) for initiating the debate. Having heard so many valedictory speeches today, I should make it clear that, although mine is also a valedictory speech, it is valedictory only in terms of the current Parliament: I intend to strive, might and main, to be in the next.

In that context, I take considerable heart from the experiences of Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. A few months ago, before the Israeli general election, all the pollsters and pundits were forecasting that he had not a hope of victory. I remember watching a television broadcast on the world network on election day, in which the Israeli Labour party proudly proclaimed, as the results were coming in, that it was back in power and that there would be a Labour Government. Indeed, a victory party was already in progress. In the end, of course, Mr. Netanyahu won the election, and he is Prime Minister today. I think that there is a lesson in that for members of all parties in the House.

Speaking as a Conservative, I am proud to describe the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) as my friend. He is retiring from the House in a few days' time. I have had the privilege of serving with him for part of his long career, and have seen him put up a real fight. Of course, he has fought on behalf of his constituents; that is his primary duty. As a member of the Jewish community in this country, however, and as one whose constituency contains a sizeable section of that community, let me say that the Jewish community has

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been extremely proud of the hon. and learned Gentleman, in good times and, more important, in bad. He has risked unpopularity and criticism, and I dare say he has forfeited benefits in his party as a result of his determination to stand up for the causes in which he believes.

Those causes have ranged widely: he has spoken up not just for the state of Israel, but for many other causes involving human rights for the Jewish people and others throughout the world. I pay public tribute to that tremendous record of service. Let me echo what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack): I hope that we shall not miss the hon. and learned Gentleman's voice, views, work and actions in years to come.

As I said a moment ago, my constituency contains, in Manchester, a sizeable Jewish community. It is a proud community, because the area was the home of modern British Zionism. It is where Weizman came to work at the university, and where he went on to persuade the British Government to grant the first recognition of the possibility of a Jewish home in Israel. I am proud of that connection.

I must say to some of my colleagues on both sides of the House—who, of course, accept the need for Israel to have security—that the issue is real, and will not go away easily. The state of Israel has lived with the threat of extinction for 50 years, and the people know that, at the end of the day, only they themselves will stand with it. They cannot rely on outside forces to come to their rescue if their freedom and security are threatened. That has been their history for 50 years, and they know it well.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin, as well as Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Rabin, contributed to the peace process. It should be remembered that he was the first to bring the Egyptians into that process. I remember when he sent Israeli bombers to Iraq to extinguish its nuclear capacity; as a result, many years later, our own forces were free from that threat in the Gulf. There was much criticism of what Begin did from all over the world and all sides of politics, but he did it to preserve Israel's security and, ultimately, ours.

I remind the House that there will be difficult times in the years to come. We all want peace in the middle east—that is the wish of everyone who lives there, not least those in Israel who have seen their sons and daughters killed and wounded for far too long—but that must be balanced by the knowledge that, whatever happens in the future, Israel is not facing extinction. It does not face a threat to its existence, or the end of what was and always has been a great dream. I hope that that will not be forgotten in the Parliaments of the future, of which I hope to be a part.

Theodore Hertzl, the founder of modern Zionism, said of the creation of the state of Israel, "If you will it, it is not a dream." I think that, if there are men and women of good will throughout the middle east who will it, peace too should not be a dream.

11.57 am

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): It is a privilege to speak in the debate, and to follow so many hon. Members with a distinguished record in the House on, among other things, concern about middle east security. I welcome the debate, and congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks).

I taught in a school operated by the United Nations. It was one of the few places where, throughout the 1960s, children of Jewish-American origin, one or two children from Israel and students from a number of Arab countries showed that, if they were not subject to the prejudices that affect many who are much closer to the situation, they could work and learn together in harmony. However, I want to make a couple of observations not because of that experience, but because my limited parliamentary experience has involved two visits to the Lebanon, one of which happened to coincide with the kidnapping of Durani by Israeli forces. That created a period of tension. The second visit was only last April when we saw the start of the attack on Lebanon and witnessed the beginning of shelling in the middle eastern mini-war.

Mr. John Marshall: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the problem of Lebanon and Israel is a two-way problem? I remember standing on the border between Lebanon and Israel and hearing on the news 10 days later that where I had stood had been the subject of an attack from within Lebanon and that people had died. Some of my friends said that the people had got their timing wrong. Does he accept that, if the kibbutzim are being attacked day after day by mortars and missiles, the Israeli Government have to react?

Mr. Gunnell: Wherever there is conflict, there are always two sides to the issue. When we talk about the peace process, we are talking about a process in which, although we hope that parties will come together and recognise the larger good that is secured by peace, there are elements of provocation on both sides. Were that not the case, we would not have such difficult conflicts to resolve. I certainly want to follow through the views of hon. Members who have expressed the wish that the peace process continues in a firm way, and of those who recognise that the Har Homa settlement development is a block in the peace process. I certainly join those hon. Members who have said to Mr. Netanyahu in the debate that they wish that he would feel able to call a halt to that settlement, because we see it doing lasting damage to the peace process. Indeed, we think that it will prove very difficult to get the momentum back into the peace process if the development goes ahead.

I am perhaps more influenced by my role as an observer in a European Union team that witnessed the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Assembly. Through being present at the elections, one got the sense, particularly perhaps because I was in the rural area of Qalqilya, of the joy of the ordinary people who were taking part in the election—the joy that they were free to vote. I met very elderly people who explained to me that it was the first time that they had had the opportunity to vote and who gave me some sense of what that meant to them.

Four generations of one family were all able to vote for the first time. It was clearly an occasion that gave them not a sense of bitterness about the experiences of their life, but the same sense of hope and forward-looking attitude as we have seen in other areas where elections have been held, almost unexpectedly in terms of the slow progress in the development of moves towards peace.

It is important that we get the peace process back on track. Those people took the election seriously, but, above all, they wanted recognition of a Palestinian state. They looked forward to that, because they seemed to be in

a period of promise. The area in which I was observing the election was very rural, so there were no hotels in which, it was thought, members of an EU observation team could stay. Therefore, we stayed in a settlement. I think that we were the only observation team to do so.

It was interesting to talk to people at the settlement and to see the different attitudes. One of our two election teams, a team of Swedes, had gone out perhaps 200 or 300 yards on election morning before the flat tyre on their vehicle became evident. The British consulate made it clear that it believed that that flat tyre was no coincidence. Indeed, an object had obviously been knocked into the tyre because some people did not wish the process to go ahead at that stage. That demonstrated that there were those who violently opposed the agreement.

The turn of events has shown that those people have had considerable influence since. We understand the pressures on Mr. Netanyahu. We think that it is important to focus on the problem of Jerusalem. We know that this Government have recognised the importance of east Jerusalem, but the ringing round of Jerusalem by settlements, which is more or less completed by the Har Homa development, has been accompanied by pressures on Arabs living in east Jerusalem to leave it. Although we could not, as yet, describe that process as anything like ethnic cleansing, it has some features of that: the mood is that people who are Arabs are not welcome in east Jerusalem. That meant that the experience of election day for Arab inhabitants of Jerusalem was very different from the experience that I witnessed in rural areas.

I am anxious to join other hon. Members in hoping that the peace process is not stalled and that, whatever the result of our election, the United Kingdom Government will continue to take a stand on issues involving Jerusalem and to support United Nations resolutions. I recognise that we would have supported the recent UN resolution that was vetoed by the United States. I hope that, in continuing discussions within the Euro-Med agreement, we can ensure that pressures for the recognition of human rights are sustained. To that end, I join other hon. Members in wishing that middle east security can be underpinned by a recognition of the human rights of all the people who live there.

12.7 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on securing this debate. It is an extremely important debate in terms of its timing, but it is also an occasion that, over the next few weeks, many of us who have been able to participate will well remember, because it has shown that the House of Commons is rational and that we can conduct debate in a sensible way. Perhaps there will not be much of that atmosphere in the country in the next few weeks. Therefore, we should enjoy it and perhaps luxuriate in it this morning.

It has also been a great pleasure to be here for the valedictory speeches of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). My path crossed that of my hon. and learned Friend before I became a Member. I was the unsuccessful Labour candidate for Bosworth in 1979. My great achievement was to turn what was then a marginal Conservative seat into a safe Conservative seat. My successor as Labour candidate was my hon. and learned Friend's son and he did worse than I did, so our paths crossed at that point. I am sorry that his son has not followed in his footsteps—

Sir Patrick Cormack: The son of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) has joined us now.

Mr. Fatchett: I understand what has happened in the family, but, if my hon. and learned Friend's son had come into the House, he would have had to follow the extremely fine example that had been set by his father. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West has been a great servant of the people of Leicester; I know that from my own involvement with Leicestershire over the years. He has also been a great servant to his own community, and on the issues that we are discussing.

It was a great pleasure to hear the final speech by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) to the House. I am sure that, when the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said that we hoped that that would not be the right hon. Gentleman's final speech in the Houses of Parliament, his wishes were echoed on both sides of the House.

We do not have any nominating powers, so I cannot make any suggestion or offer to the right hon. Gentleman in that direction, but I am sure that I have the support of every hon. Member when I say that the right hon. Gentleman's period as a Member of the House of Commons will be well respected and fondly remembered. I am sure, too, that his contribution as leader of his party will go down in history as one that saw the party rebuilt in a modern way that gave it a very significant voice in British politics.

I agree whole-heartedly with what the right hon. Gentleman said about the arms trade. It is one of the big moral, economic and political challenges that faces us as we move into the next millennium. It is a travesty when extremely poor countries spend disproportionate amounts of their budgets on arms. There is no need or moral justification for that. We all realise that difficult decisions will be involved in reversing the process, but the task for all of us is to see what contribution we can make towards that end.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) and my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) rightly broadened the scope of the debate beyond the middle east peace process. I hope that they will accept my apologies for concentrating, in the few minutes left to me, on the peace process alone. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow raised, as always, some important moral and political issues that will not go away, which will have to be confronted in the next Parliament.

The mood of the House in the debate has been clear: we all want the peace process to continue. That is not surprising, because that process brings to those in the region opportunities for justice, security and prosperity, and to the rest of the world security in a sensitive region and the opportunity for expanded trade and economic development. The price of failure is great; the prize for success is immense. Therefore the peace process is important to each and every one of us.

All the contributions to the debate have made, with justification, the same point—that the peace process is at a crossroads. That is right, although we must remind

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ourselves that significant progress has been made over the past few years. The contributions of many people, as statesmen, have already been mentioned. The decision on the Hebron agreement was crucial for the Likud Government, because it endorsed the peace process and they are now part of that process. That is not to say—and nobody is saying—that the process will continue to move easily towards a final settlement. That is not how things will be, and we know about all the difficulties.

May I draw to the attention of the House, if I need to do so, the dreadful events of last Thursday, when Israeli schoolgirls were killed. We in the House find it easy to understand the grief, because of the events in Dunblane almost exactly a year ago.

Out of those tragic events of last Thursday, some important developments arose. The fact that King Hussein of Jordan felt able to visit Israel and join the grieving family is in itself a tremendously significant statement and act. We all congratulate him on the role that he has played in trying to maintain the peace process.

Naturally, hon. Members have mentioned the Har Homa settlement, and on that subject there is no difference between the two sides of the House. In our view the settlement is contrary to the United Nations resolutions and is an impediment to peace. We ask Prime Minister Netanyahu to think again.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire talked about the need for statesmanship, and the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale drew attention to the difference between politics and statesmanship. An act of statesmanship is desperately required from all the parties to the middle east peace process—an act inspired not by immediate political gain, but by the need to ensure that the long-term interests of the people of the region and of the countries directly affected are recognised and put first.

The message arising from the debate is clear. We wish to see that act of statesmanship by the key players. We want them to follow the example that King Hussein has so clearly set.

The way in which this country can make a contribution to the middle east peace process has already been described. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale talked about the role of the European Union, and it is important that that body speaks with a consistent co-ordinated voice on questions affecting the peace process. The role already played by envoy Moratinos has been especially important. The hon. Member for Southport need not worry about any embryonic European foreign policy here; what he needs to think about, in a common-sense way, is how we can co-ordinate things and make a contribution to the long-term objective that we all share.

That does not mean going around the region pitting one country against another; it means using the expertise, knowledge and experience that we have, and the friendships that Britain, almost uniquely, has on both the Israeli and the Arab side. Let us build on those to play a constructive role, not in competition with the United States but in support—with the need, occasionally, to be a candid friend to the United States and to say that things are not being done in the right way, and that we have some advice and experience to offer.

That is an important role for this country and for the European Union. There is something on which we in this country can pride ourselves. I shall even give the Government some credit for it, although that may be the last time that I say that over the next few weeks. We can give the Government credit for the contribution that this country has made towards EU aid for the Palestinians.

It is clear enough that there must be a real financial benefit for the Palestinians from the Oslo process. Since the Oslo agreement, their standard of living has fallen by 20 per cent. There must be a relationship in which people can see not only peace and justice but economic prosperity too.

I shall finish on the thought that although we shall be divided over the next few weeks, one thing will unite the House when it returns after the election, and will unite whatever party is in government. That is our wish to make a continuing commitment to peace in the middle east—a peace to bring security to the people of Israel and justice for the long term for all the people within the region. If we can make a contribution to that, we shall have made a significant contribution to a better world.

12.17 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I had intended to make a longer speech at this point, because the title of the debate covers such a wide area, and so many important matters have been raised by right hon. and hon. Members. However, unfortunately I have been left with even less time than I would usually have in a normal half-hour Adjournment debate.

I wanted to heap fulsome praise on the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who is a good friend, and has worked closely with me on foreign affairs for nearly two years. I also wanted to pay tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), who is also a good friend. However, I know that they will both allow me to express on another occasion my feelings about their contributions to the House.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on his choice of debate. Because the contributions to the debate have been long, my comments must be short. I hope that the House will accept that my brevity is a sign not of rudeness, but of the fact that I must now get down to business.

I know that many hon. Members share my concern about the situation that has developed in Israel and the occupied territories. Sadly, events since January have largely dissipated the good will generated by the Hebron agreement. The start of the construction of the settlement of Har Homa in one of the few gaps in the ring of Israeli settlements around the Arab area of East Jerusalem can do nothing but harm to the peace process, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary pointed out yesterday. The international community agrees that this settlement, like all settlements, is illegal. It also goes against the spirit of the Oslo agreement.

It is very disappointing that the Israeli Government have decided to go ahead, against all the advice of the international community. The fact that they have done so damages the peace process and, I believe, damages Israel too—not only in her relations with other states, but in the prospects for the peace and security desired by the vast

majority of Israelis. Regrettably, the tension caused by this issue has caused mistrust in other aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship.

We welcomed the fact that the first stage of Israeli redeployment on the west bank was announced on time, but we are aware that its extent caused disappointment among the Palestinians. We must remember that the Palestinian track remains central to the peace process, and indeed to the whole question of security in the middle east. Since the start of the process, when there were positive moves on that track, there has been greater optimism and stability across the region. When there have been difficulties between Israel and the Palestinians, dangerous tensions have arisen.

Events since the start of the year have demonstrated that contrast starkly. The signature of the Hebron agreement showed that the Government of Mr. Netanyahu regarded themselves as bound by the Oslo process, which had made such gains under the previous Israeli administration. Indeed, the strong majority in the Knesset for the Hebron agreement was an encouraging signal for further progress on the Palestinian track. The first subsequent stage of Israeli redeployment on the west bank was set for early March, and the start of final status talks for mid-March. As I have said, Hebron lifted our hearts somewhat.

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have been meeting this week to see if they can find a way to return to the process that had resumed after Hebron. We hope they will succeed. One casualty of the current inflamed situation has been the scheduled start of the final status talks. These talks are to determine the shape of an overall settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, and we have urged both sides not to allow the timetable to slip further. If final status talks are to succeed, an atmosphere of confidence will need to be restored—above all, there must be an end to unilateral moves that create mistrust and the risk of violent reaction.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has made clear repeatedly our views on settlements and related issues. I agree with the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), as I have done so often on this matter, that there is solidarity in the House. There is a need for both sides to do all that they can to reduce the tension that has arisen. We took a firm line in the UN Security Council debate, and at the General Assembly. We have played a leading role in the efforts of the EU—particularly through its special envoy Miguel Moratinos, to whom we give our full support and co-operation. He is doing an excellent job, and we hope that he can restore the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating relationship.

We have heard this morning about the EU-Israel association agreement, which was debated at length in Committee a month ago today. The agreement is part of the Union's efforts to support the stable and prosperous development of the region. A parallel agreement with the Palestinians was signed by the General Affairs Council last month. The final decision to adopt the EU-Israel agreement will need to be taken by Ministers in the General Affairs Council after all member states have ratified it. While the peace process continues to make progress, there is no good argument for holding this up. But if progress is halted, EU-Israel relations generally could not fail to be affected. I therefore cannot say whether this will be a succesful negotiation.

As for the Syrian-Lebanese tracks, we must understand there can be no comprehensive peace in the region without peace between Israel and Syria, and we very much hope that negotiations broken off last year can be restarted on the basis of land for peace. Progress on that track could lead to movement on the Lebanese track, and an end to the tragic on-going fighting in southern Lebanon which has claimed so many lives on both sides, including in the Lebanese civilian population. The people of Israel want to see no more of their young men and women dying in south Lebanon. It is up to Israel to make progress.

On aid to the Palestinians, I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central for his comment. The UK will disburse some £28 million in aid to the Palestinians this financial year and we are giving the EU a great deal of support, which is included in that figure.

I shall put the question of middle east security in the context of our prime interests in the Gulf. In the past 15 years, the stability of the region, and thus the economic well-being of the Gulf states, has twice been threatened by aggression. With two thirds of the world's proven reserves of oil in the Gulf—in a world increasingly dependent on oil—the western nations, including Britain, have a paramount interest in secure access to the Gulf. It is now over six years since the end of the Gulf war, and our Gulf friends know that, as we demonstrated in 1994, they can count on our help. Our long-standing association with the Gulf and a wide range of shared interests mean that the UK in particular has a strong interest in securing and underpinning peace and stability in the Gulf, and containing any threats.

A key strand of our policy in that region is our enthusiastic support for the Gulf Co-operation Council—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Southport referred—which we have supported since its inception in 1981. We are committed to helping the GCC states establish co-ordinated defence forces, which are essential for their assured future. Those arrangements need to be matched by greater political co-ordination and co-operation. I am happy to give credit where credit is due, and I heartily welcome the recent agreement between Bahrain and Qatar—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Southport also referred, in his excellent speech—to improve their bilateral relations and to appoint ambassadors. We hope that that process of consultation and consolidation will continue. We shall also continue to take the lead in promoting constructive dialogue between the EU and the GCC.

We are also concerned by the continuing dispute between the UAE and Iran over Abu Musa and the Tunbs islands. We have urged both parties to seek a peaceful resolution and are happy to support the UAE proposal to refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice. I urge the Iranians to enter into serious negotiations to resolve that dispute.

Britain makes an extensive military contribution to Gulf security. We contribute to operations Northern and Southern Watch over Iraq. We have maintained a naval presence in the Gulf since 1980, through the Armilla patrol. We also work closely with the Gulf states to see how we can best help support them in their defence needs. These are a few examples of Gulf security, but we stand ready to offer any additional help that might be needed with training or in supplying defence equipment.

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

Gulf trade has increased dramatically. Combined exports to the six GCC countries in 1996 totalled almost £5.25 billion—an increase of 26.8 per cent. over 1995. Saudi Arabia and the UAE were, respectively, our 13th and 24th largest export markets. Saudi Arabia is our foremost non-Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development market, and our exports there rose by 51 per cent. last year. I was pleased to attend the inaugural meeting of the UK-Dubai joint trade committee on board Britannia. The enormous strides made by the UAE on the economic front in recent years provide good opportunities for the UK and Europe. Our fundamental interests in the Gulf are almost identical with those of the GCC countries, and our perception of the threat is also identical.

As for Iraq, Saddam Hussein poses a serious threat to middle east security. As recently as October 1994, he threatened to invade Kuwait once again, and only the swift and robust response of the international community stopped him. He is a danger to his own people, and I cannot understand why the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) supports him. Only last year, Saddam Hussein used his considerable military machine to attack civilians in Irbil—a clear flouting of Security Council resolution 688. I say yet again to the hon. Member for Linlithgow that food and medicines have never been subject to sanctions. If there are starving children in Iraq, it is the fault of Saddam Hussein, who builds glorified palaces to his name and his honour when people are starving. Blame him, do not blame this House, Sir.

Following the Gulf war, we established a special commission to oversee the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. We provide strong support to that commission. I must again tell the hon. Gentleman that members of the United Nations special commission in Iraq carry out vital work. They are trying to spot weapons of mass destruction, which it is said could kill the world's population six times over. All the hon. Gentleman wants to do is to make cheap criticism of their work and their accommodation. I should have thought that they should be congratulated on their achievements instead of subjected to unjustified criticism.

We now have United Nations Security Council resolution 986. There is a greater amount of money—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We must move on to the next subject.

East Ayrshire Community Hospital

12.30 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): First, I must say how pleased I am to see the Minister of State for the Scottish Office, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas–Hamilton) here to answer the debate. I must take this opportunity to thank him for his unfailing personal courtesy to me and, I believe, to other Scottish Members, during his term of office. We have been grateful for that.

I regret to say, however, that the story of the proposed East Ayrshire hospital is a saga of Government delay and ineptitude, and of the Conservatives putting political dogma ahead of health care. As far back as 1993, which is four years ago, the South Ayrshire Hospitals national health service trust had planned to replace the Ballochmyle hospital at Mauchlin with a new purpose-built community hospital for East Ayrshire on the same site at Ballochmyle. That meant that the land was in NHS ownership, ready for the building to go ahead.

The Government had earmarked £13 million in the capital budget. If construction of the hospital had started as planned and been funded as originally intended, it would be open now, and the urgent needs of the people of East Ayrshire would be being provided for at this minute. Instead, we have had a catalogue of dithering, delay, political interference and, I am afraid to say, chicanery.

First, the then Health Minister, Lord Fraser, threw a spanner in the works when he announced that, rather than proceed as planned, two NHS trusts would have to compete for the right to build and run the hospital. That is a prime example of the way in which unnecessary competition and rivalry have replaced planned provision in the NHS, setting trust against trust.

Instead of providing immediately for the health needs of the area, there was a long and often acrimonious debate about which trust should run the hospital, and whether it should be at Ballochmyle, as originally planned by the South Ayrshire Hospitals trust, or on a new site at Cumnock, where the Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare trust preferred it to be.

That long-drawn-out consultation eventually finished in June 1995, but, regrettably, the dithering of the Ayrshire and Arran health board added further to the delay, when it failed to decide at its board meeting in July as it had planned to do. The board left the decision until the end of September and opted for the community trust—not the trust that had originally intended to build the hospital—and for building the hospital on the Cumnock site. Incidentally, that site is not in NHS ownership, so the decision added planning and acquisition problems.

I regret to say that that was not the end of the catalogue of delay and interference. Ministers intervened again to insist that the option of a private finance initiative should be considered alongside that of public funding, which had been the original intention and for which the money had been earmarked. The public funding option had not been questioned, either by the board or the trust, until the Government interfered. That political interference was unnecessary, as public funding had been earmarked for the hospital, and it has been the cause of even more unnecessary and unwelcome delay.

Nearly 18 months after the health board's decision, not a brick has been laid. There is not even an agreed contract, unless the Minister tells me otherwise today—but I doubt

it, for reasons that I will come to. On 17 November 1995, however, the chairman of the health board, Jim Donaldson, wrote to me giving the timetable, promising that the first patients would be treated in the day hospital by November 1996. That date has passed, and not a brick has been laid or a contract signed. He also promised that the out-patients and general practitioner unit would be operating in October 1997, and the continuing care facilities by April 1998. There is no hope of any of that now.

In his letter, Mr. Donaldson said:

"The Board and the Community Trust have made a clear public commitment to delivering the new Community Hospital within the time scale outlined above . . . It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure that the timetable is achieved."

It is evident that it has failed in that responsibility; and who are the losers? None other than the people of East Ayrshire, who are waiting for much-needed, long-overdue healthcare facilities.

Although the Ayrshire and Arran health board has manifestly failed, I argue that the Government are the principle cause of that failure. The board is responsible to the Minister—it is appointed by him and under his direction. It reports to the management executive, to Mr. Geoff Scaife and, through him, to the Minister regularly. It is the dithering, the interference and, frankly, the dubious practices of Scottish Office Ministers that have caused the delay.

First, the Government's insistence on the PFI option meant a delay while the preferred bidder was chosen. We had to go through all the procedure of considering potential bidders and choosing one. Ultimately, the community trust chose G. A. Construction Ltd.—formerly Gilbert Ash Ltd., I think.

The first delay was in coming to a decision about the preferred bidder, but eventually, on 2 September last year, the trust submitted the PFI bid, together with the public funding option as an alternative. That option is still there. That is the benchmark for considering whether the hospital should be constructed through the PFI.

I presume that the benchmark must be at or near—I hope that the Minister will confirm this—the £8 million that was the original figure with which the community trust won the competition with the South Ayrshire Hospitals trust. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will know that the South Ayrshire Hospitals trust bid was about £11.5 million.

What happened? I understand that this is happening not merely in East Ayrshire but in other parts of Scotland and the United Kingdom. It would appear that the PFI bid was not merely much more expensive than the £8 million benchmark—in other words, PFIs are much more expensive than funding by the traditional public method—but it is rumoured that it was even higher than the South Ayrshire Hospitals trust figure. It might even have been as high as £12 million.

What happened then? This is the interesting thing, as Ministers received the details of the PFI bid and the benchmark figure, but then told the community trust that they would give the preferred bidder time "to revise the bid". The Minister used that phrase in a parliamentary answer to me.

That was very fishy: why was extra time given to revise the bid? What fiddling of the figures was needed behind the scenes? Were the specifications reduced in an attempt to get the PFI bid down to the benchmark figure or below? The Minister has so far refused all the opportunities that I have given him to answer those questions. I hope that he will take the opportunity to answer today, to the House and to me, but above all to the people of East Ayrshire.

I regret to say that there is more to the story: 1 November passed and there was still no announcement, and on 4 November I tabled another parliamentary question, to be told by the Minister that he would announce the decision "shortly"; but still there is no decision. I can see that my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) agrees that that is stretching the English language a little too far. It is stretching the patience of the long-suffering people of East Ayrshire even further, particularly as the closure of wards in Ballochmyle continues relentlessly. Health care in East Ayrshire is deteriorating rather than improving as was intended.

The suspicion that something fishy was going on behind the scenes was increased with the revelation that a second revised PFI bid had to be submitted two weeks ago today. I understand that it is still on the Minister's desk, being considered. Why was that further revision necessary? I hope that the Minister will answer that question today. Have there been further changes in the specification? Are corners being cut? Will we get a second-rate hospital because the Minister and the management executive are insisting that the trust should try to find reductions in the PFI bid?

Over the past few months, I have asked question after question in the House and in the Scottish Grand Committee, and still delays continue as Ministers try to get the answer they want rather than the best answer for the national health service and for the people of East Ayrshire.

I hope that the Minister will confirm today that the facilities to be provided in the East Ayrshire hospital have not been cut back, that they are still as outlined in his written answer to me of 6 February, and that there is still money in the capital pool to fund the hospital publicly. I believe that that is the better option.

Will the Minister say whether the report in yesterday's *Financial Times* is correct, which said that banks will not support PFI schemes for hospitals, because any trust signing a deal with a private consortium would be acting ultra vires under current legislation? Will he stop trying to fiddle the figures to favour the PFI option? Why does not he give the go-ahead for the long overdue and much-needed hospital, funded with public money?

I have spoken to my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), and I can assure the Minister in this changeover period that my hon. Friend would support the course of action that I advocate. Parliament is to be prorogued on Friday, and the Minister has the opportunity to finish his ministerial career with one act of sense and courage; I urge him to do so.

12.43 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on securing a debate on this important subject. I should like to say straight away that there have certainly been no cuts in specification for the new hospital.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

I am extremely encouraged by the recent good progress towards securing the new facility, and I am delighted that more locally based, responsive health services will in the future be available for the people of East Ayrshire. I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's description of his concerns and those of his constituents, and I hope that he will be reassured that we are well on the way to delivering this important new facility.

I shall turn to the details of the development in its local context in a moment, but it is important to place the new East Ayrshire community hospital in a national context. The scheme that has been developed for East Ayrshire is an excellent practical example of the projects that we are encouraging and that will be supported by the initiatives in the White Paper "Ready for the Future".

The White Paper's main themes are an emphasis on prevention; better information for the public and access to services; greater responsiveness to patients' needs; effective continuity of care; and excellence in clinical and management practice. The positive features of the new East Ayrshire community hospital will translate each of those into action.

Most obviously, the convenient siting of the hospital at Cumnock will provide the easiest access for the greatest numbers of the people whom it will serve. Transportation links to the site were a key consideration for the trust. For both in-patient and out-patient treatment, as well as for longer-term continuing care, the hospital meets head on the challenge to ensure that patients have access to care locally wherever possible, and can avoid travelling to facilities many miles further from home.

The improved services and facilities will meet patients' needs better, tackle the particular health problems prevalent in the area, provide effective continuity of care and foster clinical excellence. The location of the new facility in Cumnock will offer new opportunities to develop new and effective strategies to improve the health service's action in preventing disease.

The development provides a first-class example of a primary care-led NHS. There will be accessible and locally provided services, and patient care will be properly planned and well co-ordinated between the primary and secondary care sectors. A broader range of services will be available locally, with access to a network of specialist support services.

Ayrshire and Arran health board has had very clear criteria about the objectives of the East Ayrshire community hospital project since its inception. It wanted high-quality, innovative, cost-effective services delivered locally for the people of East Ayrshire. I am delighted that we are getting closer to delivering exactly that.

Mr. Foulkes: When?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall say in the course of my remarks.

The hon. Gentleman will, I am sure, be the first to recognise the particular importance of the project. East Ayrshire contains areas of considerable socio-economic deprivation and unemployment, and relatively poor health. All the parties involved with the project have recognised from the outset that the development of health services in the area must take proper account of that. Health care must target resources on the areas of local need. The new community hospital will therefore be sited at Cumnock in order to provide the easiest possible access to the largest possible proportion of the area's population.

The proposals are built on the concept of locally provided, patient-centred care, in terms of both service delivery and building design. It will be a primary care-focused service, offering integrated care for the locality. The hospital will include a 24-bed general practice unit—doubling the current complement in the area—24 day hospital places, out-patient services, and 50 continuing care and respite care places.

People will be able to receive the care that they need as close to their homes as possible. That is a model for future NHS services: local people deciding how best to meet local needs, and working in partnership—both public and private—to produce innovative and imaginative schemes. I therefore welcome this opportunity to pay tribute to all those who have played a part in bringing this project so close to fruition.

Mr. Foulkes: When will that be?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am just coming to that.

As I have said, good progress has been made. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, in the autumn of 1995, the health board selected Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS trust to take forward its proposals for the new community hospital. Having advertised for bidders, narrowed down a shortlist, and examined the resulting tenders, the trust selected a private partner with whom to explore funding the project under PFI in June 1996.

The hon. Gentleman has made clear his concern that the process of exploring PFI has taken longer than it should. He will be aware that several months of delay were caused by the refusal of the then Cumnock and Doon Valley district council to grant planning permission for the new facility. Although that problem was eventually resolved, the resulting delay of more than four months was frustrating for those keen to make progress. It was in no measure the fault of the trust, the health board, or the PFI process.

Since then, much progress has been made. A full business case was received in the autumn of 1996, and subsequent negotiations between the trust and the bidder have been extremely fruitful in making the PFI option even more attractive. As with many PFI projects, a great deal of negotiation has been necessary to ensure that the project is affordable and that the taxpayer gets the new hospital at the best possible price.

I am glad to say that those issues are now largely concluded in the case of East Ayrshire, and I would expect negotiations to be concluded very shortly. However, I am bound by election rules since the declaration of the Prime Minister. I would not expect the trust to sign the contract until after the general election, in the light of advice from the Treasury and the Cabinet Office that no further decisions should be made or actions taken that are of a continuously binding or long-term character. However, I expect negotiations to be concluded this month.

The new East Ayrshire community hospital is not the only development to benefit from the private finance initiative. Some 18 health projects, with a capital value of

nearly £56 million, have already been completed. They include: Ferryfield house, a 60-bed nursing home in Edinburgh that is now up and running; hospital information support systems at the Law hospital, Perth and Kinross Healthcare and Yorkhill NHS trusts; and a new £3.8 million community hospital in Stonehaven.

Thirteen more projects, with a total value of nearly £600 million, are beyond the point of being advertised as PFI schemes; a further nine projects, with a value of £250 million, are preparing to advertise in the near future. Projects are coming to fruition rapidly.

In the past few weeks, Lanarkshire health board has given formal approval for the building of two new district general hospitals under the PFI to replace Law and Hairmyres hospitals. Lothian health board has approved a scheme for the new royal infirmary. A promising design has been proposed for the redevelopment of the Western general hospital in Edinburgh. All the trusts concerned will be working with the consortia on the final stages of contract negotiations before submitting final proposals to the Scottish Office.

This huge investment programme could not be funded from the public capital programme. Demand far outstrips the availability of public capital. However, the PFI brings many other tangible benefits. The evidence so far is that it gives very good value for money, and only projects that offer value for money are allowed to proceed. It provides an ideal opportunity for the private sector to offer innovative solutions, while enabling projects to go ahead well in advance of the time scale that would apply if public capital alone were used.

PFI contracts also give the private sector an incentive to deliver on time and maintain services to a high standard. Quality of service is a recurring theme. The PFI is about delivering services rather than assets, and payments for the services are based on results. Capital and management skills are provided by the private sector, while the service remains under public control. Finally, risks previously borne by the public sector are transferred to the private sector through PFI deals. In particular, the risks of technical obsolescence, upgrading and residual value of equipment are borne by the supplier.

Those points are well documented, and I suspect that most Opposition Members would accept them, despite their initial reluctance wholly to embrace the PFI. It is worth remembering that these are all benefits that will improve health care services provided to people, including now those in East Ayrshire. I know that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley will welcome that.

Mr. Foulkes: I am conscious of what the Minister said about Treasury rules and the Cabinet Office instruction about not making decisions until after the general election, which is right and understandable. However, that would suggest that no decision can be taken until well into May, which means further delay for East Ayrshire hospital. If the Government decided to go ahead with the traditional public funding method using public capital, and if my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) concurred, would it not be possible to make a decision now?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are virtually at the stage at which a PFI project can go ahead. If the hon. Gentleman favoured that—I see that he does not, so I cannot make him an offer, given the election rules.

The PFI will greatly benefit the national health service, because it will ensure that public sector funds go much further. The PFI is new territory for the NHS and the private sector, and both have much to learn about each other. The deals are long-term partnerships of 20 to 25 years, involving millions of pounds of capital and significant revenue streams into the future. Partnerships—I deliberately use the word "partnership" because this is a partnership between the public and private sectors—involve provision of health care environments, and as such are not the sort of schemes that should be hurried into agreements. The NHS is too important for that. We have to get the details right.

The hon. Gentleman asked about trust vires. We have clear advice that NHS trusts have the power to sign PFI contracts. Some banks have expressed concern about that. The issue has been discussed with them, but the calling of the general election has prevented any conclusion from being reached.

Mr. Foulkes: The Minister in his reply to my earlier intervention seemed to be about to make an offer. Although I was wincing a little, I was not shaking my head. It may be that what he was about to say would have been acceptable. That could be explored with my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm), who is present. If there were a way forward to ensure that there was no further delay, I should be grateful if it could be explored.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are close to the possible signing of a contract, but under general election rules we are not in a position to do that. If the hon. Gentleman spoke to the shadow Secretary of State and received his support, and believed it to be in the public interest that the project should go ahead, I would certainly raise it with the Secretary of State for Scotland. However, both Government and Opposition are bound by the Cabinet rules. I shall endeavour to ensure that he has all the available information. It will be a few days before we are in a position to do that. If he wants to come back to me, he is welcome to do so.

Ayrshire and Arran health board has consistently received higher than average resources per head in recognition of its population profile, and an increasing share of the national total. For 1997–98, it will receive an extra 5.4 per cent. over the 1996–97 figure. We believe strongly that the development will mark yet further progress in health care facilities for Ayrshire and Arran. Just as the new hospital will be geared to meet the health needs of East Ayrshire, so has the Scottish Office made sure that the same principle holds true for the people of the whole of Ayrshire and Arran by ensuring that they receive funding much higher than inflation, and above the national average.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. On 18 December 1996, he asked me in the House why the proposals have been delayed by the PFI, and why public funding was not being made available immediately. I told him that the trusts were confident that, with further negotiations, the hospital could be provided under the PFI. That remains the case, with the PFI looking increasingly likely to provide the fastest solution.

Contrary to speculation, the scheme has a far better chance of getting up and running quickly under the PFI than it would if it joined the queue for the limited public

[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton]

capital resources available. If negotiations are concluded soon, I expect building to be completed by the end of 1998, which is probably faster than could be achieved by any other route. The sooner we can deliver the hospital, the better.

The East Ayrshire hospital project has been able to learn the lessons of other PFI schemes, such as the most effective period over which to let a contract, the need for flexible output specifications, and the need to ensure the right balance between debt funding from banks and equity input from investors. For many reasons, the PFI looks like the best mechanism to deliver the desired improved quality of services to those who need them.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. If he wishes to come back to me, he is welcome to do so: I would look into the matter speedily and effectively. He has served a valuable purpose by raising the subject.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the Minister for the way in which he has dealt with the debate, and for his offer. I shall talk to my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton. My hon. Friend the Member for Leith, who also has an interest in the matter, has been present for the debate today. I am grateful for the Minister's offer of further discussions. I do not want dogma to decide the matter—I want the health needs of the people of east Ayrshire to decide it. As the Minister rightly said, they have particular health needs, because they are disadvantaged. I am grateful to the Minister for that help.

Lord James Douglas–Hamilton: In the half minute that remains, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) is here, I repeat that I have made it clear that PFI projects would not be pursued unless clinicians and local management wanted them. In relation to the question that the hon. Gentleman asked some time ago—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We now move to the next debate.

Education (Vale of Glamorgan)

1 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): I am grateful for the opportunity to inform the House about the difficulties that are being caused to all schools in Vale of Glamorgan by the incompetence of the Labour-controlled Vale of Glamorgan council.

At the end of last month, schools were told that the council was about to impose budget cuts of £3.13 million on education. The effect on schools would be catastrophic. Some schools would face cuts of as much as 15 per cent. It was not surprising that about 200 worried parents, teachers, governors and pupils appeared at my advice surgery in Llantwit Major on Friday 28 February expressing their demand that the savage proposed cuts be reversed by the council and seeking my help to achieve that end. Since then, I have visited various schools and have had discussions with head teachers, staff, parents and governors.

I was appalled to find that there seemed to have been little or no consultation with any of those people about the necessity for such a high level of cuts or about the way in which savings could be effected in administration or elsewhere in the council's budget. On 4 March 1997, I faxed a letter to the chief executive of Vale of Glamorgan council, the director of education and the leader of the council, Councillor Shaun Stringer. I suggested that, before the budget was fixed, a series of consultative meetings should be held throughout the vale so that everyone could have a say on how best to protect their children's future.

I also requested sight of the council's budget to enable me to work constructively with the council to identify potential savings which could be used to relieve the heavy burden of cuts on schools. Unfortunately, the reply from Councillor Stringer was less than helpful. He stated:

"I have no intention of disclosing or, indeed, discussing the Council's budget with you at any time, as I consider you to be part of the problem and in no way part of the solution."

I am appalled at the unwillingness of the leader of the council to co-operate with the local Member of Parliament in the best interests of all the people, of whatever party, whom I and the vale councillors represent. Councillor Stringer's negative attitude contrasts unfavourably with that of council leaders in the former Vale of Glamorgan borough council, including Councillor Stringer, who showed a more positive attitude in those days to working with their Member of Parliament for the benefit of the community, even if that Member of Parliament was of a different political persuasion.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): Is my hon. Friend aware of a similar scandal in my constituency? Conwy county borough council has told deliberate lies to the schools in my constituency in order to cover up the reason for cutting school budgets. It has calculated the expenditure required for schools and deducted from it the income that schools expect to receive from nursery vouchers. Where in any accounting practice does one deduct income from expenditure and use the net figure to calculate the budgets, which will inevitably show a cut that they should not show?

Mr. Sweeney: I was not aware of that circumstance, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing it to the

attention of the House. I am sure that everyone will be interested to learn about that further example of duplicity and incompetence on the part of a Labour-controlled authority.

Perhaps I should not have been too surprised at Councillor Stringer's petulance, as he appears to have been equally unhelpful to the head teachers in the vale, who were given a similar brush-off. I understand from them that, at meetings on Monday 3 and Tuesday 4 March, they were told that the proposed cuts were all the fault of the Government and that not an extra penny could be found for school budgets. If that is the way in which the leader of the council treats top professionals when they are seriously worried about education standards for children in their care, it should come as no surprise to me that he puts party politics before the interests of children.

Within 24 hours, Councillor Stringer was singing a different tune. I presume that he was overwhelmed by the strength of public opposition to his proposals. First, it was announced that the council would put back into the schools budget approximately £2 million. It was planned to raise half that figure by confiscating the reserves of schools and redistributing them. The effect would have been catastrophic for thrifty schools which had created reserves. Some of them were planning to spend their reserves in order to keep on teachers or other staff who would otherwise have been made redundant as a result of the cuts. The effect of the revised proposals would have been to punish thrifty schools—a typically "old Labour" idea. Unfortunately for Councillor Stringer, but fortunately for the schools, it was pointed out to him that the proposals were illegal. The proposed budget cut, which had been reduced by about £2 million, was immediately increased again by about £1 million.

It has been impossible for me to establish precisely by how much school budgets are now to suffer. There is an atmosphere of confusion. Councillor Stringer appears to be making policy on the hoof. My telephone inquiries this morning have revealed that the best estimate of the final level of cuts is about £1.7 million. I have no doubt that head teachers throughout Vale of Glamorgan have spent many anxious evenings poring over their school budgets, deciding who will have to be sacked in order to balance the books.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I have listened with some interest to what the hon. Gentleman has been saying about this complex situation. Will he answer one or two questions in the course of his remarks? Is it true that in this year's financial settlement Vale of Glamorgan council will receive less money than it did last year? Is it true that the council, the heads and all the teaching unions—the National Union of Teachers, the National Association of Head Teachers, the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, UCAC—the Welsh teachers' association—the Association of Teachers and Lecturers and the Secondary Heads Association—have agreed a concordat under which no teacher will be made compulsorily redundant and no class size will be increased? That is the result of consultation between the vale and all its teachers. The head teacher who represents all the head teachers has written to the *Western Mail* saying that reports of things such as the hon. Gentleman is now saying are a load of rubbish and that they are disconcerting the teachers—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Interventions should be less than a minute.

Mr. Sweeney: I will not say that I am grateful for that intervention. The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the situation. Vale of Glamorgan council has known, or at least the Labour leadership has known, for several months that the council was running over budget in education. It should have taken some pre-emptive action as long ago as last November to deal with the overspend, instead of confronting schools at the last minute before the budget is due to be fixed, with the appalling prospect of ghastly cuts. If a deal has been stitched together which will ensure that no teacher losses will occur, that is wonderful news for the people of the vale, but until it is confirmed by the council, I remain extremely sceptical about it.

Indeed, if the cuts are not to be made, why is it that, as recently as 5 March, we were faced with a proposal to sack about 45 teachers? I can only speculate that what has happened is that the Labour leadership has experienced such a barrage of criticism and abuse from the public, who are rightly extremely upset about this politically motivated punishment of their innocent children, that the message has got across that such behaviour is unacceptable. Why is the council's Labour leadership so blind to the realities of life and the importance of children and education that it has only just woken up to the strength of public concern?

My school visits have revealed the widespread anxiety about the increased class sizes that will result if teachers are sacked. One head of department at a secondary school pointed out that it is often not possible to sack the weakest member of staff, because there may be a shortage of teachers in his or her specialist subject area; thus, excellent teachers may be lost. Some school buildings are very poor, with cramped portakabin classrooms which will be physically overcrowded if four or five extra children have to be crammed into a class.

I am furious that Councillor Stringer is attempting to shift the blame for the incompetence of his own council in arranging its budget on to the Welsh Office. I have read Councillor Stringer's "Budget Update 1997—Council Tax News", in which he falsely claims that the council is faced with "massive budget cuts". That brings me to the other point raised by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths). My inquiries at the Welsh Office have revealed that the standard spending assessment for Vale of Glamorgan council has been increased by 1.8 per cent. to £95,846,000. Under provisional capping principles, the council can increase its 1996–97 budget by 4 per cent. to £97,404,000. I understand that Vale of Glamorgan council does intend to spend up to its capping limit. It is therefore a fraud on the electorate for Councillor Stringer to claim that the council is faced with massive budget cuts and to imply that the Welsh Office is to blame.

Even allowing for inflation, there is only a tiny reduction in Welsh Office funding, which is entirely consistent with the Government's policies of expecting the public sector to achieve efficiency savings. Everyone in the private sector has to do that. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bridgend continues to speak from a

[Mr. Sweeney]

sedentary position, but a tiny reduction in the budget is hardly the massive reduction claimed by Councillor Stringer. It is the height of irresponsibility and incompetence for Vale of Glamorgan council, which is totally dominated by Labour councillors, to produce a budget that will hurt all the children in Vale of Glamorgan by damaging their education prospects while, at the same time, trying to blame the Government.

If the hon. Member for Bridgend is correct to say that, now, none of the damage in terms of teacher losses is to take place, why have the parents, teachers, governors and children of Vale of Glamorgan been frightened witless by misleading information?

Mr. Griffiths: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sweeney: No, we have heard enough from the hon. Gentleman—he was wrong on both the points he raised, and I must press on with my speech.

I am well aware that Councillor Stringer claims to have received a rough deal on the disaggregation that followed the abolition of South Glamorgan county council. Perhaps, instead of bleating about that a whole year after South Glamorgan council was abolished, he should address his remarks to his Labour colleague Councillor Russell Goodway, who appears—if Councillor Stringer is to be believed—to have negotiated a better deal for the people of Cardiff than Councillor Stringer managed for Vale of Glamorgan.

I fought long and hard for the abolition of South Glamorgan county council, because it did not give to Vale of Glamorgan the priority that it deserved. It was a remote authority, excessively top-heavy in bureaucracy, which deprived the people in the vale in order to spend money on the pet schemes of the majority Labour group in Cardiff. That was why I wanted to get rid of that council and have our own unitary authority in Vale of Glamorgan and, of course, I welcome the fact that that has happened.

What worries me now is that Vale of Glamorgan council seems to be making mistakes similar to those made by South Glamorgan county council. We all recall that South Glamorgan council was near the top of the league for receipts for education spending, but near the bottom of the league for the amount actually spent on education. When the figures are published, I shall be interested to see how much Vale of Glamorgan council is spending on administration and what proportion of the education budget is actually getting through to the children who matter most.

Another excuse offered by Labour councillors in the vale is that the formula whereby central Government resources are distributed to local authorities is unfair to Vale of Glamorgan. I point out that the distribution formula for 1997–98 was ratified by the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance. I assume that that body is even more heavily dominated by Labour supporters than Vale of Glamorgan council, so I can only speculate as to why Councillor Stringer, as a Labour council leader who also happens to be the agent for the Labour candidate for the Vale of Glamorgan constituency in the forthcoming general election, has been so ineffectual in persuading the consultative council that Vale of Glamorgan is hard done by.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be well aware that we have some excellent schools in Vale of Glamorgan, with good teachers, parents and pupils. We also have some good and conscientious governors, although it is a source of great regret to me that, due to the policy of Vale of Glamorgan council, Tory governors have been largely excluded. It is also a matter of regret that most of the governing bodies have not supported the principle of grant-maintained education, which could have done so much to help all the schools in my constituency.

My hon. Friend will also be aware that schools in Vale of Glamorgan are performing better than the Wales average, with 46 per cent. achieving five or more GCSE grades A to C, compared with 42 per cent. in Wales as a whole. The average A-level and AS-level point score is 17, compared with 16 in Wales as a whole. The performance of 11-year-olds has put the vale among the top three authorities in Wales, with 52.5 per cent. achieving the key stage 2 performance indicator, compared with 45 per cent. in Wales as a whole. I pay tribute to the parents, teachers and pupils in my schools.

Mr. Griffiths: And the local authority.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sweeney: Unfortunately, I do not feel inclined to pay equal tribute to Vale of Glamorgan council, as that high level of achievement is unlikely to be maintained and improved unless the council spends more of its budget on education and finds ways of cutting administrative costs so that individual schools will receive more money.

It is appropriate for me to draw the attention of the House to some examples of profligate spending by Vale of Glamorgan council. It bleats about savage, but non-existent, cuts in its budget by the Welsh Office, when in reality it is spending money like water. I learned only today that the council is contemplating spending more than £1 million on refurbishing four leisure centres in the vale, at a time when, according to my information—I hope that I will be corrected—45 teachers face redundancy. The council has spent about £100,000 on a new foyer; it has built a new hospitality suite for councillors; and the new group room for Labour councillors has displaced officers, which has led to new office accommodation having to be rented. The council is spending about £60,000 on Barry Town football club. What makes me unhappy about that is that free tickets are distributed by the club to some privileged councillors.

Pagers, fax machines and mobile phones have been freely distributed. The leader of the Labour council receives a pager, a fax machine and a mobile phone. The deputy leader receives a fax machine and a mobile phone. The chief whip receives—

Mr. Griffiths: Do you have a fax?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a Back-Bench debate for half an hour. Sedentary comments from any part of the House are not acceptable.

Mr. Sweeney: The deputy leader of the council receives a fax and a mobile phone. The chief whip receives a pager, a fax and a mobile phone. The leaders of the minority groups get a fax and a mobile phone.

All chairmen of committees receive a pager, a fax and a mobile phone. If the council is so hard up, how can it be spending money on things like that? Where do its priorities lie? Of course we want better leisure facilities and so on, but can anyone seriously doubt that we could make some savings in those budgets to help the children of the Vale, who represent our future?

I appreciate the commitment of my hon. Friend the Minister to the principle of allowing local authorities to take their own decisions. Naturally, in a democracy, that is important. However, I recall too well that the Labour-controlled South Glamorgan county council and the neighbouring authorities failed to fund the police adequately. In the end, to combat rising crime, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, supported by the Welsh Office, took the dramatic decision to ring-fence police funding to ensure that the police received all the money that they desperately needed. The result has been 30 extra police officers in Vale of Glamorgan and a considerable drop in recorded crime during the past two years.

I have reluctantly reached the conclusion, as a result of the appalling mismanagement by Vale of Glamorgan council, that the only way in which we can ensure that our children receive the best possible education is to hypothecate education spending in the standard spending assessment and to conduct an urgent audit of authorities such as Vale of Glamorgan, to find out why they are failing dismally to run their affairs in a way calculated to protect our children's future.

The public in Vale of Glamorgan should know how much we pay our chief officers compared with the much larger South Glamorgan county council, which has been abolished, how top-heavy staffing levels are, what proportion of the education budget is spent on administration, what proportion gets through to the schools, and what proportion of the total budget is spent on education in comparison with other matters. I would welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister on that.

In conclusion, I make no apology for making a political point. If that is the way in which Councillor Stringer and his new Labour colleagues treat parents, teachers, governors and children, it illustrates very well why new Labour should not be trusted in local government, or at Westminster.

1.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jonathan Evans): My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) has performed a valuable service by drawing the attention of the House to the budget plans of Vale of Glamorgan council. As the debate unfolded, he illustrated the need for much greater accountability on the part of local government.

There has been use in our press of the word "cuts". In today's *Western Mail*, at least two articles referring specifically to budget items in Wales use that word. In neither of those instances is it explained that the cuts are not cuts in spending but cuts in the aspirations of local authorities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan said, the budget of Vale of Glamorgan district council has been increased.

Mr. Griffiths *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Evans: It has indeed. In fact, the money available to the council to spend in the current financial year will increase to about £97,404,000.

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend will be aware of the scandalous way in which Conwy county borough council has deceived parents in my constituency. The council claims that there have been cuts in its budget. Will my hon. Friend nail that lie once and for all? Will he tell the House, the country and my constituents how much more cash Conwy county borough council will have to spend in the forthcoming financial year than it is spending this year?

Mr. Evans: I can tell my hon. Friend that his authority is the one for whom the capping principles have worked out best. It is allowed the biggest percentage increase in expenditure in Wales—an increase of more than £4 million.

If there is to be accountability, there must be a clear assessment of the way in which the funding made available to each authority is used. It is for local authorities to decide how much money to make available for spending on categories such as education. Performance tables of local authorities have been published, and the Audit Commission issued a report on their performance in 1995–96.

Authorities in Wales have undergone wide-scale reform, with the creation of the new unitary authorities. An interesting aspect of the accountability of the old county council was that South Glamorgan county council was one of the best-provided authorities in Wales, and the United Kingdom, but spent on its secondary school pupils the fourth lowest sum of any United Kingdom county council.

That is what accountability should be about. Newspapers should analyse the spending plans of councils instead of unquestioningly accepting press statements issued by authorities, talking about cuts, and echoing them in headlines.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan said that he wanted sight of the budget of Vale of Glamorgan council. It appears that the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) has had sight of much more information than has been made available by the council to its elected representative. That is also a matter of accountability, to which our press might like to pay attention.

Mr. Griffiths: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Evans: Just a moment. I want to draw attention to some figures first.

In the last financial year, Vale of Glamorgan council gave a far lower priority to education in its spending than did very many authorities in Wales. Parents of nursery and primary school children in Vale of Glamorgan might like to note that last year, on average, nursery and primary schools in Vale of Glamorgan received £85 per capita less

[Mr. Evans]

than the Welsh average. Parents of secondary school pupils in Vale of Glamorgan might like to note that, per capita, £159 less was spent on secondary school pupils in Vale of Glamorgan than the Welsh average.

Mr. Griffiths: Those figures have been available from the council and in the *Western Mail* to be read by anyone. As early as 7 March 1997, the head teachers issued a joint statement with the council, saying that there would be no compulsory redundancies and no increase in class sizes. That has been in the papers too, and I cannot see how the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) did not know about that.

Mr. Evans: I refer merely to the two stories in the *Western Mail* today. Both talk about cuts; neither talks about the increased budget for expenditure for each of those councils. The day that I see journalists putting the full story before the electorate in Wales will be the day that I withdraw the remark.

I am pleased that the hon. Member for Bridgend got to his feet, because I have figures on the expenditure of Bridgend unitary council. He is the education spokesman for the Labour party in Wales, and he said today that parents in Vale of Glamorgan had nothing to worry about. Although spending in Vale of Glamorgan is significantly below the Welsh average, to observe the worst performance in investment in education per capita in Wales one need look no further than the hon. Gentleman's constituency. His friends and supporters provide the nursery and primary schools in his area with £233 per head less than the Welsh average. As if that were not bad enough, when those pupils get into secondary schools, the Labour-controlled council provides £339 per head less than the Welsh average.

From all this, it is clear that, when Labour councils are allowed to choose how much priority to give to education in their areas, they are all words and no action. Their action is confined to putting out press releases, organising marches and protests and talking about education underfunding. The only underfunding going on is the underfunding of schools by the Labour party, which controls so much of education in Wales.

As far as I am aware, the Labour party is offering only one pledge on education at this election. It is a pledge to skew resources from the parts of Wales where there are smaller classes to the parts where there are larger classes. It is no surprise to discover that the areas with the biggest classes are Labour authority areas, and the areas with the best investment in primary and secondary education are those not controlled by the Labour party. Those are the areas which, if Labour ever came to office, would be starved of resources: just as Labour has starved its own areas of resources.

MRSA

1.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): My debate today is on the subject of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, to which I shall refer from here on as MRSA.

MRSA is a bacterium that is resistant to treatment by the usual range of antibiotics. Although it is not necessarily more virulent than other infections, the range of treatment options is more limited because of patients' resistance to the more commonly used antibiotics.

Many of us harbour MRSA without its causing us any harm, but carriers can pass it on to vulnerable patients with serious, sometimes fatal, consequences. MRSA contributes to the deaths of thousands of people in hospitals, yet it goes unrecorded and even unrecognised by the Department of Health.

The Government's failure to take measures to control MRSA is causing serious infections that are difficult to treat. That in turn leads to an increase in the drugs bill and in other treatment costs, and it can lead also to the need to close down wards and special units, thereby disrupting the running of hospitals. That will continue until and unless the Minister or his successor recognises that we face a problem of epidemic proportions.

The seriousness of the problem was demonstrated in May 1994 when a military hospital in Cambridge had to be closed for a week. Screening showed that there was a problem at the hospital, and the Ministry of Defence took rigorous preventive measures, including the application of antibiotics. It would be much more difficult to do the same in a national health service hospital; but the incident underscored how seriously the Ministry of Defence took the matter in a hospital for which it was responsible.

I became aware of MRSA after listening, in November of last year, to a moving speech in the other place by my good friend Lord Fitt of Belfast, whose wife, a lifelong sufferer from asthma, went into hospital to be treated for that condition but fell victim to MRSA and subsequently died. He drew the attention of the other place to the scale of the problem and to the hazards that it posed for people with respiratory complaints, people suffering from septicaemia, and in general the weak and the elderly.

More recently, one of my constituents also fell victim to MRSA. On 24 January he was admitted to Basildon hospital with a bad chest infection, later diagnosed as pneumonia. On 5 February his daughter was told that he had MRSA. Being of an inquiring mind and deeply concerned about her father's condition, she found out what MRSA was: that it is a life-threatening condition. She complained that the hospital had not been completely frank with her or explained the seriousness of the problem.

My constituent's daughter also asked whether anyone else had been infected. It was confirmed that a lady had recently been transferred to another hospital in the trust group where screening is performed, even though I understand that it is not done at Basildon hospital. Orsett hospital is in Thurrock; incidentally, the trust has tried in the past to close it down. It is still under threat—just another example, I suppose, of "what we have, quite rightly, we wish to hold".

On 6 February my constituent's daughter was told that her father had been given an antibiotic. She challenged that because the hospital had told her earlier that antibiotics

were not available to treat the condition. That caused some consternation at the other end of the telephone line. She was then told that her father was not actually being given an antibiotic to combat MRSA. Further inquiries elicited the information that Basildon hospital did not test for MRSA, as that was considered too expensive.

Unfortunately, my constituent died on 8 February. The death certificate mentioned pneumonia; it did not say that MRSA had made a big contribution to the death.

I did a bit of ferreting around in the Library and discovered that 15 hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who is with me this morning, had already probed the Department about this tremendous scandal, but their efforts had hitherto not been fully co-ordinated; neither had the Government been arraigned for their dilatory stewardship. Furthermore, five Lords besides Lord Fitt, I discovered, had raised the matter in another place.

I then tabled my own questions, the answers to which revealed widespread ignorance on the part of the Minister and the Department of Health about which hospitals screen for MRSA. They had no knowledge of the incidence of the infection in the UK because of the lack of screening; they did not know which hospitals kept antibiotics to combat MRSA; and they clearly did not know the number of deaths in which it has been a contributory factor. I asked the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland parallel questions. Their replies, too, showed the same widespread ignorance of the scale of this epidemic—and breathtaking indifference to it.

The Minister was able to reveal, from the voluntary reporting undertaken by some hospitals, that 177 English hospitals had more than 19,000 patients affected by MRSA last year—up from 2,200 in 1992. But the total incidence of this virulent bacterium was unknown.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Has my hon. Friend made any international comparisons? One of the frightening things that I have learnt is that some other countries appear to have used antibiotics much more carelessly than we have, and are suffering from an epidemic of MRSA as a result. Cannot we learn from the mistakes that they have made?

Mr. Mackinlay: Certainly, but my charge this morning is that the Department of Health is doing very little in any direction and is indifferent to the size of the epidemic.

My replies from the Minister showed some confusion as well. He said that some new treatment was still at an early stage of development, but he also told me in a separate answer that two antibiotics are effective against all strains of MRSA—yet many hospitals, including Basildon, do not stock them. It appears to be the luck of the draw; someone may be taken to a hospital that has the drug, whereas someone else may not. My constituent's daughter was told that the antibiotics were not available. I suspect that the truth is that there were cost implications. That is the most worrying aspect of all.

From the limited answers that I was able to obtain, it became increasingly clear that while the contagion remained static between 1989 and 1991, it had increased by 8.1 per cent. by 1994. However, by the first half of 1995, it had increased by 13.5 per cent.

I also asked what was recorded on death certificates. My constituent's death certificate did not mention MRSA, and I understand that Lady Fitt's death certificate did not state that MRSA had contributed to her death. Ironically—my question shows how these matters are treated in this country—the Chancellor of the Exchequer had to answer the question on death certificates. I cannot help feeling that that shows that the matter has budgetary implications.

It is clear that, in many of our hospitals, doctors are not fulfilling the conditions and instructions that they are given on completing death certificates. They are charged with giving the primary cause of death, but in the second part of the form they are supposed to say what else contributed to the death. Doctors are not mentioning MRSA, either through ignorance or because they are being leaned on to cover up and keep quiet the fact that the disease contributes to so many deaths. If doctors do not fulfil those requirements, they are not behaving professionally and are vulnerable to litigation. They must be much more frank with the loved ones of people to whose deaths MRSA has contributed.

What is the Minister doing to prevent and contain the spread of MRSA outside hospitals? His Department seems breathtakingly complacent. We know that the disease presents a problem in nursing homes; to pretend otherwise is irresponsible. I understand that the brief that the Minister will read to us in a few moments says that he has issued a leaflet to nursing homes. That is as effective as banging on a door with a wet sponge. It does not underline the seriousness of the problem.

The Department of Health is reluctant to do anything about the problem, because it has budgetary implications for the nursing home service. Moreover, hospitals do not want to recognise the problem because of its budgetary implications. In short, there is a conspiracy of silence. There is wilful ignorance, on the part both of the NHS establishment in Whitehall and of hospitals and other agencies, which do not want to recognise the scale of the problem. Consequently, good people are being put in jeopardy and deaths caused unnecessarily.

When I was ferreting around in the Library, I came across a document that I believe the Department of Health placed there inadvertently. It is a working party report that gives guidelines for the control of epidemic MRSA. It was prepared by Mr. G. Duckworth, secretary to the working party on hospital infection, and it was published in August 1990. I believe that the Department did not mean the document to be in the Library, but meant some other document to be there. Under the heading, "Cost implications of EMRSA", the document says:

> "Infection control costs are always difficult to assess, but there is general agreement that the costs of ignoring strains of EMRSA are higher than those of controlling them, particularly when the costs of potential legal action are included. Litigation by an infected patient is a growing hazard of MRSA outbreaks in hospitals and it is therefore important to demonstrate that well-documented and effective control measures are implemented."

No such effective control measures are being implemented by the NHS. It is an extremely patchy map, and the document goes on to give some of the costs involved.

The document also says that great care needs to be taken in ambulances. The information that I have from going round the ambulance service is that the recommended procedure is not being applied by the ambulance service. People will be infected in our ambulances because the Government refuse to recognise the cost implications and the scale of the scandal. It is sometimes hazardous to be in an ambulance where the proper control procedures have not been applied.

[Mr. Mackinlay]

The document also refers to the fact that agency staff in hospitals may be MRSA carriers. I return to the point that I made at the beginning: there is inadequate screening in hospitals of patients and staff. In hospitals with a high staff turnover—agency staff go from one hospital where they might be screened to another where they are not—the danger of increasing infection is enormous. I hope that people who read our deliberations will demand to see a copy of the document to which I referred. Has the Minister read it? I want to be charitable to him and say that the Department has probably not told him the naked truth about the scale of the problem, and he may not have seen the document until I pursued the matter with his private office.

The real problem is cost. The noble Baroness Cumberlege alluded to that in the debate in another place to which I referred earlier. I implore the Minister to be bold and to understand that failure to recognise the problem and deal with it immediately means that a bigger burden on the NHS is looming. It will be dealt with by another Minister, because the Government will lose the election. I do not wish to speak in a party political manner today; I am simply frustrated at the Government's failure to recognise the big additional burden on the NHS budget. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will hear about MRSA time and again, whether or not I am in the House after the election, because the problem will not go away. Whoever occupies the Treasury Bench will have to deal with it.

I cannot help but recall that this Government refused to recognise the problems of E. coli, Gulf war syndrome and, until late in the day and at enormous cost, mad cow disease. MRSA is a problem of similar proportions. It beggars belief that the Department of Health has not addressed it with greater skill, determination and resolve before now.

Hospitals have also tried to keep the problem under drapes and have displayed wilful ignorance. If the debate achieves nothing else, it will flag up to hospital trusts the fact that the possibility of litigation is enormous. The Department of Health, too, will be vulnerable to litigation, because the debate is making it clear on the Floor of the House that this is a large-scale problem. Even if the Department of Health and the hospital trusts do not listen, their insurers will. They must know that there is a significant possibility of substantial damage claims by the loved ones of people who have died as a consequence of the indifference to and lack of planning on combating MRSA. Doctors will be vulnerable to the charge of not behaving professionally if they do not complete death certificates in a full and comprehensive manner, as is their duty.

Local newspaper editors throughout the country must ask their hospitals whether they screen for MRSA and, if not, why not. They must ask whether they follow the isolation procedures set down in documents to be found in corners of the House of Commons Library, rather than being flagged up as instructions to hospital trusts, and, if not, why not. They must ask whether ambulances follow the procedures laid down and, if not, why not. They must ask whether the hospitals stock the appropriate antibiotics and, if not, why not. They must also ask whether the hospital knows in how many instances MRSA has contributed to death and, if not, why not.

What support is the Department of Health giving to Professor Brian Austen of Heriot-Watt university, in developing a new drug to combat MRSA? Has the Department considered new products that I understand are being developed—basically paints and cleaners—that kill all known microbes and, if used within hygiene management programmes, minimise some of the super-bugs such as MRSA?

I am sorry if I have spoken in rather trenchant terms, but in the five years that I have been in the House, I have rarely felt so strongly about what I consider to be an NHS establishment cover-up. I do not charge any one individual, but believe that, nationally and locally, the national health service has recognised the problem, but has been afraid that it will throw its budgets out of proportion and that Ministers and incoming Ministers will be embarrassed. The problem has therefore been swept under the carpet, which is why I called this wilful ignorance.

I appeal to the Minister in his remaining period in office to give forthright instructions to everyone concerned to address the problem. I hope that he will ensure that his successor picks that up after the general election.

1.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I am glad to have the opportunity to reply to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), even though he has left me only 11 minutes to do so. He made an extremely concerned speech, on which I congratulate him. The issue causes concern not only to the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), but to many people outside the House, and rightly so.

It is important to get the matter in perspective. We should acknowledge the problem, but it has existed for many years—indeed, decades. The hon. Member for Thurrock was ill advised to introduce party politics and matters such as E. coli. The problem has existed under both parties in government. It has not arisen overnight—it has been there for decades. I want the hon. Gentleman to recognise that, and I am glad that he is nodding to that effect.

The problem is containable, and the United Kingdom has an excellent record in containing it. The hon. Gentleman said that there was a failure to control the MRSA problem on the part of hospitals and the Department. That is not the case. Infection control is strong in the UK. We are a world leader in the control of MRSA and other infections.

Health authorities require all hospitals to have adequate infection control systems in place, and control teams must cover all facilities. Of course, from time to time, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out in connection with a Ministry of Defence hospital, fairly extreme isolation measures must be taken. They are taken when necessary, and our infection control methods are world leaders.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield spoke about international comparisons. One of the reasons why we are a world leader in the field is that we issue antibiotics only on prescription. Some other countries do not do that. That is one reason why they have epidemics, which we manage to avoid. We keep control at that level as well, not only through what we rightly demand of our hospitals, through the contracts that we impose on them, through health authorities and by other means. The charge of failure to control is ill founded. Hospitals take considerable measures to control the problem and are world leaders in that respect.

The matter has been debated before, as the hon. Member for Thurrock knows. The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) raised it in an Adjournment debate in December 1995, and the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) raised it as part of another Adjournment debate a year later. The issue has therefore been discussed in Parliament. I insist that there is no indifference, ignorance or conspiracy of silence on the Government's part. I am glad to have the matter discussed in the House.

As the hon. Member for Thurrock said, MRSA is a relatively antibiotic-resistant form of the bacterium staph. aureus, which is one of the commonest and most ubiquitous of all the bacteria with which we are surrounded. As many as one in three of us are carrying it—on our skin or in our nose or throat—and normally it does us no harm. It does, however, have the ability to cause infection, which is most likely to occur if the skin is cut or if resistance to infection is lost or compromised for any other reason.

Mostly, the type of infection will be trivial, but for patients who are in hospital, it can sometimes be serious, as the hon. Gentleman noted. Many hospital patients have catheters and drips of various sorts going into their body, which provide an easy route for bacteria such as staph. aureus. Many patients have had operations, so they have a wound that can become infected. Some have poor resistance to infection because of their illness or their treatment, and are vulnerable to serious infection such as septicaemia or pneumonia. Staph. aureus can cause all those problems—a range of infections from the trivial to the life-threatening.

MRSA acts in exactly the same way as staph. aureus and causes the same range of infections. It is no worse than staph. aureus; it is simply a particular kind of staph. aureus. Eight out of 10 people who carry MRSA come to no harm at all. If it does cause an infection, the range of problems is just the same. The infections are no worse than those caused by the ordinary bacterium.

The reason why MRSA is seen as more of a problem is that, if an infection develops, it is more difficult to treat because many of the commonly used antibiotics are no longer effective against it. However, I repeat that the infection is treatable. As I said to the hon. Member for Thurrock, and as he confirmed in his remarks, at least two antibiotics are effective against MRSA.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Minister comment on the point that my hon. Friend eloquently highlighted: do we know how many people are dying from such an infection, and how many hospitals have a good record or a bad record? There must be public recognition of the extent of the problem. The Minister is playing it down. May we have some facts and figures, and some visibility?

Mr. Horam: I am about to come to that. First, I should like to say, in response to the hon. Member for Thurrock, that all hospitals will have stocks of the antibiotics necessary to treat MRSA. Whether those antibiotics are used is a clinical decision. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

On the extent of the problem, to which both hon. Gentlemen referred, I repeat that it is not new. The media have only recently taken an interest in it, but it has existed for a long time. Official figures from the Public Health Laboratory Service show that the peak of the problem occurred in 1986. I have figures from 1983 to 1996. The problem fluctuates as various strains come and go, as various antibiotics deal with the various strains and as new ones develop. We may be at a higher point than previously, but not as high as a decade ago. The problem is not worse than it has ever been in this country.

To add to the information from the Public Health Laboratory Service, two big surveys were conducted, in 1980 and 1992–93. They show a constant proportion of MRSA in the system. It was no worse in 1992–93 than in 1980.

Let us also get in perspective the number of patients affected. I stated in a reply to one of the hon. Gentleman's questions that there were 2,107 incidents last year in the entire health service. In any one year, 8.4 million people go into the hospital service.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Minister does not know that, does he? That figure represents only what has been voluntarily reported to him. My complaint is that his Department does not know, because it does not require screening in all hospitals and reporting by all hospitals.

Mr. Horam: Those figures come from the Public Health Laboratory Service, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is a well-established service that serves the needs of hospitals and which they have an obvious self-interest in developing and complying with. There is trust and confidence in the service, which provides us with a reasonable feel for what is happening on the ground floor.

It is not right to say that there is no information. I have given quite a lot of information to the hon. Gentleman. There is a plethora of information, because the PHLS makes weekly and monthly reports on infections such as MRSA. It is unfair of the hon. Gentleman to say that there is any kind of cover-up. A wealth of information is available from a tried and trusted system.

The hon. Gentleman accuses the Department of not doing enough about the problem. We are improving our information. We are piloting a new system of national surveillance, and 40 hospitals in total have taken part. From next month or shortly afterwards, bloodstream infections will be reported. In July, wound infections will be reported. In addition to the extensive information already available, that new information will become available.

There are differing expert opinions on the validity, practicality and worth of large-scale screening. The practical problems are plain. Screening for MRSA requires swabs from different parts of the body on different days. It takes at least a fortnight to go through the testing procedures. If someone is going into hospital for an emergency operation, we cannot tell him to wait for a fortnight while we find out whether he has MRSA. There are practical problems, which the hon. Gentleman should understand.

Where there are vulnerable people in vulnerable wards, screening takes place. That is a good example of a practical approach to deal with the worst of problems. A new national surveillance scheme is to be introduced—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

IMPERIAL COLLEGE BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified].

KINGS COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords]* *(By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Tuesday 25 March.

PRIVATE BILLS (SUSPENSION)

Motion made and Question proposed,

That—

(1) the Promoters of every Private Bill which has originated in this House or has been brought from the House of Lords in the present Session of Parliament shall have leave to suspend any further proceeding thereon in order to proceed with that Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session;

(2) the Agent for the Promoters of any such Bill intending to suspend any further proceeding thereon shall give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than five o'clock on Thursday of their intention to suspend further proceeding thereon, or, if the Bill, having passed this House, is then pending in the House of Lords, of their intention to proceed with the same Bill in this House in the next Session: provided that all fees due upon any such Bill up to that day be paid;

(3) a list of all such Bills, with a statement of the stage at which they have been suspended, shall be prepared by the Clerks in the Private Bill Office and printed;

(4) every such Bill which has originated in this House shall be presented to the House not later than the third day on which the House sits after the next meeting of Parliament;

(5) there shall be deposited with every Bill so presented a declaration signed by the Agent for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill with respect to which proceedings have been suspended at the last stage of its proceeding in this House in the present Session;

(6) every Bill so presented shall be laid by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the Table of the House on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the causes of Her Majesty's calling the Parliament have been declared thereunto;

(7) every Bill so laid on the Table shall be deemed to have been read the first time and (if the Bill has been read a second time before its suspension) to have been read a second time and—

(i) if such Bill has been referred to the Committee on Unopposed Bills in the present Session, it shall stand so referred;

(ii) if such Bill has been referred to a Committee during the present Session and not reported by that Committee to the House, the Bill shall be committed and—

(a) all Petitions against the Bill which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the next Session, subject to the determination of any outstanding objection to the locus standi of any petitioner; and

(b) any minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the next Session;

(iii) if such Bill has been reported by any Committee, it shall be ordered to be read the third time unless it has been reported with Amendments in the present Session and has not been considered as so amended, in which case it shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

(iv) if such Bill has been read the third time before its suspension, it shall be deemed to have been read the third time;

(8) paragraph (2) of Standing Order 166 relating to Private Business (First reading) shall not apply to any Bill brought from the House of Lords in the next Session and upon which the proceedings have been suspended in this House in the present Session;

(9) when any Bill which has been brought from the House of Lords in the present Session, and upon which the proceedings have been suspended in this House, is brought from the House of Lords in the next Session, the Agent for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration, signed by him, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the House of Lords in the present Session and, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office that such a declaration has been so deposited has been laid upon the Table of the House—

(i) unless the Examiner has reported pursuant to Standing Order 74 relating to Private Business (Examination of bills brought from House of Lords, etc.), the Bill shall stand referred to the Examiners;

(ii) if the Examiner has so reported, the Bill shall be ordered to be read a second time, or, if it has been read a second time, it shall be read a second time and committed; but

(iii) if the Bill has been reported by a Committee with Amendments in the present Session it shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means who shall make only such Amendments to the Bill as have been made thereto by the Committee in the present Session, and shall report the Bill to the House forthwith, and the Bill shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

(10) where a Bill has been brought from the House of Lords in the present Session and the period prescribed by paragraph (1) of Standing Order 171A relating to Private Business (Petitions against private bills) has not elapsed before Friday, any Petition presented during the present Session in pursuance of that Standing Order shall be void, and the period of time prescribed by that Standing Order shall apply to any Bill brought from the Lords in the next Session in pursuance of this Order;

(11) any Bill which under the provisions of this Order is deemed to have been read the first time, or the first and second time, or the first, second and third time, shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having been so read;

(12) without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph (7) of this Order, only those Petitions against any Bill which stood referred to the Committee on the Bill and which have not been withdrawn or have been deposited pursuant to paragraph (b) of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business (Reference to committee of petitions against bill) shall stand referred to the Committee on the same Bill in the next Session;

(13) in relation to any Bill to which this Order applies Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business (Right of audience before committees on opposed bills) shall have effect as if the words "under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against bill)" were omitted;

(14) where any Standing Orders have been dispensed with in respect of any private Bill in the present Session or in the last Session, those Standing Orders shall be deemed to have been ordered to be dispensed with in respect of any such Bill presented or brought from the Lords in pursuance of this Order;

(15) any Standing Orders complied with in respect of any Bill originating in the House of Lords upon which the proceedings have been suspended in that House shall be deemed to have been complied with in respect of such Bill if the same is brought from the House of Lords in the next Session, and any notices published or given and any deposits made in respect of such Bill for the present Session shall be held to have been published, given and made, respectively, for the Bill so brought from the House of Lords in the next Session;

(16) no further fees shall be charged in respect of proceedings on a Bill in respect of which fees have been incurred in the present Session.

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Speaker: No day named.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Privatised Utilities

1. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to modify the powers of the regulators of the privatised utilities. [19426]

5. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received regarding reform of the regulatory system for the privatised utilities. [19444]

11. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received regarding reform of the regulatory system for the privatised utilities. [19450]

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): The Government receive representations on the regulation of the privatised utilities from time to time and have recently received a copy of the report of the independent Commission on the Regulation of Privatised Utilities.

Mr. Williams: When the privatised utilities make profits of over £10 billion a year with a rate of return of 20, 15 and even over 40 per cent., is it not clear, as the Select Committee on Trade and Industry has said, that the initial price controls unduly favoured shareholders over consumers? As a former energy Minister has said, we need a radical overhaul of utility regulation. Would not that provide the best tax cuts of all that would benefit most people on the lowest incomes?

Mr. Taylor: The Labour party never seems to have any word of approval for success. The Select Committee on Trade and Industry report, to which the hon. Gentleman alluded, stated:

"Customers get over 70 per cent. of efficiency improvements while shareholders get under 30 per cent."

If the Labour party would like to take its last chance to come clean on a windfall tax, I can assure it that consumers, customers, small shareholders and pension fund beneficiaries would like to know its position.

Mr. Michie: Bearing in mind that 10 regional electricity companies have already been taken over and that there is another takeover in the pipeline—quite a few takeovers have involved United States companies, including Yorkshire Electricity—does not the Minister agree that we must toughen the regulations and give more power to the regulator so that company accounts are more transparent and there is greater defence of the consumer? If the Government do not adopt that approach, the new regulator will be nothing more than a paper tiger.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman's homework will lead him to the conclusion that mergers are for the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and, likewise, matters of fair trading are for the Office of Fair Trading. Meanwhile, I do not think that anyone could say that the regulators lack powers or accountability. They are answerable to consumers, the MMC, Select Committees, the National Audit Office and judicial review. That is a great deal of accountability.

Mr. Loyden: Can the Minister really claim that the regulators have been forceful enough in making those companies—which are near-monopolies—respond to their first responsibility: to provide a good service to consumers? Most of the so-called efficiency in those industries is gained by scrapping jobs. That is one reason why the employment figures in this nation are so high.

Mr. Taylor: The fact of the matter is that the new arrangements—to which Labour did not, of course, subscribe, and which it has hindered all the way—have brought very considerable benefits to consumers, in increased standards of service and lower prices. The price of domestic gas is down by 20 per cent. and British Telecom charges are down by 40 per cent. in real terms. Those are significant benefits to consumers.

Dr. Hampson: As a member of the Select Committee, may I draw my hon. Friend's attention to two points? The Committee pointed out that, in the early stages, the gains to shareholders could not have been accurately assessed because no one knew how far they could be quantified. Moreover, the evidence of Professor Littlechild, printed by the Committee, is that he "dealt"—that is the word—with the windfall in the early stages by transforming the price reviews thereafter to the point at which this country now has the cheapest electricity and gas for industrial users of any country in Europe.

Mr. Taylor: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that to the attention of the House. Those privatisations have been remarkable achievements. They were all original. They were entirely new in terms of system and method, but the results are outstanding.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my hon. Friend ask our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ask the chairmen of the public utility companies to calculate and publish their estimates of what the increase in costs might be if any Government saw fit to introduce a windfall tax, so that the consumer can know now what the increase in the cost of gas, electricity and telephone calls would be?

Mr. Taylor: The challenge for my right hon. Friend is very important, and I think that I am allowed to say on behalf of the President of the Board of Trade that the answer is yes, we will seek those costings. The electorate will want to know what they are, as will consumers, small shareholders and pension fund beneficiaries.

Mr. Dover: Does the Minister accept that all my constituents think that the regulators have done a marvellous job in keeping prices down? Will he pay tribute to the privatised utilities, which have made enormous efficiency savings and gains, to the benefit of everyone across the country?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There have been great efficiency savings and reductions in prices, but Opposition Members do not seem to be interested in anything that is good for consumers. However, I remind them that we are.

Mr. Harvey: In the light of the obvious need to review the powers of regulators, and in the light of the growth of competition, which is welcome, is not it time to consider the creation of an office for the regulation of all the utilities together? It could share expertise and experience, ensure consistency of approach and avoid duplication and would be a really powerful regulator across all these industries.

Mr. Taylor: I have heard arguments and quite constructive debate along those lines, but it would be wiser to have a little more experience of the good operation of the present system, whereupon it would be quite proper to return to the consideration that the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend recall that, in the late 1970s, the then nationalised industries cost the taxpayer £500 million a year in subsidy? Will he confirm that, for the past seven years, the privatised industries have contributed on average nearly £9 billion each year? Does not that demonstrate that Labour's hostility to privatisation would have caused much damage to this country and its industry in the 1980s and 1990s, just as the windfall tax would do if they were ever in a position to put it in place?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right. He is also right to return to the warnings about a windfall tax. The turnaround that he described has indeed been spectacular, and the main beneficiary has been the consumer.

Mr. Battle: Are not the Government's claims of energy price cuts proving to be another great Tory myth? Is the Minister aware that, as he spelled out in his written reply to me on 25 February, Britain is 11th out of 15 in the European league tables showing reductions in prices to residential electricity consumers since 1990, which is after privatisation? Is he aware that even Greece has cut prices by more than a quarter during that period?

The truth is that prices in Britain have risen in real terms. The Minister admitted as such, so will he now accept that as the truth at the Dispatch Box? The Tories' record shows that current domestic prices are well up on 1990 prices. Labour will address regulatory reform to put the consumer first for a change. Consumers have been short-changed under this Government, and they will be better off under Labour.

Mr. Taylor: That was a diatribe, not a question. But if it was a question, the answer is no.

Ceramics Industry

2. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the ceramics industry. [19441]

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Greg Knight): The United Kingdom ceramics industry has a distinguished history of achievement both at home and overseas, and is widely recognised as a worldwide centre of excellence for materials and technology.

However, a changing world environment and intensified competition pose new challenges that must be overcome if the UK is to improve and maintain its performance. To that end, the Government are working in partnership with the industry, not least through the tableware strategy group, to help it to achieve its objectives, and to address the specific issues that are crucial to maintaining and building on the success of the industry.

Mrs. Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend recognise the importance to the national economy of the ceramics industry, and in particular to my constituency of Congleton, which borders the potteries? Is he aware that the interests of the industry are threatened by cheap imports from China, which, because of its state-controlled economy, is able to dump products on the European market at prices that bear little relation to costs? Will he endorse the European Commission's position and support the existing quota restrictions on Chinese imports of tableware to maintain the present position, and to maintain and perhaps enhance investment and employment in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of the ceramics industry. In Britain, it employs about 25,000 people, so it is extremely important. My hon. Friend made a good point about the need to ensure that other countries do not dump ceramic ware on the market, thereby destroying jobs in this country. A quota system is in force to protect the industry from imports from China, and is subject to annual review. The Commission submitted a report to the Council on 31 January 1997, but it has yet to submit to the Council any formal proposals for amending the current regime. We shall consider carefully any suggested amendments, and I shall bear my hon. Friend's comments in mind.

My hon. Friend is a widely respected Member of the House, and if she is aware of any particular difficulty affecting any company in or near her constituency, I would be prepared to meet her to discuss the matter further.

Petroleum Coke

3. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take steps to prevent the use of petroleum coke for the purpose of electricity generation. [19442]

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): Any proposal to use a fuel at a power station must satisfy the appropriate regulatory requirements.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister deny that petroleum coke is a particularly dirty fuel? The licence that is currently being processed will be viewed with bitter disfavour in my region. Does he accept that, if that fuel is burned in Yorkshire, it will serve as evidence of the Government's disdain for our international environment commitments, and will show the critical nature of coal stocks. It will also provide a final commentary on the Government's deplorable handling of the British coal industry.

Mr. Page: I thank the hon. Gentleman for coming to the House and asking me my one question for today, rather than withdrawing a question that I was due to answer, as all the other Opposition Members have.

The Environment Agency has permitted the trial. It will regulate the trial throughout to ensure that it operates within authorisation, and will be able to withdraw authorisation if the trial exceeds any of the limits that have been laid down.

As for the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, the decision to go ahead is a matter for National Power, not for the Government. We all know the mistakes involved in trying to second-guess industry; we also know the supreme results that are being achieved through privatisation. Domestic electricity prices have fallen by 4.6 per cent. in real terms since privatisation, including VAT, and prices for industry have dropped by 14.8 per cent. I know what that means, and the House knows what it means: it means lower costs, more sales and more jobs.

Mr. Wigley: The Minister talks of not second-guessing industry, but does he not accept that the amount of pollution caused by the various methods of generating electricity is a matter of public concern? Does he not accept that Government have a responsibility to devise a mechanism, whether through tax or by other means, to ensure the maximisation of clean sources of electricity production—whether through hydro, tidal or other sources—and to minimise the amount of electricity that is produced from dirty sources, especially those generating an undue proportion of carbon?

Mr. Page: Let me say, as Minister in charge of the non-fossil fuel obligation, that only two weeks ago I announced the largest round of the non-fossil fuel obligation programmes. I sincerely hope that much more "green" electricity will be produced in this country. As for what the hon. Gentleman says about this type of fuel, I know that £1 billion has been spent on flue gas desulphurisation in the Drax and Ratcliffe plants, and I am certain that the Environment Agency will not allow generation to proceed if it produces the levels of pollution to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Manufactured Exports

4. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the latest figures for manufactured exports from the east midlands. [19443]

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Anthony Nelson): Separate regional figures are not available, but nationally the figure for manufactured exports for 1996 was £139 billion, with east midlands companies making a full contribution. That represents a 9 per cent. increase in both value and volume when compared with manufactured exports for 1995.

Mr. Garnier: On behalf of manufacturers in my constituency and throughout the east midlands, I thank my hon. Friend for the work that he has done to promote British exports in his capacity as Minister responsible for export trade. It was with great regret that we learned that he was retiring from the House.

May I remind my hon. Friend that the economic picture in the east midlands has never been better, and that business confidence has never been brighter? That is evidenced by longer order books, and by the increasing number of jobs that are being created in the manufacturing and exporting sectors in the east midlands. Does my hon. Friend agree—has it been his experience when he has travelled abroad on behalf of the United Kingdom—that all that would be put at risk if we were to invite a Labour Government into this country, given all the Labour party's job-destroying activities and its fondness for the social chapter and the minimum wage?

Mr. Nelson: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for his generous remarks. It has been a pleasure to keep this Treasury seat warm for him, so that he can take it up in the next Parliament.

I entirely concur, without reservation, with all that my hon. and learned Friend says. *[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members will listen, I will tell them that there is even better news for the east midlands. According to the respected body, Business Strategies and Cambridge Econometrics, the east midlands is set to become the fastest growing region in the country. That is largely due to the successful revival of manufacturing industry, which, in turn, is entirely due to the success of the Government's policies.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister recall that, a week after we had that crowded meeting in Chichester and 100 people were turned away because they would not fit into the town hall, he decided to throw in the towel?

As for the east midlands, is the Minister aware that, following the closure of all the mines in the area, many of the industries that used to supply hydraulic and other equipment to the pits had to close completely because they had lost their home market, and that therefore many potential exports were also lost? There is another story about the east midlands: a story of despair. As many as 50 per cent. are unemployed in some of the former pit villages, and, following the closure of the mines, there is opencast mining all over the counties. The net result is that imports are now coming in to replace the coal that should have been produced by British miners.

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman will always be welcome in the constituency that I represent. Labour traditionally loses its deposit in Chichester and, by and large, we try to encourage the Labour candidates there. Anything that he can do to help the Labour candidate at the expense of the Liberal Democrat will be welcome. The hon. Gentleman's visit had nothing to do with my decision. The real test will be at the election and I have no doubt who the worthy constituents of Chichester will return on that day.

With regard to the east midlands, it is as if Labour Members do not remember the despair a few years ago in some regions, the unemployment, the difficulties and the lack of hope, which have been transformed by the Government's policies. Unemployment has fallen significantly, and production and prosperity have increased. The Labour party is always in favour of regulation, taxation, state spending and state regulation. It is always the impediment to free enterprise and to prosperity. It always has been and it always will be.

Mr. Tredinnick: May I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work in supporting the export drive in the east midlands, thank him personally as my Member of Parliament for many years, and wish him a happy retirement on his last day at the Dispatch Box? Is he aware that the tremendous investment in my constituency at companies such as Triumph, Wace and Deluxe UK Ltd has meant that there is a new export drive based in

Hinckley? Is he also aware that a recent survey has shown that, if a minimum wage is introduced and a social chapter of the European Union is implemented, at least 1,000 jobs will be lost in Hinckley?

Mr. Nelson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I was pleased to come to Hinckley and to see for myself many of the successes to which he refers. It is undoubtedly true that the east midlands has led the way in many of the exports and indeed inward investments that have been so spectacular. No small part of that is the fact that we do not have the overbearing costs associated with the social chapter. It is remarkable that the east midlands is also leading the way in some of our principal new exports. For example, the UK is now the largest exporter in Europe of computers, of televisions and of semi-conductors. That truly remarkable performance is entirely associated with the Government's consistent policies of sound economic and industrial management.

Mr. Bell: It is also the last Question Time for my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and we should wish him well in his retirement after his many years of service to the House. May I also associate myself with the remarks of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier)? It is the last appearance of the Minister for Trade, who has been an eloquent spokesman and defender of our interests. I remember a half-hour speech that he made recently without a note and while suffering from a cold. That was testimony to his perseverance and persistence in our interests.

In relation to our £139 billion-worth of exports and to the east midlands, as we had some refreshing honesty from a former Minister with responsibility for transport about how defective our road building programme was, can the Minister explain with the same refreshing honesty why we have had a trade deficit since 1983 on our manufactured goods and why our deficit last year was £12.5 billion—£1 billion a month? Can he explain how that has come about in the past 13 years of a Tory Government?

Mr. Nelson: Yes, but first may I tell the hon. Gentleman how grateful I am for his kind words? He knows that I am leaving the House voluntarily. In case it should prove that in the course of the next few weeks he does so involuntarily, may I, too, say that it has been nice doing business with him?

As for the size of the deficit, the hon. Gentleman has chosen to use the figures for goods. Our trade in services is of almost the same value as our trade in goods, and if we take the figures for services, and add the third component of the current account—account movements, dividends and incomes from foreign investments—we find that this country is pretty much in the black.

We have a very small deficit. According to Treasury estimates it looks as if the deficit for the past year, on a turnover of about $1 trillion on our current account, will be about £1 billion or £2 billion. That represents a remarkable performance. It reflects a huge burgeoning of activity on both the manufactured goods and the services front, and the results of huge investments abroad. Remember that those investments have taken place under the liberal policies that the Government have followed since 1979. The deficit is only 1.5 per cent. of GDP, and the deficit under a Labour Government was double that size.

Aircraft (Launch Aid)

6. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what launch aid has been provided by his Department towards British industrial participation in each of the main aircraft variants produced by the Airbus consortium. [19445]

Mr. Greg Knight: Launch aid has supported British participation in two main aircraft produced by the Airbus consortium. A total of £249.3 million was provided for the Airbus A320 and a total of £447.1 million for the Airbus A330/340.

Mr. Wilkinson: In view of the fact that both the wings and the power plants are produced in the United Kingdom, is not the recent order secured by Airbus Industrie for up to 23 A330 aircraft powered by Rolls-Royce Trent engines, testimony to the competitiveness of British industry, especially in that sector, which has consistently run a balance of payments surplus since 1980, and which should bring to the Department of Trade and Industry royalties on sales of about half a billion pounds over the next five years? That is a true success story, symptomatic of success under the Conservative Government.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is right. That is tremendous news. By the time the Emirates take delivery of the order they will have invested about $1 billion in British industry recently. That is good news for the aircraft industry, for Rolls-Royce, for the east midlands and for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Sanctions (Libya)

7. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report* column 905, if he will make it his policy to identify separately those representations from British firms relating to Libya which directly relate to UN sanctions. [19446]

Mr. Nelson: A good many representations to the Department of Trade and Industry on trade with Libya relate to United Nations sanctions. However, it is not the Government's policy to publicise confidential exchanges that the Department has with individual companies.

Mr. Dalyell: In the St. Albans Crown court, why did Judge Colston stop an important case—Regina *v.* Rees and Rotheroe—and describe the Department of Trade and Industry's behaviour as an "affront to justice"? Those were the judge's words, not mine. Is this Matrix Churchill revisited?

Mr. Nelson: No, it is not. I am the Minister accountable for that part of the Department, and I have looked carefully into the allegations that the hon. Gentleman has made. I am satisfied that there has been no deception and no deliberate withholding of documents required for the courts. There are sometimes genuine practical problems in tracing from thousands of files every document that may be needed. I do not deny that there are occasionally mistakes and inadequacies. We attempt to investigate and correct those, and whenever they are apparent we draw them to the attention of the public or

of Parliament or, in this case, we draw them immediately to the attention of the courts. I therefore do not believe that the hon. Gentleman's allegation is well founded. Of course there are other aspects in which I know that he has taken an interest, and about which he spoke in the House this morning in connection with trade with Libya. I have noted those with care.

Investment

8. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the benefits to the United Kingdom of (a) inward and (b) overseas investment. [19447]

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): Overseas-owned companies provide a third of all manufactured investment in the UK, nearly a fifth of manufacturing employment, over a fifth of manufacturing output and around two fifths of UK manufactured exports. The United Kingdom is itself the second largest outward investor in the world, receiving substantially more income, interest and dividends from its ownership of companies overseas than is paid out to those overseas who own companies in Britain.

Mr. Shaw: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this is an extraordinary account of the success of the Conservative Government? There is no question that our inward investment has created an enormous number of jobs, and our outward investment has helped not only with jobs in this country, but resulted in one of the greatest dividend flows into this country since the second world war. We are enormously better off, and pensioners have benefited because a lot of the money that comes back to this country does so in the form of dividends, which go into pension funds.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right, and it is remarkable that this country is the second largest in the world—after the United States—in terms of both outward and inward investment. Our outward investment stock is valued at more than £200 billion, and generated earnings of £24 billion to this country in 1995. We have an exceptional inward investment record, and a large number of companies from around the world are locating in this country because we deliver quality goods at competitive prices. In doing so, we have generated a substantial extension in employment.

Mr. MacShane: What does the Secretary of State have to say about the decision of Toyota, announced this week, to build its new car plant in France? This follows hard on the heels of Ford switching production and jobs from Liverpool to Germany and Spain. Has not much of our inward investment in recent years been on the basis of Britain being fully in Europe? Is not the message now to the boardrooms of the world that the Tory Cabinet is divided on, and hostile and opposed to, Europe? Until we drain the poison from the "Euroseptics" in the Cabinet and replace them with a Government committed to working and playing a leading role in Europe, more and more companies like Toyota and Ford will turn their backs on the UK.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is talking absolute nonsense. Toyota has taken no such decision and, along with Nissan, Honda, Ford and others, has reinforced its commitment to this country year after year with massive investment. Toyota is in the process of creating more than 1,000 jobs in Derbyshire as a result of massive investment. We have attracted more than 40 per cent. of Japanese investment in Europe, and that figure will rise—it is running at 56 per cent. in the current year. That is a measure of the strength of the United Kingdom which, under a Conservative Government, is one of the most attractive places in the world to invest.

Design Industry

9. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the contribution the design industry makes to the United Kingdom economy. [19448]

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): The design consultancy industry alone contributes more than £3 billion to the UK economy. I have announced the millennium product award to bring forward 2,000 new products to demonstrate the excellence of British design, the best of which will be displayed at the millennium exhibition.

Dr. Twinn: I thank my hon. Friend for that exciting news for the British design industry. Does he agree that the best way for British industry to contribute to increasing its competitiveness in the world is to invest in British industrial design? In doing so, our industry can take a step forward in the world and become even more competitive.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is absolutely accurate. More British companies must realise that design plays a key role at every stage of the manufacturing process, and is not just a bolt-on exercise. The reputation of British design around the world is underpinned by the fact that £350 million a year in consultancy fees is attributable to the British design consultancy industry. That indicates the reputation of British designers abroad, and we must make better use of them in this country.

Mr. Sheerman: Does not the lack of indigenous investment mean that fewer of our excellent designers are employed here by British companies, making those companies more competitive overseas? We have some of the best designers in the world, but too many of them go abroad to work for foreign companies, and between 80 and 90 per cent. of the work of the top consultancies is for foreign companies. Surely it is a mark of the Government's failure that we cannot keep good designers working for British firms.

Mr. Taylor: It is an indication of how succesful the Government are in anticipating some of the problems for British industry that we have 53 design consultants in business links around the country, that I have pioneered many of the steps forward for British design in its relationship with government, that we have announced the millennium product award to ensure that British design products are on display at the millennium exhibition, and that the Design Council is going from strength to strength under John Sorrell and Andrew Summers. This is a great tribute to what we are doing, and we are looking for equal enthusiasm from British industry.

Inward Investment

10. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much inward investment has come to the United Kingdom in each of the past three years from (a) the United States of America, (b) Japan, (c) Germany and (d) other countries; how many jobs have been created as a result; and if he will make a statement. [19449]

Mr. Lang: In 1992 to 1994, the last three-year period for which comparable data are available, inward investment from the United States of America amounted to £11 billion, from Japan nearly £200 million, from Germany £2 billion and nearly £12 billion from the rest of the world. Those figures are taken from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development "International Direct Investment Statistics Yearbook 1996".

Invest in Britain Bureau records show that about 215,000 jobs have either been created or safeguarded by projects announced over that period.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those are brilliant figures, which are attributable to the success of this Government's policies, in huge contrast to the policies of the predecessor Labour Administration, although that was a long time ago? Is not the Government's attitude to enterprise that which the Governments he mentioned most want? That is why the money comes here. Does he agree that that is in contrast to the policies and thrust of the Labour party, which would decimate those figures within a short time if ever a Labour Government were elected, which they must not be?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Those figures represent the world's verdict on the United Kingdom as an attractive location for investment—an enterprise-friendly location with low corporate taxation; good communications and infrastructure; a good, skilled, productive work force; and a commitment to helping to make projects a great success. The threat that hangs over inward investment as a result of the Opposition's policy agenda cannot be exaggerated. The burdens of the social chapter and the European social model would destroy jobs and frighten off inward investment, just as they have in the rest of Europe.

Dr. Godman: I welcome that investment, but may I remind the Secretary of State that, where American investment is concerned, IBM came to Greenock more than 45 years ago, largely at the prompting of the local Labour Member of Parliament, Hector McNeil? As the right hon. Gentleman well knows, IBM is still a major employer in the west of Scotland. Since then, there have been many other inward investors, but does he agree that not enough of them are setting up research and development facilities? Locate in Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and his Department are failing to persuade investors to set up research and development centres.

Mr. Lang: I acknowledge the fact that IBM has been here for getting on for half a century. It is one of 4,200 American companies that have located in the UK. I do not agree, however, with the hon. Gentleman's point about research and development activities. The quality of investments coming to the United Kingdom has risen substantially in recent years, and a substantial proportion are not only reinvestments and expansions by existing companies, but associated with some research and development. Indeed, the strength of our academic institutions has been one of the other factors that has attracted such investment, but it could easily be frightened away by the policies of an incoming Labour Government if they abandoned the enterprise-friendly, low corporate tax policies of this Government, which have been so successful in encouraging our competitiveness and attracting investment.

Mr. Atkins: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of the reasons why Isuzu decided to invest in a joint manufacturing operation with Leyland Trucks in my constituency, employing many of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover), were the reasons that he just enunciated—a low-cost economy that is successful as a direct result of Conservative policies, which must continue if the likes of Isuzu are to come here again?

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend is right. Japanese investors set demanding targets for productivity and efficiency. They have recognised the strength of the United Kingdom, which is why we are securing in the present year more than half of all the Japanese investment in the European Union.

Science Base

12. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received from British industry on the organisation of the United Kingdom science base. [19451]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I frequently meet representatives of industry to discuss the science and engineering base, not least in connection with the Year of Engineering Success and the current Science Engineering and Technology Week.

Mrs. Campbell: Is the Minister aware that, according to the Pharmaceutical Industries Council, the infrastructure and equipment in many of our universities are seriously eroded and science graduates no longer have the practical skills that industry needs? Is that not an appalling indictment of 18 years of Tory neglect?

Mr. Taylor: It might be an appalling indictment if it were true, but as George Poste of SmithKline Beecham, who had dinner with me on Monday evening and is now better briefed, will admit, the problem in our universities, particularly for the pharmaceutical industry, is that students have to deal with such rapid technological change that not only the universities, but the companies that those students will eventually enter, have difficulty keeping up.

I have suggested virtual centres of excellence and much more work in companies for some of our finest undergraduates and postgraduates. That collaborative spirit will underpin the excellence of the scholarship in our universities and our research. We are in it together, and must look for solutions together.

Sir John Cope: Will my hon. Friend confirm that much scientific research and development of the best

quality is also done in industry? Contrary to what the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) said, some of it is done by firms that have invested in this country: for example, the Hewlett-Packard laboratories on the edge of my constituency are the only laboratories that that world-class firm has outside the United States.

Mr. Taylor: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Hewlett-Packard is at the forefront of research and development in this country, and my namesake there, John Taylor—

Mr. John M. Taylor: My namesake.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend can take the credit if he so wishes. Our namesake—to be scientifically accurate—has done a remarkable job in chairing our information technology foresight panel. There are many other examples: Motorola in Scotland has done research in this country that was not done originally in the United States; Nortel has done work here that is original and has not been done in Canada; and Ericsson and many others have done likewise—the list is too long for me to go through.

We are sending an appropriate signal to those foreign companies, in the Year of Engineering Success, when the excellence of what is going on in our industries as well as our universities needs to be signalled. In Science Engineering and Technology Week we are paying especial tribute to engineering; in this week we need skill and vision, and the courage to wear ties such as the one that I am sporting at the moment.

Inward Investment

13. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the level of inward investment into (a) France and (b) the United Kingdom since 1991. [19452]

Mr. Lang: According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development "International Direct Investment Statistics Yearbook 1996" and the United Nations world investment report respectively, inward investment flows into the United Kingdom from 1991 to 1994 exceeded £33 billion while France received just under £32 billion. For 1995, inflows of investment into the United Kingdom were nearly £19 billion and into France nearly £13 billion.

Mr. Jones: The Secretary of State cites the statistics in a way that is helpful to him, but the truth is that the average amount of inward investment going to France in those years was £19 billion, and the average going to Britain £17 billion. Do not those statistics nail the lie, which the Secretary of State has used again twice today, that inward investment is discouraged by the social chapter and the minimum wage, which have obviously not succeeded in stopping inward investment going to France?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman obviously asked the question thinking that he knew the answer. I am sorry if he found my answer disappointing and unhelpful, but the fact is that the United Kingdom has been doing extremely well. I shall give him some more figures: between 1990 and 1994, the stock of inward investment into the United Kingdom from outside Europe was 30 per cent; the comparable stock going into France was 10 per cent. I could cite many more figures.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the social chapter. That, of course, would skew the figures against Britain if we ever had to face the burden that it, or indeed the working time directive, would impose. I quote what the American chamber of commerce said to the Irish about that directive:

> "It is no exaggeration to say that the lack of flexibility in this Bill could represent the single most negative change in Ireland's flexibility to win US direct foreign investment that has happened in the past 20 years".

That is one of the reasons why we are so opposed to the working time directive that the Labour party wants to impose on us.

Mr. Gallie: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the flow of inward investment to the Scottish electronics industry has been a story of success? Does he further agree that the industry depends on the movement of components and products, and that that could be helped if fifth freedom rights were granted to Prestwick airport? Will he have a word with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport?

Mr. Lang: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend's opening points. I know how hard he has worked to help encourage inward investment to Scotland and to encourage the prospects for Prestwick airport in his constituency. I take careful note of his comments and will give the matter close attention from my DTI office after the general election.

Mr. Beggs: I congratulate the Government on their policies, which continue to attract inward investment from overseas. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we in Northern Ireland have benefited month on month from falling unemployment, as have other regions of the United Kingdom? Will he give an assurance that, although Northern Ireland is a peripheral area, the excellence of our education system and the high achievement and excellent output of both Ulster university and Queen's university will be brought to the attention of potential investors so that they can take up highly qualified people?

Mr. Lang: I am glad to agree with the hon. Gentleman on the importance of that point. Conservative Members believe in maintaining the integrity of the United Kingdom. No one knows better than I do the importance of the links between Great Britain and Northern Ireland; my constituency has a substantial interest in the maintenance and development of transport links between Stranraer and his constituency.

Mr. Jessel: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the United Kingdom's success on inward investment depends partly on the image of our country, which is symbolised by our national flag, the Union Jack? Will he join me in deploring the conduct of the Scottish Liberal party in seeking to drop the use of the Union flag?

Mr. Lang: I agree with my hon. Friend. Nothing could be more damaging to the prospects of maintaining our economic success than the internal constitutional upheaval that would flow from the proposals of the Labour and

Liberal parties and of the two nationalist parties. I was as horrified and appalled as my hon. Friend by the proposals of senior Liberal Members to abolish the Union Jack and the national anthem. That shows where the Liberal party stands. It believes in the break-up of the United Kingdom and turning this country into a set of regions run from Brussels.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Secretary of State deny that the latest international figures show that France, with the social chapter, gets more inward investment than Britain, that British companies invest in the rest of Europe—with the social chapter—more than twice as much as European countries invest in Britain, that Ford is sourcing its new Escort in Spain and Germany, and that despite his earlier remarks, Toyota is considering a huge new investment in France that was described yesterday as a potential major coup? Does not the real damage to British investment and jobs come from the Government's divisions over Europe, their dishonesty and the danger of a fifth Tory term to the 3.5 million people whose jobs depend on Europe?

Mr. Lang: I welcome the right hon. Lady to our question and answer session, even if she is wrong on almost every point. I hope that she accepts my invitation to debate such matters during the coming general election campaign. We can then let the country judge who is right on trade and industry policies. On the United Kingdom's record in comparison with France, France claimed last year to have created 23,000 jobs from inward investment, the United Kingdom 62,000. In 1995, according to the United Nations, the United Kingdom received nearly 50 per cent. more inward investment than France, accounting for 9 per cent. of world stock compared with 6 per cent. for France. Between 1990 and 1994, the United Kingdom's stock of non-EU inward investment amounted to 30 per cent., compared with France's 10 per cent.

Information Technology

14. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to promote the wider use of information technology. [19454]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information society initiative promotes the beneficial use of information and communications technologies across all areas of life, and includes the £35 million programme for business, and information technology for all, which aims to help all sections of the community get hands-on experience of the technology for the information society.

Mr. Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the keys to spreading information technology throughout our communities is to build up our telecommunications utilities network? Was he as surprised as I was yesterday that the shadow Chancellor threatened not only to take that investment money away from British Telecom as a utility but said that all companies which were regulated and licensed, but not necessarily privatised, without discrimination, would come under the windfall tax? We can see that the biggest threat to increasing information technology and telecommunications is a vote for Labour.

Mr. Taylor: Nothing surprises me about the way in which the shadow Chancellor tries to find money for his spending pledges—even from people who thought that they had cuddled up to him and done deals with him. It seems absurd that, at the very moment when we have had a breakthrough in the World Trade Organisation which will liberalise world telecommunications—we in the United Kingdom led that change by liberalising early in the 1980s—the shadow Chancellor believes it right to place an imposition on BT and worsen its competitive position.

Mr. Hoon: It has been said that the difference between government and opposition is that Governments do things and Oppositions talk about doing things. Is it not clear from the Government's information technology policy, which seems to consist mostly of press releases, consultation documents and Green Papers—largely talking about doing things—just how much the Conservative Government are preparing for opposition?

Mr. Taylor: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has forgotten that it is good to talk. The Government's programme for the information society initiative is the best managed anywhere in the world. We liberalised our telecommunications well before anyone else. We announced that we were liberalising even international telecommunications last summer. Before I gave away the licences at the end of December, British Telecom had reduced its international prices three times. Our success in telecommunications is often quoted as one of the top three reasons why inward investors want to come to Britain. Our content industries have been let loose to communicate with each other electronically and we have led the basis for the digital television revolution. That is not bad. There is more to do. I look forward to continuing these arguments and applying the policies after the election.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of promoting information technology is through the market? Does he agree that the privatisation of such companies as British Telecom and AEA Technology has brought outstanding success in promoting information technology? Does he agree that they have promoted that technology and brought it to the benefit of the ordinary consumer, for example by installing fibre-optics throughout the land?

Mr. Taylor: British Telecom is, this year alone, investing more than £2 billion in upgrading its infrastructure at the kerbside simply to meet the competitive challenge the cable industry has brought about in what is called the local loop. That is the market working. The Government do not have to instruct companies to do those things. We do not have to do cosy deals at party conferences. If the Government regulate and let the market act, the consumer benefits. Schools are being linked up to the networks by the force of the market. The cable industry and BT have offered fixed-price ISDN packages to schools to allow them to make more use of the super-highways. Conservative policy is delivering in every corner of the country every aspect of the information society. More and more people realise how important that is and why it is attached to the continuance of Conservative government.

Regional Support

15. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next intends to review the level of his Department's financial support available to each region of the United Kingdom. [19455]

Mr. Greg Knight: Every element of the Department's expenditure is kept under regular review as part of the public expenditure survey process.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does not the experience of my constituency since 1979 encapsulate the problem for constituencies throughout the north of England? In the 1960s and 1970s, under Labour Governments and successful regional policies, 3,500 jobs were created in my constituency; in the 1980s and 1990s, under conservatism, 3,500 jobs were lost. Is it not clear that the Government have been involved in what can only be described as an act of industrial sabotage? May I ask the Minister not to give me a series of fabricated unemployment statistics in reply to my question?

Mr. Knight: Where has the hon. Gentleman been? We have had a severe world recession, and that is what caused difficulties, not only to his constituency, but to many others. That recession is now over and we are targeting the aid that is available in areas where the need is greatest. If the hon. Gentleman looks to Cumbria and the north-west region, he will see what is available: £30 million in European Union funding to help people get back to work; £20.7 million of regional selective assistance grants to help people get back to work; and, in Cumbria, £15 million of the single regeneration budget. That is what he should be welcoming. If there is any disappointment among his constituents about the recent past, it is because they have not had a Conservative Member of Parliament.

Mr. Booth: Regional policy is not a matter of spurious figures dictated by overmanning that has been cut out, or even by a world recession. Is not regional policy about ensuring that regions have freedom through lower taxation, lower inflation, lower interest rates and lower regulation—all policies that we are putting through?

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is absolutely right but, in fairness, structural funds have a role to play and we want those funds to be targeted more effectively. On the broader picture, however, he is right to say that what matters to business and to the job creators is a stable macro-economic climate—low inflation and low taxes. That can be delivered only under a Conservative Government.

Dr. Howells: Does the Minister agree that one of the most important determinants of the economic health of regions and national regions is the transportation infrastructure? Is he aware of the huge bills facing local authorities in Wales, Scotland and rural areas of England in particular as a result of their having to strengthen road bridges to accommodate the rise in maximum lorry weight from 38 to 40 tonnes? What are the Government going to do to get money from Europe to allow those hard-pressed authorities strengthen those bridges? After all, it is a European directive.

Mr. Knight: The hon. Gentleman is aware that discussions are currently taking place across Europe on the administration of structural funds. Specific applications are primarily matters for monitoring committees and, as I understand it, the issue to which he refers is capable of being looked at under the structural funds regulations. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Transport and the local monitoring committees will wish to address the matter after 2 May.

Privatised Utilities

16. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to alter the structure of utility regulation. [19456]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government's immediate priority is to enable the electricity and gas regulators to continue to drive forward the opening of these markets to full competition in 1998, for the benefit of consumers.

Mr. Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the indicator of the regulators' success has been lower prices for consumers of gas and electricity and substantial infrastructure development and investment by the water industry? Would not all that be put at risk by the Labour party's so-called windfall tax? When water quality is particularly important to my constituents, who have experienced problems—fortunately now over—with Three Valleys Water, is not the election message to them that Labour's windfall tax would mean higher gas and electricity prices, but lower quality drinking water, less money for sewerage schemes and, what is more, no money for flood relief schemes? All those are vital to my constituents, and all would be put at risk by a so-called windfall tax.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is correct to lay out that litany of the dangers of electing Labour. Not only do we know nothing about the windfall tax; we do not know the basis on which the consumer would be charged. We have a policy called RPI minus x, which means less than inflation pricing policy. The Opposition Front Bench are divided on that; we have had one signal from Leeds, West and another from Pontypridd. Will Labour Members tell us about the windfall tax and their pricing policy? We are getting two messages at the moment—both bad.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the Minister address his own responsibilities for a change and tell us why, if those companies are so efficient, they have not considered abolishing standing charges, and why so many of their elderly pensioner customers are deeply disturbed, not by the excellence of the service that they receive, but by its expense?

Mr. Taylor: Charging policy is a matter for the industry. The hon. Lady should listen to the answer. In any computation of a fair return on capital, which is a matter of interest to the shareholders, one must consider the historic cost of installing the equipment, for which standing charges are a form of rental. It is an equitable policy.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Shareholders' interests always seem to come first.

Mr. Taylor: Shareholders have an interest, as do consumers. Consumers have benefited to the tune of 70 per cent. of efficiency gains; shareholders have benefited to the extent of 30 per cent. of efficiency gains.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Madam Speaker: Point of order—Mr. Hughes.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I have a loud point of order, Madam Speaker. [HON. MEMBERS: "Short, we hope."] Following the Prime Minister's answer yesterday to the question about the Commissioner for Standards, and knowing that you have said from the Chair in this Parliament that you were very keen that all Members' interests and reputations and that of the House in general be protected, may I ask your advice as to whether there is any way in which, by your direct or indirect authority, if the Commissioner for Standards indicates that he can complete his report before Parliament is dissolved, the House, in the proper way, can have the opportunity to consider it; and, more important, whether there is any way in which the interests of Members, whether or not they are featured in the report, can be protected?

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I think this is a similar point of order.

Mr. Benn: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker—I am sorry that I have not been able to give you notice—I have been giving consideration to the point that has just been raised, on this basis. The prorogation of Parliament is entirely for the Crown and the Prime Minister, and does not relate in any way to your responsibilities; but the House continues to sit, as a House of Parliament, until 8 April.

During that period, Sir Gordon Downey, along with the Clerk of the House and the Editor of *Hansard*, remains an Officer of the House, and you, I put it to you, have the authority to instruct an Officer of the House to make available information that he has gathered at the request of the House, even though the House is prorogued and not able to meet.

Madam Speaker, you did make a great statement, in my opinion, about the standing of Parliament and the relationship of this matter to the standing of Parliament in the public mind. As we approach an election, that question will undoubtedly be a factor in the public mind, so I would ask you to consider very carefully whether you do have the authority, as I believe you may have and do have—and would be ready to exercise that authority—to allow the wishes of this Parliament to be fulfilled: namely, that Sir Gordon Downey's intentions be acted on, inasmuch as his report be published even though the House and the Committee were not able to consider it.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Does it relate?

Mr. Jenkin: It does, Madam Speaker. I put it to you, contrary to the view that has just been expressed, that we are dealing here with the livelihoods of hon. Members. What we want is a dispassionate and fair appraisal of the facts of the case. Can that really be achieved by the Opposition parties forcing the issue now for their own political purposes?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. It will be within your recollection that, during business questions and at other times, some very specific, rather narrow questions have been asked, particularly about Mr. Mohammed Al-Fayed. Does the Committee, or do you, have the power to order the publication of an interim report on those narrow questions, as opposed to the wider issue that may be absorbing most of the time and energies of the Committee? Are you entitled to require the publication of interim reports?

Mr. David Shaw (Dover) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Does it relate?

Mr. Shaw: It relates indirectly—

Madam Speaker: No.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I must ask all hon. Members to resume their seats. I am not asking for points of order on this matter, but if Members have genuine points of order for me, I want to hear them. I do not want to hear any false ones; this is a very serious matter. I am almost ready now to respond, but I will hear any further genuine points of order that hon. Members may have.

Mr. Shaw: My point of order, Madam Speaker, relates to the Standards and Privileges Committee and to its work on this report. The real issue is that that report is holding up other reports on at least three Labour Members. There are allegations that filibustering has been going on during preparation of the report in question, so that the reports on the three Labour Members cannot be considered.

As I understand it, new complaints cannot be considered by the Committee, but on today's Order Paper there is an early-day motion signed by 47 Labour Members who are benefiting to the tune of £1 million in sponsorship and support from the Co-operative Movement. I should like to refer that to the Standards and Privileges Committee, but I do not believe I can, because the Committee is no longer scheduled to meet.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I can deal with that point of order immediately. If the hon. Gentleman has any such complaints they should go to the Commissioner for Standards—right away.

Several hon. Members: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I cannot go on with these points of order, as I am now ready to respond. Does anyone have a new point of order? I see the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) trying to catch my eye; he is a member of the Standards and Privileges Committee.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The comments of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) are a fabrication.

Madam Speaker: I have already dealt with those comments. If the hon. Member for Dover has any evidence, he knows how to proceed.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. On 14 October last year,

you made a statement to the House in which you called these allegations "very serious", and said that they had undoubtedly worried the public as well as the House itself. You went on:

"I would not be doing my duty as Speaker if I allowed this situation to pass without saying that I believe very strongly indeed that these matters must be resolved as soon as possible."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. 463.]

I put it to you that the issue does not simply concern the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), who incidentally has stated that he wants the report to be published as quickly as possible. The House has been affected by continual allegations of sleaze, and it is important for the reputation of the House, not for the benefit of any single Member, that, before Parliament comes to an end, the report should be duly published. Are we to go into a general election campaign with this matter hanging over us?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am now ready to respond to these points of order; I shall take others later.

The House itself established the Standards and Privileges Committee, and required it to undertake an inquiry into the allegations of Mr. Al-Fayed. Only the Committee can be the judge of whether it can produce a report on those matters. Hon. Members may regret that it has been unable to do so, but I know that it is not for want of trying, and I pay my own tribute to the Commissioner for Standards, the Chairman and members of that Committee for the hard work they have put into their consideration of this and other matters.

As to the suggestion that the Committee should continue its work after prorogation, I have to tell the House that, constitutionally, it is simply not possible. Although the Committee has the power to sit during a normal recess, the effect of prorogation is to terminate all the current business of Parliament, including the work of Committees. I refer hon. Members to page 60 of "Erskine May", which says:

"The effect of a prorogation is at once to terminate all the current business of Parliament."

There is nothing that I can do as Speaker to alter that.

In answer to a direct question, I have no authority, either, to instruct the Commissioner to publish his report. That report must be given to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): On a different point of order, Madam Speaker. I was wondering whether you could give me guidance on whether you have received any messages from Ministers at the Department of Health about the possibility of holding an urgent debate on the dire situation at Edgware general hospital, given that the position there is rendered more perilous by the delays of Barnet hospital's new developments and the problems at Northwick Park hospital. As you know, I have been trying to raise the matter in the past few days in some form, including an Adjournment debate. I should be grateful for your guidance.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has raised that point of order with me twice today. I have not been informed that a Minister seeks to make a statement on the matter.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North–West): I seek your ruling, Madam Speaker. It is not a matter for the Commissioner for Standards. Is it not correct that, if hon. Members table an early-day motion, they should declare their interest? Having been sitting here, I have been unable to check with the hon. Members concerned, but I believe that the early-day motion was tabled by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Davidson), who has interests with the Co-operative Movement. Early-day motion 682 calls for the Government to protect the Co-operative Movement. None of the Labour Members who tabled it, most of whom have a direct interest with the Co-operative Movement, have declared their interest on the Order Paper.

Madam Speaker: It is normal to put an "R" at the side of an early-day motion and, if there are interests to declare, those should be declared.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Further to the earlier point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I do not take further points of order once I have given a ruling, and I have made a clear ruling, which was very carefully worded.

Mr. Faulds: This is another aspect, Madam Speaker. Would you inquire whether it is at all feasible for the House of Commons itself to decide to postpone prorogation?

Madam Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Colleagues have referred to the Register of Members' Interests and standards, and have pointed out that, in declaring Members' interests, we should name those who have provided funds for us. A number of hon. Members, including the Leader of the Opposition, stated that they had a blind trust in which they were receiving money—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have dealt with all those matters—*[Interruption.]* No, I am not going to allow the hon. Gentleman to go on. If he has anything to complain about, it should go through our procedures to the Commissioner for Standards.

BILL PRESENTED

Abolition of Pharmaceutical Monopolies in Rural Areas

Mr. William Cash presented a Bill to remedy an ambiguity in the law relating to the dispensing of medicines in rural areas and to abolish the monopoly for the dispensing of medicines within one mile of any pharmacy in rural areas: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 143].

Age Discrimination

3.43 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision in respect of age discrimination.

The Bill would make it an offence to discriminate against adults on the ground of age in matters of employment, promotion, redundancy and access to public facilities, including training and education, and in matters of health care and medical services.

I am by temperament and conviction a deregulator, and I am proud to be vice-chairman of the Conservative Back-Bench deregulation committee. I take it as axiomatic that any hon. Member introducing any legislative proposal bears a substantial burden of proof that the only effective way of addressing an ill and bringing about a necessary improvement is by increasing the corpus of legislation on our statute book. I fear that, in this instance, that test is met. It seems clear that legislation is necessary to deal with the problems we face.

Hon. Members may have noticed in *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday an advertisement placed by the Association of Retired and Persons Over 50 which set out some interesting facts resulting from a survey by the Institute of Management. That survey showed that 60 per cent. of job advertisements set some age limits beyond which candidates would not be considered, and that one third of all employers have a policy of not hiring people aged more than 45, whatever their experience or qualifications may be, and without examining the individual case.

It is not difficult to conceive of the enormous heartbreak and the destruction of people's hopes and aspirations that such discrimination must inevitably bring about. However, it is a public matter that should concern us all, not just those of us who know, are related to or have as constituents the many direct victims of such discrimination.

It is extremely bad for society and the economy for us to deprive ourselves of the talents and energies of so many people, the wealth and output that might be created by allowing them to practise their trades and professions, and the tax revenue that would be generated if they were in the labour market.

As recently as 1972, some 80 per cent. of men between the ages of 60 and 64 were in employment. Now that figure is down to 50 per cent. No doubt many of those men have voluntarily retired and are happy to be doing little or engaging in non-remunerated activities. It must be in the public interest, however, to encourage people in their 50s, 60s and 70s, and who are willing and able to go back to work, to do so. It is in the interests of us all that they should do that. It must therefore be in our interest to remove artificial obstructions to their re-entering the labour market.

Another aspect of my Bill concerns an even more significant and urgent issue—discrimination on age grounds in the health service. That is entirely contrary to the principles set out in the Act—and the 1944 White Paper produced by the coalition Government—on which the NHS was founded in 1948. It is also entirely contrary to explicit Government policy. Only the other day, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made a ringing declaration that age discrimination would be contrary to every principle of Government policy in the health service.

Nevertheless, I fear that such discrimination occurs. I should like to read an extract from an article in the *British Medical Journal* last week by Professor Grimley Evans, professor of clinical gerontology at the Radcliffe infirmary and the Oxford medical school. He writes:

"Older people are discriminated against in the NHS. This is best documented in sub-standard treatment of acute myocardial infarction and other forms of heart disease, where it tends to premature deaths and unnecessary disability. The care for older people with cancer is also poorer than that provided for younger patients. Age discrimination in the NHS occurs despite explicit statements from the Government that withholding treatment on the basis of age is not acceptable. Ageism is mostly instigated by clinicians, but condoned by some managers."

Age Concern has brought together considerable documentation on anecdotal cases demonstrating that this is no theoretical problem. I am sure that only a small minority of clinicians or national health service managers would stoop to the practice that I have described, but the practice exists. I believe that there is no other way of uprooting it than by legislating to do so.

There has been a slightly surprising development over the past few days. One would suppose that such a nefarious form of discrimination would be practised covertly, shamefully and in silence by those who engage in it. Indeed, that has generally been the case. In yesterday's *Daily Mail*, however, which some Members may have read, there appeared an article written by a Mr. Williams, who is not a doctor but apparently a health economist. Mr. Williams attempted to justify discrimination in health matters on the ground of age. That is a sinister development.

I believe that any right hon. or hon. Member who reads the article by Mr. Williams will agree with me that only one of two conclusions can be drawn. Either it is involuntarily muddled in its thinking or it is deliberately disingenuous. I shall give one example. Mr. Williams makes fun of the idea of providing a hip replacement for a 90-year-old with a terminal cancer. No responsible doctor would dream of imposing the gratuitous trauma of an orthopaedic operation on any terminal patient of any age. Mr. Williams makes my point. Clinical decisions should be made on clinical grounds. They should be made in the light of the specific physiological condition of the individual patient.

If the protections of the National Health Service Act, repeated Government statements and the Hippocratic oath—I have always believed that that oath places an absolute responsibility on all doctors to have prime regard to the interests of their individual patients and not to be guided by extraneous considerations—are not enough to eliminate the practice of age discrimination, we clearly need some explicit change to the law.

A generation ago, the House passed sex discrimination and race discrimination legislation, which has had widespread acceptance. The great effect of those measures was to create a change in attitude, a change in behaviour patterns and a change in culture. These pieces of legislation have been enormously beneficial to those groups which might otherwise have been subject to entirely invidious discrimination. It is time that the

sections of our population of older ages—we all hope to join their ranks in due time—should be equally protected from unjustified discrimination.

I commend my Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Quentin Davies, Mr. Batiste, Mr. Forman, Sir Anthony Grant, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Sir David Hunt, Mr. Mans, Mr. Rowe, Mr. Tim Smith, Mr. Temple-Morris, Mr. Waller and Mr. Yeo.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Quentin Davies accordingly presented a Bill to make provision in respect of age discrimination: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 20 March, and to be printed [Bill 144].

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall have effect—

(1) At the sittings this day and tomorrow the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any messages from the Lords have been received.

(2) At this day's sitting, in respect of the motion relating to ministerial accountability the Speaker shall forthwith put the questions on the motion and on any amendment which may have been selected and moved; and the questions may be decided, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.

(3) At this day's sitting—

(a) the Speaker shall, at Ten o'clock, put the question on any motion in the name of a Minister of the Crown relating to estimates, and

(b) any Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill ordered to be brought in and read the first time shall be proceeded with as if its Second Reading stood as an Order of the Day, and Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills) shall apply.

(4) At the sitting tomorrow, in respect of any motion in the name of a Minister of the Crown which relates to tax simplification or a report from a Select Committee, the Speaker shall forthwith put the questions on the motion and on any amendment which may have been selected and moved.

(5) If any Lords Amendment to the Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill is received at the sitting this day or tomorrow—

(a) it shall be considered forthwith,

(b) the Speaker shall forthwith put the question on any motion which may then be made relating to it, and

(c) the question may be decided, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.

(6) Notwithstanding Standing Orders Nos. 11 and 11A (Fridays) and the Order of 30th October 1996, the House shall sit on Friday 21st March, at Eleven o'clock.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Orders of the Day

Police Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Madam Speaker: Before I call the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I have to tell the House that, in addition to the amendments that I selected earlier today, I have received three manuscript amendments in the name of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). Those have been distributed. I have selected the first of those amendments, which seeks to leave out lines 27 and 28 on page 56 of the Bill. The amendment will, of course, be taken in its appropriate place, after amendment No. 4.

Clause 2

General functions of the NCIS Service Authority and NCIS

3.55 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 42, at end insert

'and

(e) the system of justice operating in any country with which it is proposed to offer intelligence or support under subsection (3)(d), and the extent to which it can be assumed that such intelligence or support will be used in accordance with conditions similar to those to which NCIS is subject.'.

The amendment refers to a clause that I have strongly supported—I was among a number of people who argued that it should be introduced. The clause puts the national criminal intelligence service and the national crime squad on a statutory footing, and it sets out the powers and responsibilities of NCIS.

The amendment was tabled because the provisions on co-operating with the intelligence and security services and police forces of other countries are extremely broadly described on the face of the Bill. The Bill refers to NCIS dealing with

"any other person engaged outside the United Kingdom in the carrying on of activities similar to any carried on by the NCIS Service Authority, NCIS, a police authority, a police force, the NCS Service Authority or the National Crime Squad."

I am strongly in support of international co-operation between law enforcement organisations, which is absolutely essential in the fight against international drug trafficking. Indeed, our drug liaison officers who operate, for example, in Holland, work closely with their counterparts in other countries. When they do, however, in Holland or other countries—even in very friendly countries and countries with a similar background—they have to be very careful about how they exchange intelligence, for a number of reasons. That is even more the case, given some of the regimes to which one might imagine the power would extend.

The wording could open the door to co-operation with the most oppressive regimes in the world—those with the most authoritarian and uncontrolled police forces, or with forces that are subject to the control of some element in a deeply divided form of government. It could open the way to intelligence being shared with very insecure

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

organisations, whose acquisition of the knowledge from that intelligence could damage our own security and the sources from which the intelligence had come. It could also lead to threats to individuals who are in this country but in whom other Governments have an interest, perhaps because they are fugitives from the politics of that country and might have vulnerable families living there.

All those considerations are familiar to the security organisations, because they have to make judgments about those matters in their existing work and co-operation, but I was worried to find on the face of the Bill a power so broad without any reference to NCIS having an obligation to have regard to international human rights obligations; to the security of the information that it might pass on; or to any other relevant factors.

The amendment follows on from a broader amendment tabled in Committee, but it is much narrower and requires reference to the system of justice in operation

"and the extent to which it can be assumed that such intelligence or support will be used in accordance with conditions similar to those to which NCIS is subject."

There are a number of international arrangements under which that provision can be met. The Interpol constitution refers to keeping

"within the spirit of the universal declaration of human rights."

Article 3 of the constitution forbids intervention in the affairs of a member country of a

"political, military, religious or racial character."

There are other provisions in the Europol arrangements that may help.

It is important that the Minister takes the opportunity to clarify and put on record how we shall ensure that we do not share intelligence in a way that could compromise our security and which would damage the human rights of individuals; that we do not share intelligence with regimes whose use of that intelligence would be oppressive; and that we have regard to all the wider human rights obligations to which I referred. I hope that the Minister will be able to do that.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I fully understand the sentiments expressed by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). The amendment would require the NCIS service authority to have regard to the systems of justice in any country with which NCIS may exchange intelligence and provide support. The service authority would also be required to consider how that intelligence might be used, and to judge that against the controls in place for NCIS.

Those are operational matters, and it would be wholly inappropriate for the service authority to undertake such functions. However, I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman's concern is to ensure that intelligence exchange between NCIS and non-UK law enforcement agencies is subject to appropriate controls. I assure him that that is already the case.

As the right hon. Gentleman will know, I wrote to members of the Standing Committee on 10 March setting out the various controls that already exist for the exchange of information by NCIS. That letter is in the Library. I stress that most exchanges of information between law enforcement agencies are through Interpol. The Interpol constitution states that its aims are to

"promote and facilitate the widest possible mutual assistance between all criminal police authorities within the limits of the laws existing in the different countries and within the spirit of the universal declaration of human rights."

In addition, the constitution forbids any intervention in the affairs of a member country of a

"political, military, religious or racial character."

I also referred in my letter to the exchange of intelligence between NCIS and the countries that host NCIS and Customs and Excise liaison officers. Any such exchanges are in accordance with Foreign and Commonwealth Office guidance on the individual country, and at the discretion of individual liaison officers with detailed knowledge of the country involved. Furthermore, any requests received direct from individual law enforcement agencies that give cause for concern are checked as far as is practicable before a response is given. Some requests have been refused, and I outlined some examples in my letter to the Standing Committee.

I cannot go into specific details for operational reasons, but, for example, NCIS has refused to exchange information about individuals who have claimed political asylum. Some countries can prosecute individuals for committing an offence in another country, and allegedly bringing discredit to their sovereign country. NCIS does not pass on information in such circumstances, nor does it pass on information when that may lead to a United Kingdom national facing capital punishment.

I cannot agree to the amendment, because it would require the service authority to become involved, as I said, in operational matters, and it would blur the lines of responsibility between the service authority and the director general. That said, I do of course agree about the need for exchange of information to be subject to some control. However, as I said, that is already the case in NCIS, and it will continue to be so.

Mr. Beith: Does the Minister expect the service authority to discuss with the director general the principles on which it deals with requests for information, so that the director general can say what guidelines he is working to, just as Home Office Ministers discuss with security authorities, without going into operational detail, the basis on which they deal with such requests?

Mr. Kirkhope: There is no reason why such discussions should not take place, and I expect them to do so. As the right hon. Gentleman inferred, the service authority is not expected to be involved in operational matters and operational control.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The Minister made it clear that NCIS will make decisions on operational matters. Advice on the systems of law in other countries would come from the Foreign Office and from the Home Secretary, as part of his responsibilities under the Bill. Judgments about the quality of justice in other countries should surely not be left to the operational

authority. Departments of State have the capacity to make such judgments through their international knowledge and contacts.

Mr. Kirkhope: I thought that I had made it clear how responsibility would be divided. The Departments concerned would certainly be responsible for intelligence and assessment of the situation.

I hope that I have reassured the right hon. Gentleman to some extent, and that, on that basis, he will withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Michael: Everyone would want the system of justice operating in any country engaged in relations and activities involving NCIS to be one in which people in this country could be confident. My concern about the amendment is that it seems to place an obligation on NCIS to make judgments about such matters. The Minister's reply to me seemed to confirm a different view: that such judgments must be made by Government rather than by an agency: The agency will be responsible for operational decision making, but to ask a police authority—a service authority—to make decisions about the criminal justice systems of other countries is hardly something with which we would be happy if it operated in reverse.

I think that we all agree with the sentiment that we should be certain that the operations of NCIS involve co-operation, joint activities and support where there are systems of justice in which we can have confidence, and that, where there are reservations, great care should be exercised. To place a responsibility for making such judgments on the service authority would, however, constitute an abrogation of the responsibility of Government. Therefore, while I agree with the sentiments expressed by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I think that the effect of his amendment would be far removed from the responsibility that he sought to include in the Bill.

Mr. Beith: I think that we have made progress in this short debate.

As I see it, the head of NCIS—the chief constable—will need to have regard to advice from various directions before deciding how to use his powers under this clause, and, indeed, whether to use them at all to offer intelligence or support or to exchange intelligence. He will need to have regard to Foreign and Commonwealth Office guidance about the situation in the countries concerned, and, perhaps, to the Home Secretary's view of relevant matters. He must have regard to international obligations involving human rights, including treaties to which we are a signatory. He will also need to discuss the general framework within which he works with the service authority. It would be wrong for that authority to have no knowledge of such matters, because it does some of the job that the Home Secretary does in dealing with the comparable position of the Security Service. It is natural that the service authority should be involved in discussing the broad guidelines on the basis of which he works.

Given what the Minister has now helpfully put on record, however, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 23

AID BY AND FOR NCIS

Amendments made: No. 7, in page 11, line 34, after 'subsection (1)' insert 'or (2)'.

No. 8, in page 11, line 36, after 'direct' insert 'the Director General of NCIS,'.

No. 9, in page 11, line 38, after 'Constabulary' insert 'or'.

No. 10, in page 11, line 39, leave out 'or the Director General of NCIS'.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Clause 95

AUTHORISATIONS: FORM AND DURATION ETC.

Amendment made: No. 6, in page 38, leave out lines 26 to 28.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Clause 97

AUTHORISATIONS REQUIRING APPROVAL

Amendment made: No. 11, in page 39, line 31, after 'applies' insert 'to the authorisation'.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 40, line 9, at end insert—

'"urgency" means circumstances in which it is not reasonably practicable to apply for an authorisation because to do so would cause such delay as would be likely seriously to prejudice the effectiveness of the operation.'.

We now come to what has been the most publicly controversial part of the Bill—the part that deals with intrusive surveillance, or bugging.

It has been a long and complex story. From the start, Liberal Democrats have believed that there should be a prior authority for intrusive surveillance in places that people might legitimately regard as private, such as private houses or hotel rooms. That does not apply to lock-up garages or cars being tracked: those are dealt with in another part of the Bill. We felt that that authority should come from a judge, and proposed that it should come from a circuit judge.

To cut a long story short, in another place, not only our amendment, but, thanks to a change of heart by the Labour party—which had initially been satisfied with a post hoc authority—another amendment was carried, which gave the job to a commissioner or one of a body of commissioners who held or had held high judicial office—a judge or former judge, but acting through a body of commissioners. I do not want to go back over that ground. We have our own preference as between the sorts of prior judicial authority, but, at least at this stage of the Bill, an application must be made to a judge who is a commissioner, to gain authority to undertake the intrusive surveillance to which I referred.

Mr. Michael: In view of the debates on the issue, does the right hon. Gentleman now accept that the option that he preferred—that of an application to a circuit judge—was a weaker way of protecting civil liberties than the prior application to a commissioner, which was the Labour party's proposal?

Mr. Beith: No. The hon. Gentleman's original position and that of the Labour party—that no prior authority was

[Mr. Beith]

required—was as weak as dishwater. It was disgraceful that the Labour party should have contemplated the Bill going on to the statute book in that form. I welcome its conversion—

"Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth".

Mr. Michael: Will the right hon. Gentleman kindly restrain his capacity for exaggeration, which seems to have been brought on by the imminence of an election? The Labour party welcomes the commissioner operation, because we believe that it is the right way of achieving a proper balance in relation to authority for surveillance and the protection of civil liberties. We said from the beginning that we felt that there should be scrutiny and a strengthening of the protection in the legislation as it passed through both Houses. We have fulfilled our part with honour and distinction.

Mr. Beith: I am tempted to say, "Come on. The other one's got bells on it." The hon. Gentleman must consider what his colleague the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said during the Bill's earlier stages, when he was satisfied that we did not need a system of prior authorisation. There has been agreement throughout that a body that reviewed the whole process—the commissioners—would be an element in the system. The change has been that that body has also been entrusted with giving prior approval to intrusive surveillance, a change that was not originally supported by the Labour party and that it supported later. I have welcomed that, and the hon. Gentleman should accept those kind words with good grace, but it took quite an effort.

I am glad to say that many Labour Members voted with us in favour of our circuit judge amendment, as they did on other aspects of this Bill and the Crime (Sentences) Bill, even when advised not to do so by Labour Front Benchers. Thankfully, some people in that party in another place are strongly committed to civil liberties.

We are dealing now with the circumstances in which prior approval would have to be given by the commissioners. The crux of the issue is urgency; that is what the amendment is about. There is a fear that, because, in urgent cases, prior authority or approval will not be necessary—it will be sufficient to notify the commissioner at the time or as soon as possible thereafter of the intrusive surveillance operation—that creates too wide and open a measure in the Bill. I shall not go as far as the Home Secretary, who said about another aspect of another Bill that it was driving a coach and horses through it, but there is a potentially wide loophole that might be too extensively used. In Committee and again today, I seek to define "urgency" more clearly.

In discussions, we have refined the position between the Government and ourselves. I recognise that, so far as they have been expressed to me, certainly in private, the Government's intentions seem to be what I would want them to be—that those urgent provisions should be used only in circumstances where it was not reasonably practicable to apply for an authorisation, because to do so would cause such delay as seriously to prejudice the effectiveness of the operation. Unless there is some such understanding, there is a slight danger that people working in that sphere will say, "All operations are urgent. In the nature of things, when your opportunity comes, you have to act quickly."

For the comparable activities of the Security Service, it is not felt necessary to have any urgent provisions at all. The same is true of police applications to tap telephones. What happens? The Home Secretary must be consulted and give his authorisation, his warrant. If the Home Secretary has to be got out of bed for the purpose, that is what happens. If he has to be tracked down on his holidays for the purpose, that is what happens. If he is out of the country, another Secretary of State is got out of bed—or found, wherever he may be.

That procedure is efficient enough to work rapidly in cases of urgency. We must also remember that no such action takes place without a formalised procedure within the police force. The chief constable is involved. Papers are brought to him, and the process takes some time. It is not a case of someone making a snap decision on the spot, after which something happens immediately.

4.15 pm

In any event, because of the nature of what is being done, such arrangements take a bit of preparation and planning. One cannot decide on such a course of action on the spur of the moment. It would be wrong to exaggerate the number of cases in which special urgency procedures are used.

The provision is there now and our job, as we revise the Bill on Report, is to ensure that it is adequate. I hope that the Minister will tell us that urgency really means urgency, and that the provision will not be used lightly. If possible, the code of practice could be improved to stipulate that.

What is said in the House will help to reinforce the fact that the procedures should not be used unless it is not possible to go through the formal procedures, because to do so would prevent the police from doing the important job that they have in hand.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills): I support the amendment. Perhaps the most grievous thing about the Bill—it is at the heart of the reason why I oppose it root, branch and in every way that I can—is the concept of moving from traditional, constitutional and historical values.

No one should enter our homes without the authority of a warrant, and such a warrant should not be self-issuing. The extraordinary thing about the Bill is that although we have insisted that warrants be granted to the security and intelligence services only through the Home Secretary or the Foreign Secretary, who are accountable on the Floor of the House, the Home Office now countenances the idea that chief constables or their deputies should be able to authorise themselves in any circumstances.

It was extraordinary to see the House of Lords reissue the language of this country, for this is a land of liberty. We believe in things, and one of the most important of those things is that a warrant must be issued to permit entry into people's homes.

Under the revised provisions, the Home Secretary still countenances the idea that circumstances could exist—he described them as extraordinary—in which it would be necessary to allow a police officer to be in effect self-warranting. That is wholly inappropriate.

Why does our language describe us as a land of liberty? Why have we had all those protections? Why have many people come here as refugees to escape what has been

happening abroad? Because we were people attentive to due process of law. That is why I support the amendment moved by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). Why, even in extraordinary circumstances, should a chief constable be able to authorise the bugging and burgling of premises? As we were reminded by the speeches made in another place, that is unlawful, although it has been practised by the Home Office and by police forces for many years.

People will understand our sensitivity, especially in the west midlands, where it was necessary to disband our serious crime squad. Policemen themselves had come to conclusions about free citizens and ensured that they were brought to trial and found guilty. Subsequently the convictions had to be overturned, because the police had invented evidence or circumstances.

That is the danger with self-authorisation. People can become so intent on the cause that they are pursuing, the crime that they "know" someone else has committed, that they search out and find evidence, whether it is there or not. Now, for reasons of administrative convenience, the Home Office has introduced a measure that contradicts a fundamental principle—that the agencies of the Executive should not themselves be able to do these things. On Second Reading, I asked the shadow Home Secretary what the exceptional circumstances were. I noticed that, in Committee, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said:

"I can give no better example than the one that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) provided on Second Reading. He mentioned a kidnapping during which the police follow a vehicle to the place where the kidnap victim is being held but do not know the location until moments before the kidnappers arrive. I agreed with the hon. Member that it would be absurd to expect the police to seek the prior approval of a commissioner in such a case."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 11 March 1997; c. 134.]

Remember—my right hon. Friend said:

"I can give no better example".

I have always understood that kidnapping is a crime, so the police are in pursuit of someone in the commission of a crime. The law of the land is on their side as they reach and pluck out those criminals. Why is it therefore necessary to construct an extraordinary warrant for the few seconds in which my right hon. Friend says that the police may have to be able to bug and burgle premises, of which they were not aware until a few seconds before? If one disentangles the logic of the proposal, it does not stand up.

I see that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) is frowning, but he will be aware of the indignation of many of us in the House at the Labour party, which stood aside on this matter until the House of Lords brought it to book. It was prepared to accept the wholesale non-use of warrants to achieve those administrative purposes for the police.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman should not make up the position of the Labour party, which I shall explain in due course. Could he explain what he has just said, as my frown was one of puzzlement? In the circumstances that he has just described, what would be the authority for the intrusion on to property to bug, with which he apparently has no problem?

Mr. Shepherd: I am referring to a kidnap in progress, when, for some reason, the police are required to bug or burgle premises. If one tests the proposition, one must ask why any of these provisions are necessary. The police know their duty, and are supported by the law and by the public. There is no need to bug premises. I am trying to suggest that we have constructed the most artificial and curious circumstances in which it is necessary for the police to intervene. I am trying to reiterate a principle that is profound to the nature of our constitution—that no authority, or part of the civil authority of the Executive, may of itself issue warrants to reach into our homes during the investigation of what amounts to 0.00001 per cent. of all possible cases at issue. Yet this law will apply to all 55 million people in the United Kingdom.

In pursuit of administrative convenience, we are prepared to throw away the reason why this was a land of liberty. I just wish that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth could give his attention to reading the original *Hansard* debates from the House of Lords.

Mr. Michael: Come on.

Mr. Shepherd: There is no point in trying to brush this aside, because it is a matter of indignation for some of us.

Mr. Michael: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would not be absurd. Of course I have read the *Hansard* reports from the House of Lords—they were extremely important debates. I was involved in debating those issues long before they reached the House of Lords, because of the importance of balancing the authorisation of surveillance to protect the public with civil liberties. Let the hon. Gentleman make his point without trying to misrepresent the position of others.

Mr. Shepherd: The conclusion that the hon. Gentleman came to was that we did not need warrants. That was the position put and argued in the House of Lords, so he should not get indignant with me about reading the report of the House of Lords debate, because it is on the record. We know full well where the hon. Gentleman started from. The House of Lords converted him because of the power of the arguments. The Labour party changed its position and that is fine—it is a triumph for the debating process in both Houses, and I salute that with pride.

We must return to the extraordinary circumstances elicited by the Home Office, which stated that it was trying to make lawful that which was unlawful and which had been a practice—through its memoranda or guidance notes—in our system of which I, through ignorance, was unaware. I suspect that large numbers of other people were unaware. Do we know whether our house is being burgled or bugged? Usually, we do not.

My nightmare is that a burglary or bugging will take place at the home of an elderly couple who are leaving from Birmingham airport and who find that they have forgotten their passports. They might come back and be confronted with intruders in their house. I can see circumstances arising from this issue that would give rise to public concern about the functions and actions of the police.

[Mr. Shepherd]

We have made it necessary for the security and intelligence services to effect such activities, but with a warrant in all circumstances. We had some great debates in the House on that subject. Yet the police, in a tiny fraction of cases, of which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said

"I can give no better example".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 11 March 1997; c. 134.]

will not be required to have such a warrant.

I am terribly worried about that matter and I cannot support the Bill on that basis. We trust our police and we want to maintain such a relationship with them, but they must never be the instrument of a central authority. Secondly, our constitution is about checks and balances. We have all too few of them and they are precious. Almost the last check and balance is the courts themselves, which now engage in judicial review on a scale unimaginable a generation ago. Why? Because they are almost the only check and balance that we have left. We do not perform the task well enough.

To produce such profound legislation under the avalanche of a general election means that the reflection and consideration necessary to such an important principle have not been given in this Chamber or this House, so I support the amendment.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I am particularly concerned about this aspect of the Bill, especially as I have had conflicting answers from the Home Secretary about cordless telephones and who is responsible for giving the police or any other authority permission to tap such telephones. On Second Reading, the Home Secretary told me that he held no central information on the number of times that he had given permission for cordless telephones to be tapped. He then suggested that they were covered by the Interception of Telecommunications Act 1985.

In Committee, I understand that the Minister gave conflicting answers. I hope that he will clarify to our satisfaction whether cordless telephones are covered by the 1985 Act, who gives authorisation for the tapping of those telephones and who holds records of the number of times that authorisations are given. That is an important matter. A large number of people now own cordless telephones, and they will all be concerned about this grey area in the Bill.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I hope that, in my usual way, I can assist the House and pour some oil on troubled waters this afternoon. First, on the point raised by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), there is no doubt about the matter, and there was no conflicting view in Committee. It is clear. Any organ of the state or anyone wanting to intercept any telephone communication, whether on a land line or a mobile phone—cordless telephones as she describes them—must have an intercept warrant under the Interception of Communications Act 1985. That requires the authorisation of the Home Secretary and has done so since IOCA was passed.

Mrs. Clwyd: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maclean: Yes, but the matter is not relevant to the amendment, and I do not want to stray too far from the terms of the debate.

4.30 pm

Mrs. Clwyd: Surveillance is part of the debate. What the Minister says conflicts with what the Home Secretary said. If he can assure us that the matter is dealt with in the Interception of Communications Act 1985, why did the Home Secretary tell us that the information was not held centrally and that it was a matter for police authorities? Surely, if he has to give his permission, he must know on how many occasions he has been asked for it.

Mr. Maclean: I cannot add anything to what I have already said. It is quite clear that the Interception of Communications Act 1985 applies to the interception of telecommunications or telephone calls, whether on mobile phones or on land lines. The hon. Lady was confusing two issues. In her original question, she was confusing information on interception of communications and the quite distinct and totally different matter of whether the police can approach a telephone operator and ask for information that may be held at the exchange or on computer records about what phone calls were made from certain phones, whether mobile or land line.

Mr. Michael: I believe that the Minister is trying to help the House, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) has been trying to tease out the explanation of the curious lack of reply from the Home Secretary on the interception of mobile phone calls. Is the Minister saying that interceptions of mobile phone calls would be included in the overall number of interceptions and cannot be distinguished, or that they are not recorded? Surely my hon. Friend's point is right: if the Home Secretary has to authorise such interceptions, they would appear in the numbers somewhere, although perhaps not in a separate category.

Mr. Maclean: I do not know whether they are separated out for statistical purposes. I can give the House the principal assurance that there is no difference in law and no avoidance of IOCA simply because the intercept relates to a mobile telephone call. At some point or other, mobile phones are plugged into the public telephone network, and if any state agency or police authority wants to intercept a public telephone, whether it is made exclusively on land lines, or between mobiles and land lines, or in any other combination, the Interception of Communications Act 1985 applies. That is exactly what I said in Committee, and I believe that that is the correct position.

I take extremely seriously the points that have been made. They were debated seriously in Committee. I know that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) expressed his concern in Committee regarding the cases in which surveillance operations in the sensitive categories may go ahead without the prior approval of the commissioner.

I also know that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) has had a noble record, since long before I came to the House, of defending absolutely the privacy and the rights of individuals. At times, the Government may have considered his interventions slightly awkward to handle, but I none the less welcome his resolute defence of those rights, and it is important that hon. Members make

those points. I do not say that he is misguided today: perhaps I have not made clear to him all the safeguards that already exist in the Bill.

We are all agreed that the procedure should be used only in cases of genuine urgency, and I believe that that point is satisfactorily covered in the Bill as drafted. I do not believe that any further definition along the lines of the amendment is necessary. The amendment would not get round my hon. Friend's main point of principle. Even if I were to accept the amendment, it would not address his worries of principle. I also believe that those worries are unnecessary.

The Bill already requires that, where an authorising officer uses the urgent procedure in cases that require prior approval, he must, when notifying the commissioner, give his reasons for believing that the case was urgent. That is the crucial point. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills said repeatedly that the procedure is self-authorising, and that organs of the state should not use a self-authorising procedure. I agree entirely; this is not a self-authorising procedure that no one can challenge or examine. It is not the case that chief constables can make a decision that is never re-examined.

We have built it into the Bill that, in cases where a chief officer, or those designated, believe that something is genuinely urgent, they can use the procedure. However, they must then notify the commissioner, who will be able to quash an authorisation immediately if he is not satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the case was urgent. I draw that to his attention because I know that he has read the Bill and the Committee proceedings.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: The amended Bill.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend has read the amended Bill in detail. I ask him to look at the procedure that we now have: the authorisation by the chief officer; the review by the commissioner to check whether the chief officer's decision was reasonable; the appellate procedure built in for the chief commissioner. In all fairness, there is no way in which my hon. Friend could describe this as an organ of the state having a self-authorising procedure.

Mr. Shepherd: That the judgment may be reviewed subsequently does not alter the fact that the initial phase is self-authorising.

Mr. Maclean: Of course the initial phase is self-authorising, but then there are the procedures involving the commissioner and, on appeal, the chief commissioner. There is another safeguard. As my hon. Friend knows, chief constables will not abuse the procedures, because of the safeguards that are built in. I am not asking the House to trust me and to trust all the chief constables. We are not simply leaving it to that. The system will not be abused because of the procedures built in—the report that the chief commissioner will make to the Prime Minister and the safeguards that are in the Bill. The chief commissioner will consider in his annual report how the urgency procedure has been used. He will not be backward in coming forward if he believes that there has been misuse of the genuine urgency procedure.

We have had a short but crucial debate. I reiterate that I do not believe that it is necessary to define "urgency" in the Bill. I have listened carefully to the points that were made. I do not think that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has made a case for defining in one sentence the meaning of "urgency". That could be limiting in some cases, which could be dangerous—and not because it would be administratively inconvenient. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills that this has been done not for administrative convenience but because both Government and Opposition, in the main, appreciate that there will be some circumstances in which lives could be at risk or a terrible crime is being, or is about to be, committed. The procedure could solve the crime or prevent it from happening; it could save lives. That is not a matter of administrative convenience but an important safeguard for the rest of our 55 million citizens.

Mr. Michael: I am worried that the amendment would not only provide a definition that may not be necessary but that it might get in the way of operations and lead to dangers to the public. I shall come to that in a moment. I am stimulated to intervene not least by the fact that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) was at his sanctimonious best. Labour will not take lessons from the Liberal Democrats on the importance of civil liberties.

Last year, the Security Service Bill was improved in Committee by sensible debate. In that debate, we pressed the Government and received assurances from the Minister that, at the earliest possible date, two things would happen. First, there would be a service authority to introduce accountability for the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the proposed National Crime Squad. In the event, there are to be two service authorities with overlapping membership. Secondly, it was promised that intrusive surveillance, which was dealt with in respect of the Security Service in that Bill, would be made subject to legislation. I do not think that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed took much interest in that important step at the time.

That step was extremely important, and so are the measures before us today. The right hon. Gentleman makes a mistake in thinking that the protection of an application to circuit judges, which would introduce the delay and bureaucracy entailed in an application to a court, would provide as strong a protection of civil liberties. It would delay decision making and bring it into disrepute. It would increase the use of the urgency provisions and provide inadequate protection of civil liberties. That is why the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in the House of Lords were mistaken in preferring that option, and why the amendments moved by the Labour spokesman in the House of Lords were the right approach.

The change that has happened is right. It was a sensible development. There was a debate. The outcome was a triumph for intelligent debate, which had been going on long before the press and public became interested. The change that happened means that we now have protections in the form of prior authorisation by a commissioner on sensitive matters relating to property and, for example, legal privilege. There were some worrying discussions about interference with legal privilege in areas not covered by the scope of the Bill. I think that the Minister sought to respond to that matter in a short debate at the end of the Committee proceedings yesterday. The matter will need to be returned to because there is a great deal of concern about the way in which it is being interpreted.

[Mr. Michael]

The speech of the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) was a mixture of high principle and absurdity. He was rightly sensitive to the idea that intrusive surveillance should not take place gratuitously or to meet the administrative convenience, whether of organisations of individuals or the state as a whole. That is right. I respect his passion in raising that point, as all hon. Members would, but we need a balance. Action sometimes needs to take place urgently when it is necessary to catch criminals or protect the public. The balance in the Bill now is a good deal better than before, but to swing in the opposite direction would undermine the operations about which the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed expresses concern through the wording of his amendment.

The question is what operations require urgency. Are the operations the only things that would define urgency? The hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills referred to the case of a kidnap victim. He has misunderstood the nature of the authorisation that would be needed in those circumstances. He said that it was obvious that everything should be done to protect someone who had been kidnapped, where there was danger to life. Clearly, that is the case, but it is not always possible to predict the movements of the kidnappers or what premises they will go to. Intelligence that a kidnap victim will be taken to particular premises might require surveillance of those premises at short notice in the interests of the protection of the victim and the effective conclusion of the operation. That is surely a sensible priority to allow for. The hon. Gentleman suggested that, in those circumstances, it would be so obvious that the victim needed to be protected that self-authorisation would be allowed.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: All I am saying is that provisions in the criminal law give the police authority to arrest people for kidnapping or whatever. That is why I have difficulty in understanding why we need to set down the principle that everyone should be authorised by a warrant from a separate institution such as the magistrates court.

Mr. Michael: I see that the hon. Gentleman did not understand the example that was given, which was that of the need to undertake intrusive surveillance of premises to which a kidnap victim might be taken in order to undertake the operation of safely rescuing that victim. There are examples that go precisely to the point of the authorisations in the Bill and to the sort of circumstances in which urgency might arise.

My concern is that, if the amendment were to be passed, it would allow the urgency procedure to be used only where delay would be likely seriously to prejudice the effectiveness of the operation. Other matters might be urgent, such as the protection of the public or the avoidance of danger to the public or to police officers. The amendment would prevent the urgency provision being used in those circumstances, and that would be a grave mistake. I certainly understand the reasons why the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed wants to define urgency more closely, but his amendment would introduce a danger that the use of the urgency provisions would be so constrained that police officers and members of the public were put at risk. That would be a dangerous mistake to make.

4.45 pm

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) for his usual stalwart contribution on civil liberties matters, as I have been grateful for his support in earlier stages of the Bill. I am also grateful for the closing words of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). I shall not dwell on his earlier remarks, except to say that he is an upholder of the longer and rather unhappy political tradition of never admitting that one was wrong, even when one has had the sense to change one's mind. That attitude is all too common in British politics, but I see no merit or advantage in it.

The Minister's remarks were echoed to some extent by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth in saying that we must have an urgent procedure because lives may be at risk. I simply emphasise that the existing procedure, with no urgency provision, has to be operated when terrorism is being fought by the Security Service. If that service is aware that a surveillance operation is necessary because of the prospect of a major bomb outrage occurring, it gets to the Home Secretary quickly, and gets the authorisation in an efficient manner.

What I do not want is a cumbersome and slow system of approvals for the police when dealing with serious crime that necessitates frequent recourse to an urgent procedure in which they do not have to get approval in advance. The Minister has said, and has referred to parts of the code of practice that say, that urgency has to be genuine. He has underlined that the urgent application will not merely be reviewed as to whether it was a good idea, but will be open to being quashed. That quashing might not have any effect if the operation has already been completed, but one quashing of an urgent application at a relatively early stage might serve to concentrate minds wonderfully from then on. I hope that that does not prove necessary, but the Minister has today helped to make clear it that the procedures should be used only in an extremely limited and closely defined set of circumstances.

There may be dangers in narrow definitions, but the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth illustrated some of the dangers of broad definitions by using phrases such as "where there is danger to the public". There is danger to the public in all these matters—there is danger to the public in most serious crime and all terrorism. However, we have to have procedures that ensure that rapid action can be taken where that is needed and that the civil liberties of the vast majority of citizens, who are not engaged in any of those activities, are also protected.

The Minister has helped to put that firmly on the record, and, on that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 104

APPEALS BY AUTHORISING OFFICERS

Amendments made: No. 12, in page 44, line 13, leave out from 'complainant' to end of line 14 and insert 'under Schedule 7'.

No. 13, in page 44, line 45, leave out 'remain' and insert 'be'.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Clause 106

APPEALS BY COMPLAINANTS

Amendments made: No. 14, in page 45, line 31, leave out 'Subject to subsection (4)'.

No. 15, in page 45, line 34, after 'Commissioner' insert 'appointed under section 91(1)(b)'.

No. 16, in page 45, line 36, after 'complainant' insert 'by virtue of paragraph (a)'—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Clause 108

INTERPRETATION OF PART III

Amendment proposed: No. 17, in page 47, line 5, leave out from 'writing,' to end of line and insert

'the notice may be transmitted by electronic means'.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Mr. Beith: I was slightly concerned when the amendment was tabled and even more concerned when I saw the Government's explanation for it. The amendment would allow documents used in the process of obtaining authorisation to be sent by e-mail. The Government's explanation is that that could be used only if the police, customs and the commissioners are satisfied that the communication will be secure. That is obviously a fundamental point: communication must be secure, because the matter is highly delicate. If information became known to those being surveilled, the operation would be defeated and, in addition, other kinds of confidential information about operations would emerge.

However, e-mail is a threat to the security, not only of the communication, but of the systems at each end. Use of electronic mail involves access to the computer system from which it goes and the computer system into which it goes, so the condition that the Government have kindly included in their notes on clauses—that e-mail will be used only if they are satisfied that the communication will be secure—will not do. E-mail is a real danger to the security of the body of material that will be stored by the secretariat of the commissioners, and to the computer system of the police force sending that information.

Mr. Maclean *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Beith: The Minister shakes his head. If he seeks to deny that, I shall draw his attention to various places in various documents to which his Department has access which make it clear. I hope that the Government will now take that into account.

Mr. Michael: The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has drawn attention to a proper concern, which the Minister sought to allay, in Committee and subsequently, by saying that he would want to be satisfied of the safety and security of communications. Under this part of the Bill, communications can be made in a variety of ways, including in writing, and writing can be extremely insecure if the wrong means are used, so I have no objection to the inclusion of electronic communications.

I should be grateful if the Minister would satisfy us that requirements will be placed on those using such systems so that there is some oversight to avoid the dangers. There are secure and insecure facsimile transmissions. Can the Minister assure us that secure fax, not insecure fax, will be used? The same thing applies to all communications where there may be risk, not only to operations, but to individuals' safety.

Mr. Maclean: I am delighted to give the House the maximum assurance that I can on that. There is e-mail and there is e-mail. This will not be a loose Internet system. The police already have a secure system for communicating throughout the country and we have a national communication strategy, which aims to connect up the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts in future, mainly to speed up the processing of criminal cases. I envisage part of that system being used and the commissioners being linked to it.

I do not understand the technicalities, but I know that, although the Home Office is connected to the Cab-E-Net system, it is impossible for a person in another Government Department—even on our network—to tap into all the files in the Home Office, or for us to tap into anyone else's files. Codes, passwords and electronic gizmos must be used and one can obtain access only to the part of the system to which one is entitled to gain access.

I do not understand the bells and whistles that make these things operate. I do not suppose that these computers have valves any more, but I am absolutely certain that, when the right valves are installed, the police will have access only to the files to which the commissioners want them to have access, and the commissioners will be able to correspond only with those parts of the police network that the police wish them to correspond with. That is achievable.

Of course there are security risks—someone may get it wrong, and there may be leakage in the system—but I know that, with the best computer brains applied to the matter, the secure systems that already exist in this country can be replicated for that system.

One of the advantages of e-mail is the speed that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed urged on us a moment ago. He does not want a slow, bureaucratic, burdensome system, which requires the commissioners to wait for a few days before taking decisions; nor do we. If we want an urgency procedure to work PDQ, the chief constable and his staff should be able to e-mail the commissioners, saying, "We have just used the urgency procedure; this is why," and the commissioners should be able to e-mail them back securely as soon as reasonably practicable, to approve or quash action.

Use of electronic mail is the best way to implement the wish of the right hon. Gentleman, the Opposition and myself that such things be dealt with speedily. The technical experts tell me, and I know from my own amateur knowledge of computers, that it is possible to have a secure network. Security is vital, and I shall endeavour to make the system as secure as is humanly possible.

Mr. Beith: The Minister has demonstrated that he knows even less about the technicalities than I do—and I make no claim to be an expert. He has also revealed, I fear, that he may not be up to speed on the dangers to systems that may be generated by the interface between them. I counsel him to read some of the documents available in the Home Office and circulated by the appropriate authorities, or at least to ensure that someone else reads them.

[Mr. Beith]

I believe that this short debate will have drawn enough people's attention to the problem to ensure that some careful consideration is applied before the procedure is used.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 18, in page 47, line 5, at end insert—

'( ) For the purposes of this Part, an authorisation (or renewal) given—

(a) by the designated deputy of an authorising officer, or

(b) by a person on whom an authorising officer's powers are conferred by section 94,

shall be treated as an authorisation (or renewal) given in the absence of the authorising officer concerned; and references to the authorising officer in whose absence an authorisation (or renewal) was given shall be construed accordingly.'—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Clause 112

CRIMINAL CONVICTION CERTIFICATES

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 48, line 33, at end insert—

'(5) Any day appointed by an order made under section 135 below for the coming into force of this section shall not be earlier than two years after the coming into force of sections 113 to 127 below.

(6) This section shall not come into force until the Secretary of State has laid before Parliament a report containing an evaluation of the effect of sections 113 to 127 below and his assessment of that evaluation.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 5, in clause 135, page 59, line 11, after '(1)', insert

'subject to section 112 above,'.

Mr. Beith: We now come to a completely different part of the Bill, but one of fundamental importance, which has not been widely enough discussed. It concerns the power under which every employer in the land, for any job of any kind, can require an applicant to produce a criminal conviction certificate. That certificate will be the means of showing whether the person concerned has any unspent convictions.

There are clearly some sorts of work for which it is vital to obtain this sort of information; indeed, it can be vital to obtain even more information, and other provisions in the Bill allow for enhanced certificates to provide information that may be relevant to considering whether a person can be trusted to work with children or the elderly. But that is not what we are talking about here; we are discussing the general provision for criminal conviction certificates.

The amendment would delay the introduction of such general certificates until we had some experience of the working of the enhanced and other higher level certificates.

Outside this House and the Committee that considered the Bill, it has not perhaps been sufficiently appreciated how fundamental a change in our society will be brought about by this measure. Employers, because they have a duty to shareholders or to the organisations that appoint them, may increasingly feel a responsibility to see that no one is admitted to their firms if something on their record might have offered a clue to any subsequent misbehaviour.

Hitherto it has not been the practice in this country to make this requirement. Certainly, some employers have used the existing data protection legislation to get people to bring along the information. That has been one of the reasons for introducing the new provisions, but it could be dealt with in other ways—the Government are still considering the problem of enforced subject access. But the rehabilitation of offenders will be made extremely difficult if everyone with an unspent criminal offence on his record has to produce this certificate.

Many people will give up applying for jobs because they cannot produce a clean certificate. Some will give up because their certificate includes an offence that is irrelevant to their job application. It may be something as minor as a driving offence conviction, even though the job for which they are applying carries with it no responsibility for a motor car.

Another example might be someone who had committed a sexual offence involving consenting males which is no longer a criminal offence but was when it was committed, because it involved someone between the ages of 18 and 21. The Minister has already confirmed that possibility. I drew his attention to the example of someone with such an offence on his record who has completely changed his life style. He might go for a job only to be told that he has to get a certificate. He would then tell his wife and family that he could not get the job because he needed to produce a certificate. "Well, you have never done anything wrong, have you?" say his family. He then has to disclose to them that there is something in his past, not part of his current life at all, which he has put behind him. It may be a matter of quite legitimate privacy, no longer constituting a criminal offence.

Those examples may relate to only a small number of people, but a far larger number will be affected by past mistakes of other kinds. One third of all males under the age of 40, I think, have a criminal offence on their record—a terrifying number—but most of them go straight thereafter and have nothing more to do with crime. We do not want them to apply for jobs with labels around their necks.

The amendment would delay the widespread use of general criminal conviction certificates until we have some experience of using enhanced certificates in posts for which it is clearly necessary to have such information. If we do not do that, we may have a Child Support Agency situation on our hands, with a huge body charged with an enormous task—there may be a huge take-up of those certificates because employers insist on them—with which it cannot cope. It may then start to make mistakes. We all know that the Child Support Agency has mistaken the identity of parents and caused terrible family distress. We do not want that to happen in this case, so let us deal with the urgent problem and see how we get on.

5 pm

General conviction certificates will be a problem in another kind of case, which the Minister has not explained properly. It is the case of an informer who has committed criminal offences but who assists in the prosecution and conviction of people guilty of serious offences and is then

given a new identity, and encouraged and enabled to settle in some other part of the country. The practice occurs mostly in Northern Ireland, but it also occurs in Great Britain, and resettlement from Northern Ireland to Great Britain is common.

When that person goes even for his first job, let alone his second, in the new life that the state has determined it is in the public interest to allow him to undertake, he will have to produce a criminal conviction certificate. He has a string of convictions, which, it has been decided, can now be overlooked because of the amount of assistance he has given in putting behind bars people who would pose a real threat to public security in the future. How will that be dealt with, given that there is no provision in the Act?

The obvious and sensible way to sort out those problems is at least to take some time over doing so. Many people who deal with the rehabilitation of offenders are extremely concerned about the provision's total effect. John Monks of the Trades Union Congress wrote to Committee members pointing out that the provision could

"create a class of permanently unemployable people, many of whom have only offended once, and would be highly unlikely to do so again, particularly if they have steady employment."

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): When I worked in the criminal justice division of the Scottish Office, some 67 per cent. of all first offenders never offended again. I do not know whether the figure has changed, but it is something of that order.

Mr. Beith: I, too, recall that figure. I have no other figure to hand. Everybody agrees that getting employment may be the biggest single factor in somebody subsequently going straight, so we must make it easier for people to get employment, not put a barrier in the way. We should confine the barrier to cases where there is a proven need. The Bill contains clauses that do that, particularly in relation to the worrying area of people with paedophile offences working in children's homes. We all realise how urgent it is to take action to resolve a problem that should not have been allowed to build up as it did.

Let us get that system under way before looking at general criminal conviction certificates, and give the body that will introduce those certificates time to prove its effectiveness and competence in the area where urgent need exists. Following the Government's unwillingness to accept my view about criminal conviction certificates generally, the amendment is a constructive suggestion about how we could proceed. We could then make progress in the most urgent area and see how that works before introducing into our society something that will worsen our crime problems, cause great personal hardship and distress, and achieve little value in the process. We may be able to judge the matter more effectively once we have seen how the enhanced certificates work.

Mr. Michael: I have some concerns about the amendment and shall listen carefully to the Minister's reply. Some of the concerns expressed by the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith) are sensible in terms both of rehabilitation of offenders and of what should be the priorities, but I am not sure that they lead to the delay suggested in the amendment.

The priorities should be clear. The top priority must be the protection of children and vulnerable adults. I hope that the Minister would agree. The provisions of the Bill must be co-ordinated with the requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 and the work of child protection at local level. Careful thought must be given to the way in which we should use the various pieces of legislation, each of which takes us a step further forward.

That is not the only issue that would be addressed by the checks for which the measure provides. A further element is honesty and integrity, which may be important not just to the employer, but to the public. The third element is the situation in the private security industry, which has been a matter of great concern over a considerable period.

We must ensure that employees in the private security industry do not have long criminal records. In Committee I gave an example of employers with a criminal record. A police superintendent told me about a partnership between someone with a record for grievous bodily harm and someone with a record for financial offences. In a business sense they may make a fine team, but in terms of the public interest, they are a dangerous team to run a private security firm. There must be protection against such employers, and in fairness, the industry wants regulation to protect the good name of firms that are doing a good job.

The private security industry is a case where information about a past record, not necessarily involving financial irregularities, is important and should be available as quickly as possible in the form of ordinary certificates, not necessarily the enhanced information that the Bill would make available.

We want the protection of children and vulnerable adults treated as the first priority. Thereafter, there may be a good deal of sense in implementing the Bill progressively, rather than adopting a big bang approach. There are examples of several Government agencies and initiatives where trying to do everything at once led to mistakes in details, which might have been discovered at an early stage but which brought down the entire system. The Minister would be wise to ponder that, and consider the timing of the introduction of the measure.

Part of the suggestion made in the amendment therefore has some attraction, but I am not happy that it specifies a period of two years after the full implementation of one part of the measure. That would narrow down and potentially delay the introduction of provisions in the Bill, with no clear justification. It might be more sensible to reconsider the time scale for implementation. We were not given much detail about that in Committee. Perhaps the matter has not been thought through to the extent that would allow a detailed time scale to be set out for the implementation of this part of the Bill.

For those reasons, I hope that the Minister will reassure us about the way in which the Bill is to be implemented and the amount of thought that has been given to that, without going so far as to accept the specific constraints for which the amendment provides.

Many people are anxious that we should achieve the right balance between the rehabilitation of offenders and ensuring that those with a criminal record who are likely to reoffend do not get into positions where they can prey on the public generally, and on children and vulnerable adults in particular. I have worked with young people who have been involved in offending, and I have had people working with me as a result of good work by the probation service on rehabilitating people after offending.

[Mr. Michael]

Individuals with that background can become valued members of society if they are given the opportunity to change their ways and to earn the respect and rehabilitation that should be open to anyone. The task is to get the balance right.

The Bill's implementation could achieve the right balance or it could introduce dangers. I hope that the Minister will say that, like me, he wants to ensure that in building in protections rehabilitation will be achieved, and that the proper balance lies within the thinking through of how we implement the Bill, which is intended to protect and assist the public.

Mr. Kirkhope: I hope that I have been fair to the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith) in responding to the amendments. The amendments would delay the introduction of criminal conviction certificates and it might be suggested that they have been tabled because the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues—this is the impression that they have given—greatly distrust the certificates. The issue has been much debated during the Bill's passage through both Houses.

I wish to assure the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed again that CCCs will not be as intrusive and unwelcome as he suggests. The certificates will be issued only to the individual who makes the application. They will contain only details of unspent convictions, which is entirely consistent with our commitment to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, which has been referred to by the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). The certificates will enable employers to confirm that the information that they have been given by an applicant is full and accurate.

I would be amazed if employers taking on an employee did not want to be provided with full information about the prospective employee. The nature of the relationship between employer and employee is one of trust. Nothing could be worse than a situation in which an employer was not fully aware of the background of the person he is about to employ.

The introduction of the certificates is likely to be phased in after the introduction of the other two types of certificate. The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth asked me to ponder about the timing of the introduction, and I have been pondering for some time. It is clear that the fledgling agency should not be flooded with applicants from the outset. I agree that it must be able initially to concentrate on issuing the more important and probably less numerous criminal record and enhanced criminal record certificates.

However, the eventual introduction of CCCs is an administrative matter concerned with workload and timing, and not as the right hon. Gentleman suggested. It will be done when it is considered that the agency will be able to manage the extra work. In all likelihood, it will be phased in at a slightly later time than the other certificates.

Mr. Rowe: I hope that my hon. Friend will take into account the real need for educating employers about the value of the information in the certificates. As the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith) has said, the rehabilitation of young men, particularly, often takes place as a consequence of obtaining employment. Many employers have experience of taking on people with one conviction and finding that there is nothing wrong with them. I hope that we shall consider carefully preparing employers for the information that they will be seeking.

Mr. Kirkhope: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. It is necessary for employers to take an intelligent approach towards these matters. They do so in the vast majority of cases now with information that they have requested and received. I hope that that attitude will continue when the certificates are available.

I have listened carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman has said but I do not accept that it is necessary for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament an evaluation of the initial success of criminal record and enhanced record certificates before any CCCs can be issued. The introduction of CCCs is not dependent upon the perceived success of the other certificates. These will be different types of checks that will be carried out for very different purposes, and it is unlikely that the effects of criminal record and enhanced criminal record certificates will tell us much about how CCCs will be used.

During the Bill's passage the purpose and nature of all three types of certificate have received full parliamentary scrutiny. We shall, of course, keep the operations of the agency and the extent to which criminal record certificates meet the purposes for which they have been created under review. But by delaying the introduction of CCCs by at least two years, which is the right hon. Gentleman's intent by means of the amendments, we may be delaying the implementation of a new criminal record system that, we believe, will be coherent, cost-effective, transparent and, above all, fair. For these reasons, I ask the right hon. Gentleman not to press the amendments.

5.15 pm

Mr. Beith: The Minister might have come close to persuading me to withdraw the amendment. He revealed that one of its effects would not be very far from what will in fact happen. He revealed that it is the Government's intention that the enhanced certificates—those dealing with the urgent cases in respect of paedophiles and those who will be employed in residential homes and have access to the vulnerable—must be given priority and that the agency must get on in dealing with them. The introduction of the general conviction certificate is likely to be some time after the enhanced certificates have been dealt with. The two years that is stated in the amendment, which the Minister considers to be a long delay, might well turn out to be reality.

It became clear that I had to press the amendment when the Minister said that there will be an administrative decision. It is not an administrative matter. We are talking of a fundamental change in our society. That will be the position when a prospective employee cannot get a job anywhere without producing a piece of paper showing whether or not he has a criminal conviction. In that way, we have changed our society beyond recognition, and in the process, I believe, we shall greatly impair the rehabilitation of offenders, and especially of young people whose only offence may have been to get into a fight

outside a pub at a time when they were less responsible than they have since become. However, they will still have to produce a piece of paper.

We are talking about a profound change and one on which Parliament should decide. We should reflect on the experience of using new and better certificates to deal with the special cases of people whose work is with the vulnerable or who work in the security industry. Let us then decide whether the proposals before us remain particular to certain types of employment or to every person applying for whatever job throughout the country. There is nothing in the Bill that will affect so many people as the provisions that we are now considering. Parliament should return to the issue. I shall therefore press the amendment.

The House divided: Ayes 26, Noes 271.

Division No. 97] **[5.17 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McGrady, Eddie
Maclennan, Robert
Mallon, Seamus
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mrs. Diana Maddock.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael (Rochf'd)
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John (Ravensb'ne)
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hersf'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor

Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strang'd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Matthew Carrington
and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 125

REGULATIONS

5.30 pm

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 55, line 2, leave out 'section 115 (4) and insert

'section 112 (1), 113 (1) or 115 (1) or (4)'.

The amendment will be of interest to hon. Members who care about charities, scout organisations, the Boys Brigade and the variety of organisations that will be affected by the cost of the charges for conviction certificates, especially for enhanced criminal conviction certificates.

A clear benefit of the arrangements proposed in the Bill, and one that we support, is that organisations dealing with young people and the elderly will be encouraged and enabled to obtain information about those who want to work with such groups, about criminal convictions and cautions and other relevant information. The need for such information to be available is vividly shown by the Dunblane experience and the case of Thomas Hamilton. The information known about Thomas Hamilton would have appeared on the enhanced criminal conviction certificate.

All the organisations in the charity sector are extremely concerned about the cost of these certificates. The purpose of the amendment is to ensure—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are having conversations in the doorway please converse outside.

Mr. Beith: I am most grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This issue is important for many charity organisations, a number of which have made representations to us about the level of cost. The Scout Association estimates that the cost of checks on their volunteers will be about £500,000 a year. Think of the number of scout money-raising events that will be required to raise that amount. The Guide Association estimates costs of £450,000. We should bear it in mind that those organisations demand much of their volunteers, and to expect them to pay this cost on top of everything else is too much. The Scripture Union, which runs summer camps for young people, estimates that the costs of checking would add an extra £30,000 merely to the costs of summer camps. The Boys Brigade has produced its cost figures, and other organisations, such as the Wing Fellowship and the Abbeyfield Society, which is involved in residential care for the elderly and has volunteers who back up the work of professional staff, are deeply concerned.

In the report of his inquiry, Lord Cullen noted that doing what he proposed involved costs. He wanted to ensure that checks are made on people working as volunteers with young people. Those costs should be kept within the limits of what organisations can afford. It is the view of almost every organisation that the likely costs are beyond the limits of what they can afford.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Lord Cullen went further and said that, if necessary, the fees should be subsidised. Is that not correct?

Mr. Beith: Yes, that is precisely what Lord Cullen said, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for pointing that out. In my youth, I was a scout in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I do not like to think of the amount of money that would have to be raised by local organisations to meet those costs. Lord Cullen said that, if necessary, they should be subsidised.

Throughout the proceedings on the Bill, the Government have said that, despite the efforts of our former Speaker, Lord Weatherill, in the other place, they are not prepared to commit Government expenditure, and that they want the scheme to be self-financing. If help is given to charities, it will have to be at the expense of private individuals who apply for general certificates. That cannot be right, and it is not in the spirit of the Government's acceptance of most of the recommendations in Lord Cullen's report.

Now that the Government have rejected the view of the vast majority of their Lordships under the leadership of our former Speaker, and have overturned that good amendment to the Bill, we must ensure that the cost issue comes back to this House. The effect of the amendment would be that the House would have to approve, by affirmative order, the scale of charges to be imposed. We would then know precisely how much was involved, and the charities would know how much it would cost them.

We could put those figures in front of the Government, and if we were not satisfied with the scale of charges, we could defeat the proposals and force the Government, whoever was in power, to make proper and satisfactory provision for charities. I invite hon. Members to ensure that this matter comes before Parliament—it will be the next Parliament, after the general election—and that the real concerns of charities about the costs involved will be brought to bear.

If organisations were not doing the jobs they do, the Government would have to find other ways in which to do them. Those organisations keep youngsters out of

trouble, and care for the elderly. The cost savings to public funds that they create are enormous. We owe it to them to ensure that they do not have to foot an unreasonable and unaffordable bill, so that the people in their care are looked after by people who are fit to do so. It is important that they should make those checks, but they need help to do so.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I support the amendment. The Government recently refused to accept a report that recommended a self-funded social services council, whereas they propose to impose further charges on a limited number of people who voluntarily give of their services, and on charities which, in many other ways, have subsidised public expenditure. When the number of volunteers has fallen, it is wrong to impose further charges on organisations.

I speak from years of experience in the Boys Brigade movement and the Scripture Union. I recognise that, in our churches, where a fair bit of the charity support comes from, fewer people are doing voluntary work. If we think that their work benefits all the nation, then all the nation should support it. We should not leave it to a coterie of volunteers. I support the amendment, which would allow the matter to come back to the House for further consideration.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I share much of the concern expressed by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who told the House that he was a scout in Macclesfield. I commend him on that, because I am involved in the scout movement. I am a member of the Macclesfield and Congleton district scout council, and I am a vice-president of the Cheshire county scout association, but I am not speaking only on their behalf.

There are 150,000 non-profit-making sports clubs in this country, with a total membership of 6.5 million people. Each of those clubs is run predominantly by coaches and staff, all of whom freely put time and effort into promoting sport in their locality for the benefit of all. Many, if not all, of those clubs rely on the hard work and commitment of their volunteers to stay afloat. I know that for a fact through my involvement with clubs in Macclesfield. They have not the additional money with which to pay even a £10 fee for each volunteer.

The charging of volunteers for criminal checks sits uneasily with the determination of the Government, and our Prime Minister, to promote volunteering and grass-roots support throughout the country. At the beginning of this year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage delivered the Government's youth pledge—that all young people who wanted to volunteer would have an opportunity to do so by the end of 1997. I understand that £3 million was allotted for the purpose.

This Conservative Government also recently launched a new policy document entitled "Young People Make a Difference", the aim of which was further to encourage youth volunteering. The document outlines an ambitious programme to increase young people's opportunities to volunteer, and reflects part of a much wider agenda throughout government to support volunteering and youth development.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Does the hon. Gentleman think that the subsidy should come from central Government?

Mr. Winterton: I shall answer that question directly in a moment.

I put it to the House that charging volunteers—many of whom have no income, and many of whom may be on income support and other benefits—is hardly likely to encourage more people to volunteer.

Given my earlier intervention on the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, I must say that, if there are to be charges—for good reasons, which I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister will explain when he winds up the debate—I think that they should be subsidised from the centre. I know that that would inevitably involve additional Government expenditure, but I believe that it would benefit the country financially. I think that it would be wrong for us to provide any sort of disincentive to young volunteers, especially when both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for National Heritage have said that the Government want to see much more volunteering, and are giving it considerable support.

I rest my case. I am worried—as, I am sure, are other Conservative Members—about the impact that charges will have on many charitable organisations, such as youth groups and non-profit-making sports clubs. I think that we have given too little support, and that our former Speaker, Lord Weatherill, reflected widespread public concern when he successfully moved amendments in another place.

Mr. Rowe: I declare an interest. Among other things, I am a trustee of Community Service Volunteers, the organisation that places the largest number of long-term young volunteers in the country. Our organisation clearly has a vested interest in the debate, but there is more to it than that: as many hon. Members will know by now, I believe passionately in volunteering.

I enthusiastically support the "Young People Make a Difference" initiative, and wish that it had gone further. I believe that there is a huge untapped pool of volunteers out there, in a society in which increasing numbers may retire in their fifties with a life expectancy of 86 years or more. Many of those people will have retired on exiguous pensions; many will have very little income from any source other than benefit. Those are the people who volunteer least, but they are the very people we wish to encourage.

Someone aged 54, who has retired prematurely, may be anxious to contribute. That person may come along and say, "I have a skill. I would quite like to coach the under-11s"—or whatever it may be. What do we find? The first thing that that person is told is, "We are so pleased that you have volunteered. Of course, you will have to pay £10 or more as your first contribution." No voluntary organisation can expect that, and the organisation will therefore pay the money itself. As several hon. Members have pointed out, that means a massive contribution, which voluntary organisations can ill afford.

5.45 pm

I understand the Government's point that the certificates are intended to be personal certificates for personal use, and that there is therefore a risk that a number of people who received their certificates free, as volunteers, would use them for other purposes. There must clearly be a mechanism whereby organisations can

[Mr. Rowe]

be reimbursed for the cost of volunteers who can be shown to have made a contribution, and are not simply cheating in order to obtain free certificates. In principle, however, we cannot expect volunteers to multiply—especially among the lower paid and those with no income—if we are going to strap them for cash by imposing this financial disadvantage.

I do not very much care whether we have an affirmative resolution, or a negative resolution against which we can pray, I am certain that we should debate the matter in the new Parliament. I believe that the Secretary of State, whoever that may be—I am sure that it will be one of us—will be expected to find money to make reimbursement possible, and I firmly believe that the Government must take into account the real apprehension among a large number of organisations that their bills will be forced up for no other reason than their enthusiastic embracing of the Government's own policy of increasing the number of voluntary helpers.

Sir Michael Grylls (North–West Surrey): Important points have been raised. As others have said, the voluntary movement is a hugely important part of our national life.

I should like to say a little about the Prince's Trust, which has done much to help people start their own businesses—especially disadvantaged people who do not receive much help from other sources, and do not have much capital. The trust does a wonderful job encouraging people from disadvantaged homes to set up businesses: I believe that it helps tens of thousands every year. It would be sad if there were any deterrent to that wonderful, constructive work.

Interestingly, this has become—in a sense—an all-party debate. We have heard important contributions from hon. Members representing Northumberland, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northern Ireland and other, obviously English, constituencies. The House seems to be saying that we should consider the charges carefully, and do our best to ensure that they do not deter volunteers. Organisations such as the Prince's Trust are providing the future lifeblood of our country by encouraging people—who may not have a family history of entrepreneurism—to become entrepreneurs. I hope that that will indeed be looked at carefully, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister will take account of what is being said.

I think that the idea of the Bill is very good, but I hope that we will examine this part of it.

Mr. Michael: I welcome the debate, and the concern for the voluntary sector that has been expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I, too, was involved with the Prince's Trust in its early days, and chaired its Wales committee: I know something about the work involved in getting money to, in particular, the youngsters on street corners whom other trusts—and, indeed, the public sector—have sometimes found it difficult to help. Such work is extremely important.

Opposition Members will also know of my personal interest in the voluntary sector and of the Labour party's commitment to volunteering in particular and to the voluntary sector generally. This week, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition launched a policy document that offers new encouragement and a new relationship of partnership between government and the voluntary sector. We will be determined to implement that document in government.

The policy document makes clear our commitment to nurturing the voluntary sector and to encouraging volunteering as an essential act of citizenship for people of all ages and from all sections of society, and it follows from a concern that the relationship between government and the voluntary sector had increasingly been one of government taking for granted the work of volunteers, charities and voluntary organisations. We have sought to put that right through a period of consultation and discussion in every part of England, in Wales, in Scotland and in Northern Ireland, and we will seek to address the matter in government.

I share the concern of hon. Members that there are dangers of a disincentive to volunteering if the Bill were introduced without sensitivity and without the greatest care. As was said in the discussion on an earlier amendment, the priority must be the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults. That must be addressed in the way in which the Bill is implemented. The amendment has stimulated a useful debate, but it would be cynical of the Liberal Democrats to push it to a Division, because it appears to support voluntary organisations without actually delivering anything.

I have spent my life involved with volunteers. As a Queen's scout and a former scouter, I referred in Committee to the concerns of the scout movement. I understand it because I have been involved and have seen it at first hand. I was subsequently involved in other forms of voluntary youth work. For some 16 years, I worked as a youth and community worker involved in the recruitment, training and support of volunteers in all aspects of voluntary work. For that reason, I understand the importance of providing support to those organisations.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I am listening with bated breath to understand how this Parliament can justify the Scout Association, Barnardo's and other organisations, or their volunteers, being charged. I am still waiting to hear the justification for that. It is indefensible. As for making declarations, I was leader of the Rams patrol and, in this place, I am vice-chairman the all-party Scout Association group, for which I am proud to speak on this occasion.

Mr. Michael: I make no comment on the name of the patrol that any particular hon. Member might have represented. My hon. Friend has misunderstood the nature of the amendment and of the debate. The debate is important, but I was coming precisely to the point about how the issue has been addressed during our debates. In bringing forward their plans and in planning the establishment of the agency, the Government failed to think through the impact that the Bill might have on volunteering and voluntary organisations, but they have gone some way to meet our concerns, and amendments were agreed in Committee that addressed that precisely.

The Government originally intended to delete the amendment proposed by Lord Weatherill and agreed in another place, but, instead of simply deleting it and returning the Bill to its original form, the Minister agreed in Committee to introduce an element of flexibility, which

allows discussion with the voluntary sector, proper consideration of the issues that have been raised by hon. Members during the debate and, therefore, arrangements to be made that take those points into account. That is precisely the point.

That was a victory for common sense, and the change in the Bill is extremely important. Certainly we would be committed to meeting voluntary organisations and, in particular, volunteering organisations to discuss their concerns and to ensure that things are thought through before the flexibility that has been achieved by the amendments that were agreed in Committee lead to the Bill's implementation. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will support that approach. It came as a result of amendments in another place, followed by discussion in Committee.

As I said to the Minister in Committee, I welcome the greater flexibility that results from the amendments that were agreed in Committee, and I hope that he agrees that we need to be very careful about how the charging system is developed and implemented to protect, wherever possible, the interests of volunteers and volunteering organisations.

Mr. Kirkhope: I am well aware of the fact that hon. Members do not like the idea of fees for groups such as volunteers. I suppose that none of us does ideally, but we have already agreed, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) said, to provide for the possibility of introducing free checks for certain groups if it is considered appropriate in future. As he said, that was accepted in Committee when the amendments inserted in another place to provide free checks for volunteers were overturned.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kirkhope: I have only just started.

Mr. Mackinlay: It is very important and it is on that point.

Mr. Kirkhope: I must give way to a leader of scouts.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Minister said that free checks might be introduced if they were deemed appropriate. His colleague said in parliamentary replies that that would happen as and when resources permit. Frankly, hell will freeze over before that happens. If this goes on the statute book, this Government, if they are returned to office, or another Government, will find it difficult to find the money. We have to establish the point now that there should be free checks for these very important voluntary organisations.

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Gentleman is being pretty fierce for a patrol leader, but I am coming to the points that he has raised.

Let me stress that we recognise the enormous amount of good work done by volunteers. Over the years, I have been involved in quite a number of voluntary organisations. My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Surrey (Sir M. Grylls) referred to the Prince's Trust, as did the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth. I am very keen on it as well. It is an excellent organisation.

Our opposition to Lord Weatherill's amendments does not undermine the Government's long-standing commitment to volunteering, which was encapsulated in 1995 in the "Young People Make a Difference" initiative. As I am sure hon. Members are aware, that document made it clear that the Government encourage preferential treatment for volunteers in relation to, for instance, youth work development grants, the Millennium Commission giving priority to programmes for bursaries and grants to help young people to volunteer, and employers allowing employees to be involved in volunteering without cost or expense.

The Government have done many things to encourage volunteering. I assure the House that, before introducing the Bill, we carefully considered whether voluntary organisations should be afforded free checks but, as I explained to the Committee yesterday, responsible Governments have to make tough choices. We rejected the idea on the grounds of equity, practicality and—for the benefit of Opposition Members—cost.

The Criminal Record Agency, which will issue the certificates, has been planned on the basis that it will be self-financing. At the moment, therefore, there are simply no funds available to pay for free checks for volunteers. I do not want to become embroiled in an argument about numbers, but it is necessary to do so to give an idea of the financial effects of Lord Weatherill's amendments.

Between 8 million and 20 million people act as volunteers—I cannot give a more accurate assessment, and I do not believe any other hon. Member can—so it is difficult to estimate precisely what the cost of free checks would be.

Assuming that checks were restricted to new volunteers, and that only those eligible for the higher level of checks—enhanced criminal record certificates—were included, the minimum sum likely to be needed would be about £10 million a year. However, that could increase considerably if demand for checks was stimulated, as it could be, if they were free and were sought in a blanket way, rather than after careful consideration of whether they were really necessary for each organisation.

If there were a requirement that existing volunteers be checked, as was suggested in another place, the sums involved would be between £40 million and £200 million in the first year. We do not believe that it would be right to commit ourselves to providing a blank cheque when we are trying to hold down public expenditure.

6 pm

Mr. Rowe: Those figures are notional indeed. Surely it would not be beyond the wit of man to devise a system whereby voluntary organisations would be able to claim money back only if a volunteer were shown to be in the category for which checks were required.

Mr. Kirkhope: Yes, but I was about to say that there is also the question of practicality—the very point that has just been raised. If we had accepted the amendments passed in another place, not only would provision have had to be made for the costs of the checks themselves, it would also have been necessary to put in place complex administrative arrangements to filter out particular types of check.

There would have to be a list of all organisations that might be likely to appoint volunteers, and each application would need to be screened to ensure that

[Mr. Kirkhope]

the statement waiving the fee was from a bona fide voluntary organisation. The type of post being applied for would also require close scrutiny—my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe) has already suggested that we might differentiate between various posts—so that the agency could satisfy itself that the applicant would not be receiving any remuneration other than expenses.

Those procedures would be time consuming and require the agency to take on additional staff. That would all add to the costs to be met either from the public purse or by increasing considerably the charges levied on other users of the Criminal Records Agency.

That brings me to equity. As the agency was envisaged as being self-financing, and as there are no funds in existing budgets for free checks, the money to pay for them could be found only by diverting funds from elsewhere or by charging non-volunteer applicants more for their checks. We do not think that that would be fair, especially as if we redistributed the costs in that way it is likely that the charges incurred by other users could double.

Many of those eligible for the more detailed and costly checks are in relatively low-paid jobs associated with the caring professions, while many of those who would require criminal conviction certificates could be the unemployed who were seeking work. Hon. Members have already said that such categories of people may be deterred from volunteering, but what about those seeking certificates for the purposes of finding work?

It cannot be right to expect people on low incomes to subsidise all volunteers, as many of the volunteers may be much better off than they are. If fees were waived for volunteers, the Government would come under considerable pressure to waive the fees for low-income groups and the unemployed, increasing further the amount that would have to be taken from public funds.

The fairest way of meeting the costs therefore continues to be to spread them across all those using the agency. Such an approach means that the fees charged can be kept as low as possible. As I am sure the House is aware, the cost envisaged for a criminal conviction certificate or criminal record certificate is about £5 or £6.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): When all that is finished, who will own the licence, the agency or the individual?

Mr. Kirkhope: The certificate to be applied for, certainly at the basic level—the CCC—will belong to the individual, who can therefore prove his status to those who might need to know it.

As I have said, the costs are low—£5 or £6 for a basic certificate, and for an enhanced certificate between £8 and £10. In our view, that should not prove burdensome for most volunteers, and it should not discourage them from continuing to make their valuable contribution to the community through their voluntary work.

We recognise, however, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth has been fair enough to say, that there is a need for flexibility. We do not want to rule out the possibility of providing free checks for deserving groups at some point in the future. That is why we tabled an amendment in Committee to provide a power to allow certain groups, such as volunteers, to be exempted from paying fees for criminal record checks.

The measures in part V put in place a long-awaited improved system of access to criminal record checks that will undoubtedly offer better protection to vulnerable groups such as children, and will provide reassurance to those who appoint people to positions of trust. Voluntary organisations working with children and other vulnerable people have been among those who have most particularly sought access to checks. It was in direct response to them that we included the provisions in the Bill, and it would be a great pity if speedy implementation of the necessary measures were delayed because money is not available to cover the costs of free checks for volunteers.

The amendment would require the regulations in which the fees and forms for criminal record certificates are prescribed to be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure rather than the negative procedure, as is provided in the Bill.

As with all regulations that deal with fees or the form of applications, it is necessary to provide for routine changes that are always necessary—to take account of inflation, for example. It is not possible to justify the use of the affirmative procedure for that purpose. We would be setting an undesirable precedent if regulations specifying the modest sums of money involved in the fees, or the form applications must take, had to occupy the time of both Houses every time a small adjustment was needed. That process is not necessary, because we are already making the regulations subject to the negative resolution procedure, thus providing the opportunity for scrutiny by Parliament.

I believe that the present provisions are sufficient to meet the concerns of right hon. and hon. Members, and I urge that the amendment be withdrawn.

Mr. Beith: The Minister has enumerated many reasons why he believes the Government will not assist charities with the costs of the checks that they will have to carry out. The existence of a power in the Bill to do so appears to be no more than a nominal concession. Because of the concern among charities and the sums of money involved, I ask hon. Members to ensure that the House must debate the scale of charges when it is introduced. At that point we shall be able to bring to bear again the concerns of the charities. We should give the next Parliament the opportunity to ensure that charities are not faced with a cost that they cannot bear, and which could destroy the enormously valuable work that they do. I shall therefore press the amendment to a Division.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 38, Noes 267.

Division No. 98] **[6.6 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Beggs, Roy	Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J	Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Godman, Dr Norman A
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon (Southwark)
Kirkwood, Archy
Llwyd, Elfyn
McCrea, Rev William
McGrady, Eddie
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Mallon, Seamus
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tyler, Paul
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Diana Maddock and Ms Liz Lynne.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael (Rochf'd)
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael (Stirling)
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John

Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Roger Knapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 129

CHANGE OF NAME OR DESCRIPTION OF CERTAIN POLICE AREAS

6.18 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I beg to move, a manuscript amendment: in page 56, leave out lines 27 and 28.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Speaker for selecting the amendment which—as a manuscript amendment—is unusual at this stage. But when I explain the circumstances in which I asked the Speaker to accept the amendment, hon. Members will understand why I thought it important to give the House an opportunity to debate an issue that will affect the people in my constituency—and every constituency covered by Humberside police—because of the impact of a change that took place yesterday in Committee.

In some ways, I am sorry to speak against the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), who moved that amendment in Committee. On many occasions, he, my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and I have worked together to represent the interests of north and north-east Lincolnshire, but on this occasion I cannot support him, and I shall explain why.

Hon. Members from all parties should support my amendment, which would delete the amendment agreed to in Committee yesterday to change the name of Humberside police to Humber police. Hon. Members might ask themselves what is so important about changing the name and that is a good question. Humber police is not a great name, is it? We do not call the Metropolitan police the Thames police, or the Merseyside police, the Mersey police. The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes sounds as if he wants the police to concentrate on police boats going up and down the river Humber checking shipping. The name is not sensible.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): It is a rare occasion when the hon. Gentleman and I are on opposite sides on behalf of local interests. In our 10 years as next-door neighbours, we have usually worked together on local issues, and I will not fall out with him because of today's debate. I remind him that when the county of Humberside was abolished, the Government's regional office in Leeds changed the name of Yorkshire and Humberside to Yorkshire and the Humber—the Humber has become an accepted term for the region.

Mr. Morley: That is true, but in that case the name had to be changed because it referred to the county of Humberside, which no longer exists, so there was no choice. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we still have the Humberside fire brigade and that that name will not be changed by his amendment. We also still have the Humberside ambulance service, but for some reason we are to have the Humber police. It does not make sense.

Dr. Godman: In response to the intervention by the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), when the Government got rid of Strathclyde regional council even they retained the Strathclyde police force.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

During the consultation period on local government reorganisation, the police authority and all the local authorities were consulted about the name, and wanted unanimously to keep the name Humberside police. The force's operational area is still within the county boundary of the old county of Humberside.

Hon. Members should oppose the amendment agreed in Committee for three reasons. First, on consultation, the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes has his own view of the name Humberside. It is an anathema to him. He has criticised Radio Humberside, saying he did not like it because of its name. Disliking a name is not sufficient reason to change it. The change could cost up to £1 million. It is outrageous that a decision was taken in Committee that will have far-reaching implications in terms of cost to Humberside police, when there was no consultation with local people, the police authority, the chief constable and Members of Parliament representing the Humberside police area, nor any consultation with local parish and town councils. No one had any say in the change. It has been sprung on us with no consultation.

If there were a groundswell for change, we would listen. I did not object to the name of North Lincolnshire for my new unitary authority because I knew that there was a groundswell of opinion for it. There is no groundswell in the former Humberside area for a name change of this kind.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): The hon. Gentleman says that he did not object to the fact that the local authority changed its name to North Lincolnshire. Would he accept changing the name of the police authority to the North Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire police authority, which is precisely what it is?

Mr. Morley: The same points apply. People should be asked for their view of the change. If there is to be any change, local opinions and views should be sought. There was no attempt to do so before the amendment was agreed to in Committee, and that is why I object to the change. There has been no consultation. I have seen no groundswell of opinion, I have not had a single letter on the subject and not one person has mentioned to me that the name of the Humberside police force should be changed.

When people in the old Humberside area realise that the change could cost up to £1 million, which will come out of the police authority's budget, they will wonder why the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh)—a Member representing Lincolnshire—is so concerned about changing the name. The authority will not cover his area.

The cost is the third point. The Minister should think carefully. Will he consider accepting my amendment rather than making me force it to a vote? If he does not accept my amendment, he is telling the people of Humberside and the four councils in the area that they will have to find nearly £1 million—according to the chief constable with whom I have been in touch today—out of the existing police budget simply to make that change. How many police officers will be affected by that? Does not the Minister think that fighting crime, dealing with criminals and ensuring that there are police officers on the streets are far more important than changing the name on a cap badge or the side of a police car? That is what the Minister should think about, and it is what every hon. Member thinks about.

If the Minister will not accept my amendment, he and those hon. Members who go into the Lobby to support the Bill as it stands should realise that people in my area will think that they and the Conservative party care so little about fighting crime and about effective police resources that they are prepared to take £1 million from a police authority budget simply to drop the "side" out of Humberside. That is unacceptable. There has been no consultation. The views of local people have not been taken into account and a good police force might be crippled by having to find that £1 million.

I read in the *Hansard* report of proceedings in Committee that the name change could be phased in over a number of years and introduced as it can be afforded, which is a ludicrous idea. One cannot have one police car going out with Humberside police on it and another with Humber police, or half the police force with one cap badge and half with another. It does not make sense and would be a bureaucratic nightmare. That is why we Labour Members are saying that our priority is fighting crime. Our priority is law and order and we do not want to waste money changing four letters in the name of a police force. We want to ensure that the money that the local police authority has is used to greatest effect and that means by fighting crime and not messing around with a name in this way.

Dropping the "side" in Humberside will not only let down the side referred to in the name, but will let down the side as regards representing the people of the area and ensuring that the money is used to fight crime.

Mr. Michael Brown: As I said in my intervention, it is a rare occasion when the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) and I disagree on a local issue. We have been good neighbours, and normally we are on the same side.

The hon. Gentleman speaks of lack of consultation. The position is simple: I served in Committee on the Bill, and I saw that it was within the long title to table my amendment, which has been on the amendment paper and known to the hon. Gentleman since 25 February. Any Member of Parliament who studies the Vote bundle can see any amendment that is tabled and take appropriate action.

If he had been watching the proceedings of the House, the hon. Gentleman would have known that my amendment was selected for debate by the Chairman of the Standing Committee on 11 March, so there was no attempt to slide it through; every hon. Member knew that I was on the Standing Committee and that I had tabled the amendment that first appeared on the amendment paper on 25 February.

6.30 pm

Yesterday, when my amendment was debated in Committee, it was open to any member of the Committee to vote it down. My right hon. Friend the Minister made it clear that the Government were neutral, and said that he and his Front-Bench colleagues would not participate in a Division. It was possible, therefore, for the Opposition to call a Division and defeat my amendment, but I am delighted to report that it was made without a Division, after a good debate that covered several issues.

The most important point for me to stress is that the county of Humberside no longer exists. I spent 16 years, from the day on which I first entered the House, trying

[Mr. Michael Brown]

unsuccessfully to persuade successive Ministers in the Department of the Environment that the hated county of Humberside should be abolished. Eventually, in February 1995, the House passed a statutory instrument enabling the county to be abolished and the new unitary authorities to be set up.

The Government recognised that, with the abolition of Humberside, some names would need to be changed. The Government regional office of Yorkshire and Humberside was renamed Yorkshire and the Humber. The Post Office acknowledges that to write Lincolnshire on a letter is an accepted form of address.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe says that he has had no complaints about the name of Humberside constabulary, but that is not my experience. Whenever the name Humberside arises in a water, electricity or gas bill or in reference to the fire service I get a large number of letters from constituents who say, "You have abolished the county of Humberside, Mr. Brown, so why do we still have Humberside police and Humberside ambulance service?"

From October this year, the hon. Gentleman's constituency and mine will be served not by the Humberside ambulance service but by the Lincolnshire ambulance service.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is right, but that change will be the result not of any popular movement but of the daft internal market and the tendering procedure, in which Lincolnshire ambulance trust happened to win.

Mr. Brown: I suspect that, if I pursued that avenue too far, Madam Deputy Speaker, you would rule me out of order. However, I will say that, with the Lincolnshire ambulance trust taking over the responsibility for the ambulance service in the constituencies of the hon. Gentleman, myself and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), I bet that the name Humberside ambulance service, which will cover only east Yorkshire, will not remain.

I bet that, when the name is changed, there will be no suggestion that £1 million will have to be spent on changing the names on the ambulances. In October, when the present Humberside ambulance trust becomes responsible only for Hull and East Yorkshire, it will call itself not Humberside but East Riding. It will not spend £1 million painting out names on ambulances immediately and change all its notepaper. It will have to continue on existing budgets, because that is the structure of its cost basis.

Mr. Beith: I have listened with great interest, but is it not the case that all the people who object to having Humberside on their bills and letters really want Lincolnshire on them?

Mr. Brown: That is correct. I have been waging a campaign, of which I gave notice when we passed the Order in Council giving effect to the setting up of the current structure of unitary local government—it is in my speech in *Hansard*—that I would do everything possible to expunge the word Humberside from the English language. Yesterday's opportunity that was presented to me in Committee was simply a part of that continuing campaign.

I have successfully persuaded Anglian Water, Yorkshire Electricity, British Gas and BT to recognise that the name Lincolnshire must appear on their bills. There has been a cost to those companies, but the bills have not increased.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe touched on cost, but I believe that that is a red herring. He was right to remind the House that the chief constable is concerned about the cost implications, but I dispute the chief constable's figure of £1 million. If the change were to be made overnight, I believe that the cost would be about £250,000.

I have received the same list as the hon. Gentleman from the chief constable, who says that to effect the change he will have to get new uniforms for 3,000 people, including regulars, specials and support staff; he will not have to get new uniforms unless he is terribly profligate. All that has to be done, eventually, over some time, is to change the name tag on the shoulder pads. He does not have to get new headgear, as all he has to do is change the badge.

The chief constable says that he will require funds for marketing the new name; he does not need to spend a halfpenny doing that. He says that he has to write off existing stock of all headed notepaper and official literature, including legal documents, summonses and warrants; that is not so: my constituency association is changing its name from Brigg and Cleethorpes to Cleethorpes, and we do not have the money to go to the printing presses tomorrow to change everything, so we shall continue to use the old notepaper until the last sheet has gone. That is therefore a red herring.

The chief constable speaks of vehicle livery for the whole fleet; but, when new police vehicles are purchased, they can have Humber on the side, while existing vehicles continue to have Humberside on the side, just as, when later this year the name of the Humberside ambulance trust changes, that will have to be done by a gradual process.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is playing down some of the difficulties. Some of the uniforms have the name woven in; one cannot simply tear them off and sew on a stripe. Taking off the names on police helmets is not as simple as the hon. Gentleman would like to believe.

When my three local councils were brought together, they did not want the expense of a change, but realised that it would be too complicated if they did not act at once, so they went for a stick-over logo; even that was quite expensive. Even people who argue for local government change complain about the costs that go with it: the new signs and headings and the office administration. Should not people be given a choice as to whether they want to pay £1 million to change a name?

Mr. Brown: I do not support police uniforms being scrapped until they need replacing. In Committee yesterday, I said:

"I understand that the chief constable may be concerned about the cost implications. If the Committee approves my amendment, we should do everything possible to ensure that the name change takes place only as and when resources allow the chief constable to

replace motor vehicles and uniforms. I know that he is anxious about costs and it is essential to recognise that the last thing we expect the chief constable to do is to reorder new uniforms, police cars, equipment, and so on."

The Minister made a similar point. I intervened on him and said that I accepted his warning that he did not expect the chief constable to engage in additional expenditure to effect the change. I asked:

"If the Committee agreed to the amendment, would it be acceptable for my right hon. Friend's Department to send some sort of guideline to the chief constable acknowledging that it would not expect him to incur expenditure overnight on changing badges and logos, and that it fully understands that it could take several years for the proposal to come into effect?"

My right hon. Friend replied that he would draw our remarks to the force's attention, but:

"The Home Office has no constitutional right to send a guideline to that effect."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 18 March 1997; c. 279-282.]

He accepted that his neutrality was based on the clear understanding that there would be no immediate requirement to spend money on effecting the change.

It is important to recognise that the name Humberside is still synonymous with the hated county of Humberside. I simply took the opportunity presented by the Police Bill. I would never have dreamed of introducing such legislation on its own. It is rare that the House gets an opportunity to table amendments that affect a locality. If I had not taken advantage of this opportunity, I might have had to wait another five or 10 years. The chief constable does not want to change the name, because he is concerned about the growing demand in the old South Humberside area for our area to be policed by the Lincolnshire force.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe said that the consultation showed no demand for our constituencies to be taken over by the Lincolnshire force. Let me remind him that there is a growing demand in the old south Humberside area for the Lincolnshire police to take over policing because Humberside appears low down the crime ranking order relative to Lincolnshire. We often have undue problems with the Humber bridge, which is the single link between the two halves of the police area. If the majority of my constituents had their way, they would be policed by the Lincolnshire police. The chief constable is worried that the Home Secretary of the day may decide to ensure that the police authority and local government areas are more closely matched. That is why he overstates the case on cost grounds.

There is a case to be made, and it is the responsibility of Parliament—not the chief constable, the local authorities or the parish councils—to take legislative decisions about such matters and to test them in the Lobbies, if the hon. Gentleman chooses to press his amendment. It is rare for us to disagree on local issues. We have had, and I am sure that we will continue to have, a very good working relationship. I am sorry that it has temporarily broken down.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I have been in the House for a long time but I have never known an occasion when, on a matter affecting the title of a county or area that he or she represented with another hon. Member, the Member who had the bright idea of changing a name did not inform colleagues directly—

Mr. Brown: It was on the Order Paper.

Mr. McNamara: Not through the Order Paper.

Secondly, I am surprised that a matter that affects the whole area was not referred to the local authorities, the parish councils or even to the police authority. The action of the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) was discourteous to his colleagues. We can live with that, because we are used to such things. More important is the cavalier way in which he has treated the people who he claims to represent in Humberside.

Fortunately, at the general election, the Labour candidate in his seat will to be able to say that the hon. Gentleman is the man who would profligately spend £1 million on changing a name—£250,000 a letter. That is the equivalent of 20 policemen. He is prepared to watch the money go, just like that. That says much for his concern for the safety and security of his constituents. Fortunately, he will not have that responsibility in future.

The hon. Gentleman is prepared to play with their physical safety and that of their homes and of the roads by being prepared to spend £1 million to satisfy a childish phobia about a name. He says, "I hate the name, I want it expunged." What sort of stupid arrogant attitude is that? What a waste of public money.

6.45 pm

The Government say that they are neutral, but they are prepared to allow £1 million to be wasted. The same Government could not give me £300,000 under the safer city initiative to protect the safety and security of people who live in high-rise flats in my constituency. They could not give me that, but they can give £1 million for the foolish idea of the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes.

Mr. Brown: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman, who is normally a mild, meek and gentlemanly character, has got so carried away. I want to give him a breather. I challenge the hon. Gentleman about the figure of £1 million. The chief constable would be profligate to spend £1 million overnight to effect the name change, but he has no need. My exchanges with the Minister showed that only out of petty mindedness could the chief constable be profligate enough to do that. I would not expect him to spend £1 million.

Mr. McNamara: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but that is not what he means. He is really saying that he is prepared to spend that money over several years. He is prepared to allow the money to be spent, whether at once or over a period, on a foolish scheme. He says that I am usually mild, courteous, gentle and kind, that I kiss my wife and do not kick the dog. That is all true, but I get angry when something concerns the physical safety of my constituents, and the security of their homes is put at risk by hare-brained schemes.

The one thing that makes me even angrier is the Government's attitude. Time and time again we have applied for schemes to protect my constituents and those of my hon. Friends in Hull and had them turned down. Then Ministers turn round and say, "Here, take £1 million—£250,000 a letter—to get rid of the 'side' out of 'Humberside'." We shall be left with the Humber police force. What a glorious idea that is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) has shown.

[Mr. McNamara]

The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes says that he wants his part of Lincolnshire to be policed by Lincolnshire police authority. I understand his wanting to go into Lincolnshire. As far as I am concerned, Lincolnshire is more than welcome to the hon. Gentleman. Yet both banks of the Humber have common interests, in terms of effective policing, as we have had on such things as drug smuggling and so many other issues. Humberside police force has expertise on such matters as drug smuggling because of the maritime nature of the area and the nature of the ports on both sides of the Humber, down the Trent and up the Ouse.

Humberside police force protects not only our citizens in Humberside but the citizens of the greater part of the country. Some of the greatest attempts to import dangerous drugs occur in Hull and other Humberside ports. The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes wants to break up and spoil that expertise when it is just beginning to get on top of drug smuggling. Why? Because he does not like the name "Humberside." He would spend £1 million on changing it. For goodness sake, Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that we are supposed to be demob happy, but this is demob lunacy.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Some people who do not represent my part of the world—you represent Plymouth, Drake with great distinction, Madam Deputy Speaker—may wonder why people are getting so worked up in this debate. The issue is of great importance locally. For those who are not familiar with it, it goes back to 1974 when the Government led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), whom I was delighted to see in the Chamber a moment ago, decided to tear away from the rest of Lincolnshire parts of north Lincolnshire, including Scunthorpe, Grimsby, Glanford and Brigg. That caused enormous ill feeling. Unofficial local referendums were conducted and massively subscribed to because the Government led by my right hon. Friend, whom I now see entering the Chamber, did not allow an official referendum on the issue. The people of Lincolnshire wanted to be one, but they were not consulted.

After almost 20 years of campaigning by people like my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), the county of Humberside has finally been abolished and people can once again say with pride, even if they live in Grimsby, Scunthorpe, Brigg, Glanford or wherever, that they live in Lincolnshire. To them it is an important issue.

This is not simply an unimportant debate about a name. People in Lincolnshire feel strongly about it. That is why, as a member of the Standing Committee which considered the Police Bill, I tabled my own variant of the amendment proposed today by my hon. Friend. I proposed that we should change the name of the Humberside police force to North Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire police force. That is what people want deep in their hearts.

People who live in Scunthorpe, Grimsby and Hull think of themselves as belonging either to Lincolnshire or to Yorkshire. That is the reality. I was told by my hon. Friends and by my right hon. Friend the Minister that it was not possible to proceed that far. It is important to local people.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman chose the names of two unitary authorities and left out the other two. He is as stupid as his hon. Friend.

Mr. Leigh: That was an unworthy intervention. The hon. Gentleman and I enjoy good relations on other matters. People who live in Hull know perfectly well that they live in east Yorkshire. People who live in Scunthorpe or Grimsby know that they live in Lincolnshire. That is the fact of the case. That was the reason for my amendment, but it was not accepted.

The campaign of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes has met with success. The county of Humberside has been abolished. He is now rightly pressing to have all other public bodies expunge the name from their titles.

Listening to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), one would think that people do not attach importance to this issue. They do. I constantly received letters from people in the north part of Lincolnshire before the Post Office changed its rules who were angry that, although they lived in Lincolnshire, they had to put "Humberside" in their address. They did not like it. A name is important. People in Lincolnshire want that fact acknowledged.

My hon. Friend's amendment is important for another reason. I have talked about the symbolic importance of a name, but as my hon. Friend says, this goes further. Last week I had a long conversation with the chief constable of Lincolnshire. I cannot repeat what he said in private, but there is mystification as to why the two police authorities in north Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire have not been amalgamated. It is a serious point.

I represent villages in the northern part of Lincolnshire just south of the old county boundary between South Humberside and Lincolnshire. I receive complaints from people in places such as Keelby about the long police response time when an incident takes place. I am sure that people on the other side of the old boundary make the same complaint. The nearest headquarters is Gainsborough or perhaps Market Rasen. How much more sensible it would be to have a unified police authority. We should have created a unified police authority from the north Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire forces.

Lincolnshire police authority has performed superbly in the past 20 years. The chief constable told me that, before reorganisation, about two thirds of the crime in the county was committed in what is now Lincolnshire and one third was committed in South Humberside. The position is now reversed. Two thirds of crime in the county is now recorded in the former South Humberside and one third is committed in south Lincolnshire. Lincolnshire constabulary has a superb record of performing a comprehensive service within its budget.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman digresses from the argument about policing, which was considered and rejected. Humberside has a major drugs problem associated with the Humber ports. It makes sense to have an estuary-wide police force. There is a logical argument for that. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that people

should be consulted about changing the name and that the cost should be considered? I have a suspicion that, if people in north Lincolnshire had realised that the local government reorganisation would mean a 28 per cent. increase in their council tax, they might have had second thoughts. People ought to be consulted on whether they want to pay £1 million to change the name of the local police authority.

Mr. Leigh: We all know that the figure of £1 million is grossly inflated. The letter from the chief constable is absurd. The change will not cost £1 million. As my right hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes have said, the change could be phased in over a considerable time.

I can now draw my remarks to a conclusion. This is not simply a little campaign by my hon. Friend in which local people take no interest. He is not simply trying to get a few headlines in the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*. It is nothing to do with any of that. It is important. If it was not important, why has my hon. Friend been able to show me a sheaf of letters from organisations such as the Great North Eastern Railway, the Benefits Agency, the Post Office and the Lincolnshire ambulance service, all saying that they are changing their name? Indeed, the Rural Development Commission is actually changing its name to the very name that I suggested in my amendment—North Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire. As far as I know the Rural Development Commission is a serious and well-respected body. It obviously considers the matter important, but it has not said that it will cost it £1 million to change its name. The chief constable is using absurd arguments.

Local people attach importance to this matter. My hon. Friend's amendment does not go far enough, but I appreciate that mine cannot get through tonight, so I am happy to support my hon. Friend.

Mr. Maclean: I am pleased to respond to this short and slightly heated debate. From the Government's point of view, there are only two principal issues here. In Committee yesterday, I said that I would not attempt to impose the Government's view of what the area should be called—I did not consider it my duty to do so, nor was it appropriate. I said that I would be happy to take the Committee's opinion on the matter and leave it to a free vote in Committee. That is what happened, and I shall return to that subject in a moment.

7 pm

The other point I wish to make relates to cost. If I thought for a single moment that the cost of a change of name from Humberside to Humber, as was decided in Committee yesterday, would cost £1 million—either next year or over ten years—I would have had to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) that I was sorry, but the Government could not remain neutral because that was an excessive cost, up with which we would not put.

Mr. McNamara: Has the right hon. Gentleman discussed this matter and the costings with the police authority or the chief constable?

Mr. Maclean: The chief constable, as I said yesterday, has said that he does not wish the name to be changed, and he has sent a letter making that view clear. Attached to the letter is a document headed, "Areas incurring implementation costs." These areas lead him to conclude that the cost could be £1 million and they include vehicle livery for the whole fleet; writing off existing stock; and marketing the new name.

I accept that, if the name was changed, whatever it was changed to, the cap badge would have to change in due course—I do not, however, accept that uniforms would have to change—and as official notepaper was replaced, it too would have to change. However, I do not accept for one moment that existing stock bearing any name needs to be written off at all—that would be an appalling waste, and I would not contemplate such action. Nor would I accept that a single penny of taxpayers' money should be spent by any police authority on marketing a new name. I know what marketing costs from when the Home Office has attempted anti-crime drives. It would be easy to spend £1 million on marketing a new name—it is possible to spend £5 million on marketing a new corporate identity without seeing any great benefit from doing so.

There is only one way in which costs could rise to £1 million and that is if a decision was taken overnight to spend an awful lot of money on a new corporate identity, marketing a new name, writing off all existing stocks and changing overnight. I have said that an authority could do that if it wished, but I would not intend any of the generous increase in funding that we have given Humberside police over the years to be spent on such action. I made that clear in Committee yesterday.

I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said. We have allocated sufficient extra funds to Humberside and we intend to continue the programme of allocating money for extra bobbies. Humberside, which has increased the number of its officers over the years to 2,042, can now recruit an extra 85 officers because of the extra funding promised by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Last year, we allowed Humberside police a budget increase of more than 5 per cent.; this year, it could increase by 3.8 per cent. We have put in that funding, and I want all of it to be spent on fighting crime. That is what it is all about.

I made it clear in Committee that, if the change went through, I would not want any money to be wasted on marketing a new name or corporate identity; and it would be scandalous if the costs of a change of name reached a fraction of £1 million, let alone £1 million.

Mr. Morley: To balance its budget this year, Humberside police took £750,000 from its reserves in order to solve its funding problems and meet its commitments. The Minister may quibble about the figures, but I have confidence in the chief constable of Humberside. Whatever the real figures are and however much is spent on changing the name, that represents money being diverted from fighting crime and protecting the interests of the people of Humberside. How can the Minister justify that?

Mr. Maclean: If that is how he feels, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) should have voted against the amendment yesterday in the free vote in Committee.

[Mr. Maclean]

Humberside has been generously funded; there can be no quibble about that. If it took money from reserves, that is because the 5 per cent. increase last year allowed it to build up generous balances.

The crucial and fundamental point is this: yesterday in Committee I made it absolutely clear that the Government were neutral on this issue. I warned my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes that I could not support his amendment and said that I would vote against him; I warned him that he would probably lose. If my hon. Friend had lost in Committee yesterday, the Government would not be coming here today with an amendment to reverse a free vote in Committee—that would be intolerable.

Similarly, I do not propose to reverse an amendment that yesterday went through on a free vote, with no one voting against it. I am content to advise my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench and in the Government that, although we had a free vote on the issue yesterday in which members of the Government abstained, the Government will not try to overturn tonight an amendment that was passed by a free vote. We will support the Bill as it stands.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) demonstrated the foolishness of trying to be too clever with his amendment yesterday, but the Minister has compounded that by making himself look ridiculous today. This is a local issue, and it should be decided by local opinion. Yesterday, I thought the Minister agreed with that point.

I am surprised that the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes has not learnt the importance of listening to local people, but in the debate he made clear his absurd obsession with grinding the name of Humberside into oblivion, irrespective of the impact on policing or whether £1 million might be taken out of the police budget. That money should be spent on preventing, fighting and detecting crime in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) and for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). The hon. Gentleman is not interested in that—he is interested only in the name.

Mr. Michael Brown: I cannot believe my ears. The hon. Gentleman served on the Committee and yesterday had the opportunity to defeat me. If he and all Opposition Members had voted against my amendment, I would have lost. Why did he not vote against me?

Mr. Michael: It is perfectly clear, and I shall come to that question in a moment. The hon. Gentleman tabled amendments, and in the course of the debate I asked the Minister, who had not referred to any consultations undertaken by his Department, to tell us about any such consultations and about the wishes of the local police authority and others. The Minister did not answer that question—he did not tell us the views of the local police authority. He said, in a low-key manner:

"The chief constable certainly sees no need for change; nor does Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary recommend that any change is essential."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 18 March 1997; c. 282.]

After we emerged from the Committee, I saw a letter that had been sent to the deputy Leader of the Opposition expressing the chief constable's opposition. It was not the gentle opposition that the Minister had suggested, but strong and passionate opposition of the sort that has been illustrated by my hon. Friends tonight. The chief constable wrote:

"Such a change could only have perceived symbolic advantage, particularly when there are other agencies continuing to use 'Humberside' as part of their title . . . Not only is change unnecessary, but to implement it would cost in the region of a million pounds."

That is why my hon. Friends have come today to say on behalf of their constituents that they believe that £1 million expenditure would be more beneficial to their constituency if it was spent on crime prevention and on policing in their areas, rather than on a change of name.

Mr. Maclean: Obviously, the Labour party is in a blind panic tonight. Having agreed with, and not opposed, my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes yesterday and said nothing in Committee, letting an amendment go through on the nod, why does the hon. Gentleman oppose it tonight?

Mr. Michael: Because I am able to answer the question that I asked the Minister, which he was unable to answer in Committee. The Minister abrogated his responsibility by not consulting on the amendment in Committee and maintained his neutrality there but, ridiculously, he says that tonight he will not give the House the choice, but will vote to spend £1 million on a change of name over a period, instead of allowing that £1 million to be spent on policing local communities in Humberside.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 106, Noes 271.

Division No. 99] **[7.10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm (Gordon)
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Janner, Greville
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lloyd, Tony *(Strat'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfld)*
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McGrady, Eddie
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert

McWilliam, John
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin McNamara and Mr. Elliot Morley.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'd)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strang'd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Ballast N)*

Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whitingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 6

APPLICATION TO NCS SERVICE AUTHORITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ENACTMENTS

Amendments made: No. 19, in page 75, line 7, leave out 'and'.

No. 20, in page 75, line 9, at end insert

', and

(c) the word "not" shall be omitted.'—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Schedule 10

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 21, in page 99, column 3, line 30, at beginning insert—

'In section 146A(1A), the word "not".'

—[Mr. Maclean.]

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

POLICE AND FIREMEN'S PENSIONS BILL

Considered in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Consolidated Fund Act 1997
Finance Act 1997
Criminal Evidence (Amendment) Act 1997
Policyholders Protection Act 1997
Pharmacists (Fitness to Practise) Act 1997
British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1997
Knives Act 1997
Architects Act 1997
Lieutenancies Act 1997
Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1997
Justices of the Peace Act 1997
Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act 1997
Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997
Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Act 1997
Local Government and Rating Act 1997
Police (Property) Act 1997

PROTECTION FROM HARASSMENT BILL

Lords amendments considered.

Lords amendments Nos. 1 to 5 agreed to.

Business of the House

7.26 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the order of business later today and the business to be taken tomorrow.

It is intended that the House will consider Lords amendments to the Crime (Sentences) Bill immediately following motion 6 relating to Northern Ireland business, and that the House will consider Lords amendments that are expected to be received to the Education Bill immediately after the Third Reading of the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill. The business for tomorrow will be:

Money resolution on and consideration of Lords amendments to the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill.

Motion on the Hedgerows Regulations.

Motion on the legislative procedure for tax simplification

Bills.

Motion relating to the First Report from the Administration

Committee (Session 1995–96) on all-party and parliamentary groups.

Motion relating to the First Report from the Procedure

Committee on Standing Orders revision.

The House may also be asked to consider any Lords messages which may be received.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Leader of the House for that statement. I am not sure that it deals with the main item of outstanding business in this Parliament that has been on Members' minds today, but I cannot comment on that; nor perhaps can the right hon. Gentleman, as a member of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, which is still sitting.

The right hon. Gentleman has said that we shall take Lords amendments to the Crime (Sentences) Bill and the Education Bill this evening. I wonder whether that is the best way to proceed, given the weight of other business this evening and the fact that Members interested in those Bills may not have enough notice of when they are coming on for discussion. We have no wish to delay either Bill, but would it not be wiser to consider the Lords amendments to them tomorrow, when there is far less business than this evening?

This is the fourth business statement that we have had in little more than 48 hours. Will it be the last?

Mr. Newton: I certainly hope that this will be the last business statement and I have every expectation that it will be, but in an uncertain world I had better not go further than that. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her acknowledgement in relation to the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. On the other points, we concluded—I hope that it will not cause too much difficulty for her—that, given the extent of the agreement reached on the two Bills to which I referred, it would be sensible to proceed with them this evening.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): My right hon. Friend informed the House that there will be a motion to deal with revision of the Standing Orders, but an amendment to the motion on the Order Paper has been tabled by the majority of members of the Procedure Committee, urging that the second annexe be included. It is a simple annexe that modernises the names of Committees in the House, so that a Public Bill Committee will be known as a Public Bill Committee, not by some other rather subfusc name. I hope that that matter can be raised and that, if anybody is thinking of voting against the amendment, my right hon. Friend will use his powers to persuade him or her that the Government have always been in favour of modernisation.

Mr. Newton: I do not think—*[Interruption.]* I do not need to be reminded by the Opposition Chief Whip intervening from a sedentary position. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will have studied carefully the case that my right hon. Friend made in his report for the amendment to which he refers. I hope and expect that they will have an opportunity to make that decision if they wish.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Assuming that this is the last business statement that the Leader of the House will make, how much Government business will not be taken before the Prorogation of Parliament? In his capacity either as Leader of the House or as Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, can he give us a report on how far that Committee has gone in its deliberations and in dealing with the report being prepared by the Commissioner? If the hon. Members, some of whom are on record as saying that they want the report published, give their assent, can the report be published before the general election?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) rightly acknowledged the difficulty for me of speculating, as it would be at the moment, about a meeting of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, which would be proceeding now but for the fact that I am making this statement to the House. I cannot, therefore, do that. On the earlier point, the Government have effectively carried the business that they intended to carry at the beginning of the Session, although some of the Bills are not quite in the form that was originally intended. However, the bulk, even of those Bills, has been passed and they contain many important proposals. Apart from that, I can think only of a number of not particularly urgent regulations that were among the remaining orders, which have not been tabled in order not to take up the time of the House.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Without wishing to trespass in any way on the deliberations of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, would not the normal procedure for that Committee ensure that any report by the Commissioner could not possibly be published until the Committee had been given an opportunity to discuss and consider the points that the Commissioner had made?

Hon. Members: It has.

Mr. Newton: That is certainly the case.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The whole House is greatly encouraged by what the Leader of

[Mr. Peter Shore]

the House said about the proceedings of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. In resuming his discussions on that matter, will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind how monstrously unjust it would be, both for hon. Members affected by the inquiry and for their constituents, to have the matter hanging over them without the proper publication of the report of Sir Gordon Downey? I am sure that he is aware of how much the reputation of Parliament is involved in the completion of that inquiry, given that nearly three years have passed since the great offence of cash for questions was first brought into the public domain.

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Gentleman, to whom I pay respect, particularly at the end of his distinguished parliamentary career, has revealed the difficulty of my making any comment at all on that matter. I judge from the early part of his remarks that he may have been reading more than I intended into what I said. This can be judged only once the Committee has finished its proceedings tonight. Given that several Committee members are in the Chamber, I am sure that they will bear in mind the points that he made.

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): Given that my right hon. Friend has just announced that the Administration Committee's report will be presented tomorrow, will he confirm that a gap of two months will be allowed during which Committees such as the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee will be allowed to re-register?

Mr. Newton: Yes.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Leader of the House agree that the necessity for his statement now, and the events of the past two days, have been occasioned by the decision to prorogue Parliament on Friday, not on Thursday week, which would have been possible? Is he aware that page 33 of "Erskine May" makes it clear that since 1974 it has been the practice at general elections to prorogue and dissolve Parliament on the same day? Why not have Dissolution and Prorogation on 8 April to allow the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges to continue its work, as it has done in previous periods? If he will not do that, he is not being

"as open as possible with Parliament",

as paragraph (3) of motion 10 on the Order Paper says he should be, and which he will invite the House to approve later this evening.

Mr. Newton: I simply do not agree with anything that the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Have not all the Select Committees been working extremely hard to get their reports out in time for the Prorogation of Parliament? Many Select Committees that have not published their reports will publish them tomorrow. Since everybody has been aware for some time of the need to complete those reports so that they can be published before Parliament dissolves, why has not the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges done its work on time like every other?

Mr. Newton: Again, my hon. Friend seeks to draw me into matters beyond that which I should properly discuss on the Floor of the House. It is, however, absolutely clear that the Committee's work depends on receipt of a report from the Commissioner, who has been examining literally thousands of documents and much other material. When that report is received, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) said, the Committee will have to consider it, and provide any hon. Members who are criticised with an opportunity to make representations and for them to be considered.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): May I express my regret that the right hon. Gentleman did not manage to muster the same encomium for my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) as he did for my distinguished colleague here, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore)? I hope that he will not repeat the same error when I have finished. Am I not correct—as I usually am in the House—in presuming that changing the date of Prorogation would in no way affect the functioning of this House or the other place, or the general election timetable?

Mr. Newton: I am happy to rectify what the hon. Gentleman saw as an omission in respect of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), for whom I have formed a high regard during his years in the House, and I am happy to say so. I say the same of the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), although his many qualities are not entirely the same as those of his right hon. and hon. Friends alongside him.

As for the rest of the question, it has always been the practice, as far as I am aware, to bring proceedings in the House to an end at the earliest practicable time, once an election has been declared. The reasons for that are obvious.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Why cannot my right hon. Friend find time tomorrow for a debate on the £2 million of blind funds that are financing the Leader of the Opposition and Labour Front Benchers? There have been allegations in *The Sunday Times* that money laundering went on through an Oxford university account, and that possibly a foreign donor—it has been suggested that George Soros may be that foreign donor—has donated funds through a laundered bank account. One business man, Mr. Robinson—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is asking the Leader of the House to find time tomorrow for a particular debate. Will the Leader of the House respond as to whether there is time or not?

Mr. Newton: That interrelates with the point that I have now made several times, that it is not appropriate for me to discuss matters before the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges as I have been invited to do.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Will the Leader of the House take the opportunity of saying farewell to his hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), who will not be with us much longer?

May I ask the Leader of the House a simple question that goes to the heart of the problem that he has faced this week, which has resulted in a succession of chaotic business statements? As this has been the longest

peacetime Parliament this century, there can be no conceivable reason why the Government should be in a chaotic state in managing business at the end of the Session. They have known for a long time when the date would come. The sole reason why they have made a succession of business statements this week and why Select Committees cannot complete their work is that the Government have decided to prorogue Parliament on Friday. Can the right hon. Gentleman please give the House and the country a simple explanation of why it was imperative that the House should be prorogued on Friday, and not next Thursday?

Mr. Newton: There are two points there. I have already touched on the first: it has always been the practice to bring proceedings in the House to an end at the earliest practicable moment, once an election has been declared. I would add, as part of the hon. Gentleman's question echoed that of the hon. Member for Newham, South, that the process of negotiation that always occurs at the end of a Parliament and which, on this occasion, has been rather complicated by those on the Liberal Democrat Benches, particularly in another place, will always lead to a great deal of uncertainty at the time when the business before the House is being cleared up for the end of the Parliament.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the Leader of the House agree that, bearing in mind the fact that we have time until about 8 April for the House to sit if need be, some consideration should be given to the comment made by the Prime Minister on "The Frost Programme", that the whole mess should be cleared up before the general election? Can the right hon. Gentleman now arrange Government business in such a way that at least the Prime Minister's expectation in that regard can be met?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend, if I recall rightly, made it clear that it was his wish and hope that these matters should be resolved before the end of the Parliament. It is absolutely clear that those matters are, in the first instance, for the Commissioner to produce the report, then for the Committee to consider that report. It has not been possible for the Commissioner to complete the report.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I entirely accept my right hon. Friend's point that, now that it has been decided to go for an election, it is necessary to have an early Prorogation of the House, but, for academic purposes, would he consider the possibilities if Prorogation were delayed by a week? If that happened, how, in terms of natural justice, would it be possible for the Committee to complete all the reviews, take all the evidence, summon before it those who are implicated in the report and get that out of the way? How do we know that that could be done within a week? What we do know is that as soon as the report came before the Committee, some hon. Member from the Labour party would leak it to the press.

Mr. Newton: Once again, I am invited to make comments that it would not be proper for me as Chairman of the Committee to make. I have said on two or three occasions that it would be necessary for the Committee to consider the report, although I cannot be sure at this moment exactly what that would entail. It might well entail quite an extensive process.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, if no changes are made to the business statement that he has made today, the report will be locked in a cupboard during the general election? That would not be satisfactory for the hon. Members who have been implicated, as they would have no chance to clear their name before they faced the electorate. The prospect of the report remaining in a cabinet until the new Parliament assembles and a new Committee is appointed—at the beginning of this Parliament, that took six months—is intolerable, when the reputation of Parliament is at stake in such a serious and important matter.

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position to add to what I said earlier or to what you, Madam Speaker, said in your statement this afternoon. As I have said several times, members of the Committee are present and will have noted what the hon. Lady said.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Leader of the House, recognising his own difficulty in dealing with the situation, recognise also that on "The Frost Programme" the Prime Minister said that he did not want the report "kicked into the long grass"? Surely what has happened will make people feel that the report has been or is being kicked into the long grass, because of many pieces of legislation that the Government have striven to get through. Will the right hon. Gentleman take any responsibility for the arrangement of business, or will he say that the Prime Minister said one thing, but acted in such a way as to suggest that he wanted something quite different to happen?

Mr. Newton: I am certain that that is not the case, if, as I understand it, the hon. Gentleman is making an allegation against my right hon. Friend. If the hon. Gentleman is seeking to feed that allegation, that is a matter for him. I cannot add to what I said. I do not regard what has occurred in a long, complex and difficult inquiry as constituting kicking this "into the long grass", as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Does my right hon. Friend share my surprise at the chorus of calls from hon. Members on the Opposition Benches for an extension of the life of this Parliament, when for months the Leader of the Opposition has been calling for an early Dissolution of Parliament? Does he agree that that is a desperate attempt to conceal the good news about the British economy from the British people by a process of smear and innuendo, which the House should hold in total contempt?

Mr. Newton: I understand why my hon. Friend says that, and I suspect that many people will share his feelings. Again, as Chairman of the Committee, I think that it would be right for me to restrain myself.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): The Leader of the House will be aware of the Prime Minister's wish that the report should be published before the election. He will be aware

[Mr. Hugh Bayley]

of the view of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) that the report should be published before the election. The Select Committee on Standards and Privileges is a Committee of the House and works according to the decisions of the House. There is no reason why the House could not pass a resolution that Sir Gordon's report be published now and that the Committee consider it after the election. Will the Leader of the House make time for us to consider such a resolution, so that the report can be published?

Mr. Newton: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was present for your response, Madam Speaker, to points of order earlier this afternoon. You made it clear that publication in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests was not an option.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Has my right hon. Friend considered one possible advantage of delaying Prorogation, which would allow time for debates on the fact that the crime figures showed a fall on Monday, the public sector borrowing requirement came in lower than expected on Tuesday and the unemployment figures have shown a vast improvement today? Such debates would allow the House a chance to expose the fact that the policies recommended by the Labour party would jeopardise improvement on all three fronts.

Mr. Newton: I entirely agree that it would be nice to provide further opportunities for such debate, but at present I have no proposals to make such time available.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): It is peace in our time on electoral registration figures. I hold a piece of paper on which is set out the global totals of people who are on electoral registers. The problem is that there is only tomorrow for names to be added to the lists, tomorrow being the last day for supplementary lists. The global totals show that there are still 3 million to 4 million people missing from electoral registers. Before we prorogue, should we not have an opportunity tomorrow, or even on Friday, to discuss the state of electoral registration? We are moving into a general election that will be based on the arrangements that I have described.

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake to provide such an opportunity. However, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the fact that his persistence seems to have achieved even more than the undertaking that I understand he was given yesterday, when he was told that he would get the figures tomorrow. He seems to have received them a day earlier even than had been hoped.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you; that is the end.

Northern Ireland Business

7.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I beg to move,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 99 (Northern Ireland Grand Committee) shall be repealed and Standing Orders No. 99A to 99H below shall have effect;

(2) Standing Order No. 87 (Attendance of law officers and ministers in standing committees) shall be amended, in line 9, by inserting 'or a motion in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee under Standing Order No. 99A (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (composition and business))' after the words relating to the Welsh Grand Committee which were inserted on 11th March 1996;

(3) Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation) shall be amended, in line 21, at the end, by inserting 'or to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee'; and

(4) Other Standing Orders shall have effect subject to the foregoing provisions of this Order.

99 A. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (composition and business)

(1) There shall be a standing committee called the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, which shall consist of all Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland, together with not more than twenty-five other Members nominated by the Committee of Selection, which shall have power from time to time to discharge the Members so nominated by it and to appoint others in substitution for those discharged.

(2) The quorum of the committee shall be ten, subject to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)).

(3) the business of the committee shall include—

(a) questions tabled in accordance with Standing Order No. 99 B (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (questions for oral answer));

(b) short debates held in accordance with Standing Order No. 99 C (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (short debates));

(c) ministerial statements proceeded with under Standing Order No. 99 D (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (ministerial statements));

(d) bills referred to it for consideration or further consideration in relation to their principle, in accordance with Standing Order No. 99 E (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle));

(e) such legislative proposals and other specified matters relating exclusively to Northern Ireland as may be referred to it in accordance with Standing Order No. 99 F (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (legislative proposals and other matters relating exclusively to Northern Ireland));

(f) instruments (whether or not in draft) referred to it in accordance with Standing Order No. 99 G (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (delegated legislation)); and

(g) motions for the adjournment of the committee, made under paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)).

(4) Any Minister of the Crown, being a Member of the House, though not a member of the committee, may take part in the deliberations of the committee and may make a motion, but shall not vote or be counted in the quorum.

99 B. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)

(1) Notices of questions for oral answer in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee by Northern Ireland Office ministers on a day specified in an order made under paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)) may be given by members of the committee in the Table Office.

(2) Notices of questions given under this order shall bear an indication that they are for oral answer in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee.

(3) No more than one notice of a question may be given under this order by any member of the committee for each day specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)) for the taking of questions.

(4) On any day so specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)), questions shall be taken at the commencement of the sitting; no such question shall be taken later than half an hour after the commencement of the proceedings thereon; and replies to questions not reached shall be printed with the Official Report of the committee's debates for that day.

(5) Notices of questions under this order may be given ten sitting days before that on which an answer is desired, save where otherwise provided by a memorandum under paragraph (8) of Standing Order No. 18 (Notices of questions, motions and amendments):

Provided that when it is proposed that the House shall adjourn for a period of fewer than four days, any day during that period (other than a Saturday or a Sunday) shall be counted as a sitting day for the purposes of the calculation made under this paragraph.

99 C. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (short debates)

(1) Notices of subjects to be raised in short debates in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, on a day specified in an order made under paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)), may be given by members of the committee in the Table Office.

(2) Subjects of which notice is given under paragraph (1) of this order must relate to Northern Ireland.

(3) Not more than one notice of a subject may be given under this order by any member of the committee for each day specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)) for the holding of short debates.

(4) On any day so specified such debates shall be held at the commencement of the sitting or, if the order under paragraph (1) specifies also the taking of questions on that day, immediately after questions.

(5) (a) No Member except the Minister of the Crown replying to the debate shall be called to speak later than half an hour after the commencement of the first such debate.

(b) The Member who gave notice of the subject and the Minister of the Crown replying to the debate may each speak for five minutes. Other Members may speak for three minutes.

(c) The chairman may direct any Member who exceeds the limits in sub-paragraph (b) to resume his seat forthwith.

(6) Notice of subjects under this order may be given ten sitting days before that on which they are sought to be raised:

Provided that when it is proposed that the House shall adjourn for a period of fewer than four days, any day during that period (other than a Saturday or a Sunday) shall be counted as a sitting day for the purposes of the calculation made under this paragraph.

99 D. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (ministerial statements).

(1) The chairman of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee may permit a Minister of the Crown, whether or not a Member of the House, to make a statement, of which prior notice has been given to him, on a matter relating to Northern Ireland, and to answer questions thereon put by members of the committee.

(2) Ministerial statements may be made—

(a) at the commencement of a sitting; or

(b) if questions are taken, immediately after the conclusion of proceedings thereon; or

(c) if short debates are held, immediately after the conclusion of those proceedings.

(3) Proceedings under this order shall be brought to a conclusion at the discretion of the chairman.

(4) A Minister of the Crown making a statement under paragraph (1) of this order, who is not a Member of the House, may not do so from the body of the committee; and shall not vote, make any motion or be counted in the quorum.

99 E. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)

(1) On the order being read for the second reading of a public bill relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, a motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown (or in the case of a private Member's bill, by the Member in charge of the bill), 'That the bill be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee', and the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed:

Provided that such a motion may be made by a private Member only with the leave of the House.

(2) A bill so referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee shall be considered on a motion, 'That the Committee has considered the bill in relation to its principle', and, when the committee has considered that question for a total of two and a half hours (whether on one or more than one day), the chairman shall put the question necessary to dispose of the motion, and shall then report accordingly to the House (or shall report that the committee has come to no resolution), without any further question being put thereon:

Provided that a Minister of the Crown may, immediately before the motion 'That the Committee has considered the bill in relation to its principle' is made, make without notice a motion to extend the time-limit specified in this paragraph; and the question on such motion shall be put forthwith.

(3) A bill in respect of which a report has been made under paragraph (2) above shall be ordered to be read a second time on a future day.

(4) When a motion shall have been made for the second reading of a bill to which paragraph (3) above applies, the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed.

(5) At the conclusion of proceedings on consideration on report of a bill in respect of which a report has been made under paragraph (2) above, or on the order being read for the third reading of such a bill, a motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown (or in the case of a private Member's bill by the Member in charge of the bill), 'That the Bill be referred again to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee', and the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed:

Provided that such a motion may be made by a private Member only with the leave of the House.

(6) A bill so referred again to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee shall be considered on a motion, 'That the Committee has further considered the bill in relation to its principle', and, when the committee has considered that question for a total of one and a half hours (whether on one or more than one day), the chairman shall put the question necessary to dispose of the motion, and shall then report accordingly to the House (or shall report that the committee has come to no resolution), without any further question being put thereon:

Provided that a Minister of the Crown may, immediately before the motion 'That the Committee has further considered the bill in relation to its principle' is made, make without notice a motion to extend the time-limit specified in this paragraph; and the question on such motion shall be put forthwith.

(7) A bill in respect of which a report has been made under paragraph (6) above shall be ordered to be read the third time on a future day.

(8) When a motion shall have been made for the third reading of a bill to which paragraph (7) above applies, the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed.

99 F. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (legislative proposals and other matters relating exclusively to Northern Ireland)

(1) A motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown at the commencement of public business to the effect that a legislative proposal or other specified matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee for its consideration, and the question thereon shall be put forthwith.

(2) If such a motion be agreed to, the committee shall consider the legislative proposal or matter referred to it and shall report only that it has considered the said legislative proposal or matter.

(3) In this order and in Standing Orders No. 99 A (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (composition and business)) and No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)) 'a legislative proposal' means a proposal for a draft Order in Council relating exclusively to Northern Ireland.

99 G. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (delegated legislation)

(1) Where—

(a) a Member has given notice of a motion for a humble address to Her Majesty praying that a statutory instrument be annulled, or of a motion of a similar character relating to a statutory instrument or to any other instrument (whether or not in draft) which may be subject to proceedings in the House in pursuance of a statute, or of a motion that the House takes note of a statutory instrument, or

(b) a Minister of the Crown has given notice of a motion to the effect that an instrument (whether or not in draft) upon which proceedings may be taken in pursuance of an Act of Parliament (other than a draft deregulation order) be approved,

a motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown, 'That the instrument be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee'; and the question on such motion shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed.

(2) The Committee shall consider each instrument referred to it on a motion, 'That the Committee has considered the instrument'; and the chairman shall put any question necessary to dispose of the proceedings on the motion, if not previously disposed of, not later than two and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings thereon; and shall thereupon report the instrument to the House without any further question being put:

Provided that a Minister of the Crown may, immediately before the motion 'That the Committee has considered the instrument' is made, make without notice a motion to extend to three hours the time-limit specified in this paragraph; and the question on such motion shall be put forthwith.

(3) If any motion is made in the House of the kind specified in paragraph 1(a) or 1(b) of this order, in relation to any instrument in respect of which a report has been made to the House in accordance with paragraph (2) of this order, the Speaker shall put forthwith the question thereon; which may be decided at any hour, though opposed.

99 H. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)

(1) A motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown providing (or varying previous provision) for the Northern Ireland Grand Committee—

(a) to sit on not more than two specified days in Northern Ireland (at places to be named by the Member appointed chairman), the sitting commencing, and proceedings being interrupted, at such hours as shall be specified;

(b) to sit on other specified days at Westminster at such hours as shall be specified;

(c) to take questions under Standing Order No. 99 B (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) on certain of the days specified under paragraph (a) or paragraph (b) above;

(d) to hold short debates under Standing Order No. 99 C (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (short debates)) on certain of the days so specified;

(e) to consider specified bills which shall have been referred to it under Standing Order No. 99 E (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)) on certain of the days so specified;

(f) to consider legislative proposals and other specified matters which shall have been referred to it under Standing Order No. 99 F (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (legislative proposals and other matters relating exclusively to Northern Ireland)) on certain of the days so specified;

(g) to consider specified instruments (whether or not in draft) which shall have been referred to it under Standing Order No. 99 G (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (delegated legislation)) on certain of the days so specified; and

(h) to consider motions for the adjournment of the committee made under paragraph (5) below on certain of the days so specified;

and the Speaker shall put forthwith the question on such a motion, which may be decided at any hour, though opposed:

Provided that nothing in this order shall prevent the committee from considering further at a sitting at Westminster business adjourned at a previous sitting in Northern Ireland, nor from considering at a sitting in Northern Ireland business adjourned at a sitting at Westminster.

(2) The provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees), so far as they relate to the naming of a day in respect of business by the Member appointed chairman and the committee's appointment of future days in respect of business not completed at a sitting, shall not apply to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee.

(3) The chairman shall interrupt proceedings (other than on a motion made under paragraph (5) below) at the time specified in relation to the sitting by an order made under paragraph (1) above or, in the absence of such provision, at one o'clock, subject to paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees).

(4) At the moment of interruption, proceedings under consideration and not disposed of shall stand adjourned.

(5) On a day specified in an order made under paragraph (1) above, after the interruption of proceedings, or on the completion of the business appointed for consideration at that sitting, whichever is the earlier, a motion for the adjournment of the committee may be made by a Minister of the Crown, and, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees) the chairman shall, not later than half an hour after the motion has been made, adjourn the committee without putting any question; and in respect of business taken under this paragraph, the quorum of the committee shall be three.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has asked me to convey his apologies to the House for his absence, which is due to other pressing business which he cannot postpone. The House will know the nature of it.

Ever since the onset of direct rule in 1972, successive Governments have been aware of the democratic deficit in the arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland. That is why we place so much importance on the multi-party talks that have been going on in Belfast over the past nine months. The future well-being of Northern Ireland requires that, as part of a comprehensive settlement based upon consent, progress is made in restoring democratic accountability in the Province.

We do not, however, have to wait for what we all hope will be a successful outcome to the talks process before anything can be done. The present arrangements in Parliament for scrutinising the affairs of Northern Ireland can be improved at once. Over the years, a number of such improvements have already been made. For example,

we established the Northern Ireland Committee in 1975. Since 1976, we have published Northern Ireland Orders in Council in draft. The purpose has been to give right hon. and hon. Members, as well as other interested persons and bodies, the opportunity to comment on the legislation and to propose changes before the House is asked to approve the order.

Then, in 1994, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee was established so as to secure proper scrutiny by the House of the departments for which I am responsible. I am sure that all agree that it has since proved itself well, producing a number of valuable reports. It was at that time that the Northern Ireland Committee was renamed the Northern Ireland Grand Committee.

It was with the same motivation that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced last October his intention to introduce the changes detailed in the motion. As he explained in that speech, Scottish and Welsh Members had recently been given greater ability to question Ministers, and my right hon. Friend wished to extend that same facility to Northern Ireland.

In October 1996, I wrote to the leaders of the Northern Ireland parties represented at Westminster, and to the Opposition parties, explaining how this might be done, and seeking views. There is still some diversity of view on our proposals, but the Government believe that we should now move forward with changes that will bring an immediate benefit to the governance of Northern Ireland.

I shall outline the principal changes briefly. Northern Ireland Office Ministers would in future make the public expenditure survey statement for Northern Ireland to the Grand Committee, in place of the current briefing arrangements. Northern Ireland Office Ministers, including any Minister in another place, would make statements and take questions in Committee on a regular basis. Cabinet and other departmental Ministers whose responsibilities extend to Northern Ireland would be able to make statements before the Grand Committee, and be questioned on them. It is intended, subject to a suitable venue or venues being identified, that some Grand Committee meetings should be held in a Northern Ireland venue.

Greater use would be made of the existing power to hold debates, both general in character and to consider specific proposals for draft Orders in Council. Those meetings which are held under the existing Standing Orders always prove valuable. It should also be possible on a Government motion for draft Northern Ireland orders and Orders in Council to be referred to the Grand Committee, instead of to a Standing Committee, or be taken on the Floor of the House, as at present.

The Northern Ireland Grand Committee would be able, on a Government motion, to consider certain Bills relating exclusively to Northern Ireland. In effect, this would be in the form of Second and Third Reading debates. There would finally also be provision for half-hour Adjournment debates at the end of Grand Committee meetings. Those changes would bring the Northern Ireland Grand Committee broadly into line with the Scottish and Welsh equivalents.

I shall not be recommending any changes to the membership of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, which will remain as now—that is, all Northern Ireland Members, plus up to 25 others. Nor am I proposing a set number of meetings. I shall, however, be recommending that the quorum be reduced from 14 to 10. That last point is to bring the Northern Ireland Grand Committee more into line with the Welsh and Scottish equivalents.

The changes that we are proposing are entirely without prejudice to any developments that there may be in the multi-party negotiations or to the future relationship between any new political institutions in Northern Ireland and the Westminster Parliament. Of course, in the event of future devolution of functions to local representatives, there will be a corresponding diminution in the role of the Grand Committee.

The changes will self-evidently enable the Grand Committee to examine Government policy in greater detail. That is a good thing. They will valuably allow members of the Committee to bring to bear their own detailed and local knowledge of Northern Ireland matters. The measures will significantly improve the accountability of government under the circumstances of direct rule. They will provide new opportunities for right hon. and hon. Members to undertake detailed scrutiny of the Government's policy and performance in Northern Ireland. I commend the motion to the House.

7.55 pm

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): The Northern Ireland Grand Committee, as it is now known, was set up in 1975 following the establishment of direct rule and the Northern Ireland Act 1974. The Secretary of State has outlined the Committee's history since then.

Direct rule is without doubt an imperfect and unsatisfactory situation. Legislation for Northern Ireland is largely enacted by Orders in Council, which cannot be amended and are not subject to full parliamentary scrutiny. There was a 50 per cent. increase in the number of such orders between 1994 and 1996. The system of direct rule is the status quo. On basic principles of democracy and accountability, that is not acceptable.

As I have said many times, change is necessary. There are two basic routes for change—one is by direct Government action and the other is by local consent and agreement. Achieving local consent and agreement is the task of the two Governments and the parties in the talks. Those talks are designed to address relationships within Northern Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, and between Britain and Ireland.

Progress since last June has been slow and immensely frustrating at times, but we should not underestimate what has been achieved by agreement on independent international chairs, on rules of procedure and on the agenda for the talks. There is something to build on when talks resume.

In our view, a way forward on decommissioning has to be found on the basis of the Mitchell report. We hope that all parties will use the time between now and 3 June to develop their thinking on this and offer ways forward out of the current blockage. If we are elected, we shall immediately invite the parties at the talks to discuss the matter with us on a bilateral basis. We want to see a fully inclusive talks process, but if the talks are to succeed, everyone must be fully committed to the democratic process and to peaceful methods. Sinn Fein and the IRA can demonstrate that commitment by calling an unequivocal ceasefire and showing by their actions that they mean it. They should do so immediately. If they do not, we shall go forward in the talks without them.

[Ms Marjorie Mowlam]

In government, we shall put all our energies into the process that I have outlined—both within and outside the talks—in working to build confidence between the communities to create fertile ground for compromise and agreement. Trust and confidence between the parties and the communities that they represent must grow to enable real progress to be made.

Direct government action to improve accountability and transparency in Northern Ireland should be sets within the context of greater confidence building. We want to find the best ways to help include local people in debating issues, in holding government to account and in taking part in the decision-making process. The lack of local input into decision making in Northern Ireland is a problem for both communities.

We understand the desire for changes to the Grand Committee. We welcome the Secretary of State's assurance that they are proposed without prejudice to developments in the talks. We would also welcome his assurance that, while he is proposing to enable the Grand Committee to debate legislation on a Government order, the decision making—any votes on that legislation—will continue to be taken on the Floor of the House. Extending the use of the Grand Committee would create more opportunities for debate, as has the establishment of the Northern Ireland forum.

If Labour is successful in the forthcoming election, we shall immediately begin to examine how those mechanisms work alongside others in improving openness and democratic accountability across the board in Northern Ireland. Although we shall ensure that this legislation passes through the House today, we reserve the right to look again at the proposals after the election in that broader context. We understand why there is support for the measure, but the proposals have been drawn up in haste in the dying days of a Parliament, and, given the importance of this issue to both communities in Northern Ireland, it would be irresponsible of us not to give a commitment to look at them afresh when a new Parliament begins.

8 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I agree with the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), the Opposition spokesperson, that direct rule is totally unsatisfactory. Those of us who have been in the House for many years will agree that it is unsatisfactory to Northern Ireland Members that we are able to table amendments to proposed legislation for England, Scotland and Wales but are unable to table amendments to measures that relate to our constituencies in Northern Ireland. It is unsatisfactory that we have only an hour and a half—tonight's timetable is not unique to Northern Ireland Members—to deal with the most complicated and heavy orders.

A few months ago, a licensing order came before the House. Indeed, two orders were brought before the House on the same night. Hundreds of pages of detailed legislation were pushed through in an hour and a half. That is a totally unsatisfactory way to conduct business. Therefore, the ability of a Grand Committee to consider detailed and weighty matters and for us to have the opportunity at least to make our arguments to the Government about legislation must be welcomed.

Anything that makes a Government more accountable for their actions is an improvement, but I would not like to leave the House with the impression that a Grand Committee will be a panacea in terms of the restoration of democracy in Northern Ireland. It is right that Northern Ireland should have such a Committee, not just because Scotland and Wales do, but because we have a better case than Scotland and Wales because of the deficit in local government democracy in Northern Ireland and the few powers that exist for local authorities there.

The hon. Lady referred to the Labour party's manifesto position on Northern Ireland. That requires a response. According to Labour, the issue of decommissioning is holding back the talks process. In a sense that is true, but there is something much more fundamentally flawed about the present talks process, because it is designed to bring into the democratic process those who have not yet accepted the principles of the democratic process; those who would bypass the principles of democracy, even those enshrined in the international report. The issue of decommissioning is central to that, because it is the desire of some parties—the Social Democratic and Labour party being one—that people should have entrance to the talks process and still hold on to their weapons while they sit around the negotiating table.

My party has made its position clear. We accept the Mitchell principles but we do not accept the Mitchell report. The Labour party says that it does. It should reconsider, because the report is based upon a faulty premise. The Mitchell team felt and believed—no doubt those in it were convinced by the Government and others—that there was a permanent cessation of violence on the part of the Provisional IRA. In the belief that there was a permanent cessation of violence, the Mitchell team made the proposals that are contained in the report.

We all know—some of us knew at the time, but others will understand by now—that it was a phoney cessation of violence, a tactical cessation, a manoeuvre by the Provisional IRA in an attempt to extract concessions. Therefore, it would be very dangerous if any Government attempted to accept principles enshrined in an international body's report which made a judgment based on proven false principles. The Labour party would do well to go back to the drawing board before it simply picks up an international body's report that was based on an incorrect judgment of what the IRA's position was.

I hope that it was not a slip of the tongue by the Labour spokesperson, but I noted that she said that Labour would require an unequivocal ceasefire before the IRA could enter the talks process. I am looking to see whether I get a shake or nod of the head from her, but *Hansard* will show that that was the terminology that she used. I am delighted at that. That, of course, is different from the present Government's position. The Government's position and the position in the ground rules document is that they require an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994.

There is a clear distinction between those two positions. The Government want an unequivocal restoration of a failed, phoney ceasefire. I am glad that the Government who we may have after 1 May are now saying that we want not an unequivocal restoration of a failed ceasefire but an unequivocal ceasefire, a permanent ceasefire, a complete ceasefire, a universal ceasefire, one that is totally unequivocal. I hope that the Labour party will see the distinction between those two statements. It will, of

course, require from the hon. Lady a change in legislation, because the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 refers to command 3232 which enshrines the principle of an unequivocal restoration—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. I assumed that he was making a broad introduction to the subject, but we are debating the Grand Committee. I rather think that the hon. Gentleman is speaking to a later order.

Mr. Robinson: No; I was speaking in response to the comments made by the Opposition spokesperson. I had assumed that, as she was considered to be in order, I would be in order to respond to her. If she has led me astray, I will come back to the straight and narrow path.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I try to be tolerant if something is mentioned briefly in passing, but it is less easy to be tolerant when it is expanded on at some length.

Mr. Robinson: I am sure that the message has been left with the Labour party. I trust that we shall see the necessary legislative change for the entry conditions of parties to the talks process.

In relation to the Grand Committee, I am somewhat concerned that the Labour party suggests that the motion will not close the issue, that Labour will revisit it. It almost sounded as though it would be part of some negotiation after the election, and that Labour would then suggest that the proposals would change unless various principles that Labour may lay down were accepted by the parties. I hope that, at the end of the debate, we shall have a clearer statement from the Labour party that it will accept the judgment of the House tonight in relation to the Grand Committee and that it will not seek to change the decision of the House if Labour is elected in May.

I have no argument with the Secretary of State about the various functions that he gives the Grand Committee, save that, in his communication of 27 February to party leaders, he said that, in addition to the initial functions that he considered for the Grand Committee, he was to include the power that it should be possible on a Government motion for a draft Northern Ireland Order or for an Order in Council itself to be referred to the Grand Committee instead of going to a Standing Committee or being taken on the Floor of the House.

I am concerned that that could allow a Government to put all Northern Ireland orders into a Grand Committee and that they would never be considered on the Floor of the House. I hope that the Secretary of State will give us an assurance that that is not the position, but his communication of 27 February certainly makes it clear that consideration in a Grand Committee would be instead of consideration on the Floor of the House. It would not be helpful to Northern Ireland for the business of Northern Ireland to be shunted into a siding. We should have time to raise on the Floor of the House matters of importance to the people of Northern Ireland.

It is sad that members of the Grand Committee for Northern Ireland who represent Northern Ireland will be a minority. That is not the position on the Scottish Grand Committee. If one wanders into that Committee, one will not see a majority of Englishmen and women—the same applies to the Welsh Grand Committee—but the poor Ulster people will be in the minority on the Grand Committee for Northern Ireland. The Government have deliberately designed it so that the representatives of the people of Northern Ireland are in a minority on the Grand Committee. That is a mistake, and shows that the Government are not prepared to leave the field open for the views of the people of Northern Ireland to be expressed.

I noticed that, in the debate on the Scottish Grand Committee and the proposals for constitutional change in Scotland, the Labour party's view was that the Committee would be much like a travelling circus, a toothless talking shop and a platform for Ministers, who would use it to launch various proposals up and down the country.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The hon. Gentleman is right. That is precisely how the Secretary of State for Scotland has exploited the Scottish Grand Committee for his own purposes. It was a travelling press show for him and his fellow Ministers.

Mr. Robinson: The great difficulty is that it would be hard, even for the Labour party if it were in the same position as the Secretary of State for Scotland, to resist the temptation to use the Grand Committee as a platform. If a Grand Committee is to mean anything, it is to get the views of Back Benchers as well as the Government on various issues. If allocations of time allow it to be hogged by the Secretary of State and his Ministers instead of allowing the views of representatives of the area to be heard, it will not assist us one bit.

I was disappointed that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland did not advocate a Grand Committee for Northern Ireland using the same arguments as were advanced for Scotland. In the document containing proposals on a Scottish Grand Committee, the Secretary of State for Scotland said:

"The Government stand four-square behind the Union".

I did not hear the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland using such terminology. He went on to say:

"What the people of Scotland want is Government close to them, Government listening to them, and above all, Government accountable to them."

The Secretary of State cannot say that, because the Government are totally unaccountable in Northern Ireland. There is no representation in Northern Ireland by the Conservative party, nor will there be any by the Labour party.

The Secretary of State has let down the people of Northern Ireland. He could have said that this proposal was to strengthen the Union, but he chose not to say that. He did not follow the line of the Secretary of State for Scotland. Perhaps the people of Scotland are more loved by the Government than the people of Northern Ireland. Perhaps we are children of a lesser god in the eyes of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He does not use the same arguments in relation to the Province.

I am sure that we all wish the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland well in his new life as he leaves the House and parts from us. He had this opportunity, which is probably the last time that he will deal with Northern Ireland business, to set out clearly his views, and the views of the Government, on maintaining the Union with Northern Ireland, and to say that he saw a Grand

[Mr. Robinson]

Committee as part of that scheme. Unlike the Secretary of State for Scotland, he chose not to do that. I wonder whether the Government do not believe the argument that they advanced for Scotland, or whether they do not want the Union to be maintained in Northern Ireland.

8.14 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the legislation. I shall try to stick closely to the terms of the order, because I began to wonder whether some folk had been given the wrong speech, as they were dealing with later orders. I welcome the proposal, because it has taken a long time coming. The process began when Lord Glenamara was responsible for these matters in the House. It is fascinating to discover that it has taken all these years to come to fruition.

I thought that there was perhaps a problem of gestation and that we were trying to outdo the elephant, which is the land mammal with the longest gestation period. I was advised today that the blue whale is the water mammal with the longest gestation period, so perhaps we have been at sea for a long time about Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom.

The Secretary of State spoke about diversity when he referred to the Grand Committee. In a sense, British politics is all about diversity, as we come together to argue, debate, try to understand and reach conclusions. I welcome the fact that we have travelled along this road, as the Secretary of State outlined in his introduction. It has taken many years to reach this stage.

The Secretary of State apologised for the absence of the Leader of the House. I want to express my thanks to the Leader of the House, who, in the past few months, has been assiduous in seeking to make progress towards this hour. He has been considerate and helpful. We now discover that others have begun to recognise that the Grand Committee has a role to play in making up part of the democratic deficit.

I say bluntly that the Grand Committee should not be viewed merely as a means of making up the democratic deficit or plugging a gap until an understanding is reached whereby the people of Northern Ireland will have a greater say in matters affecting their everyday lives. In my judgment, there will always be a time when a Grand Committee for Northern Ireland is needed to deal with issues that will never be devolved to Northern Ireland.

I am convinced that a large number of the problems that arose in 1968 would never have arisen if more people in the House had been aware of the overall situation there. We should bear it in mind that the Foreign Office represents Northern Ireland abroad, as it does the rest of the United Kingdom. Defence issues will not be devolved to a Northern Ireland Assembly. There may be moments when it will be important for the Grand Committee to bring Ministers of the Crown before it to deal with issues relevant to Northern Ireland. So it will not be merely a stop-gap, and I welcome that.

Some people have opposed the establishment of a Grand Committee for Northern Ireland. Some have argued for parity of esteem in Northern Ireland. We welcome the fact that we have moved in the positive direction of parity of esteem between Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

There is another reason why I believe that such action is necessary. Those who remember the debates on broadcasting that have taken place here will remember my raising the problem of regional broadcasting. We were given to understand then that the regions would report to the regions what Members representing those regions were doing in the House, but that has not been done to any great effect in Northern Ireland. Indeed, many Northern Ireland newspapers concentrate on local disagreements and squabbles, rather than reporting the positive contributions that have been made here for the well-being of the people of Northern Ireland. The fact that a Grand Committee can meet in Northern Ireland from time to time is a positive development.

I was interested to note that the main daily paper in Northern Ireland prefaced a report about the tabling of the legislation with a headline referring to "plans for a mini-Westminster to meet in Northern Ireland". I know that others have debated other issues, but, given that tonight we are debating the main theme of the motion, I welcome it and trust that it will be implemented in the near future.

8.21 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): When the Secretary of State introduced the motion, he invited us to approve it on a number of grounds. Let me paraphrase what he said. He wished to address the democratic deficit, and he wished to approve the participation of Northern Ireland politicians and representatives in the decision-making process. Those are laudable sentiments, and it is hard to argue against them—except when they are placed against the practicality of what has happened, and is happening.

It is difficult to conceive of a conversion to the body that we discussing. This is the last gasp of a Government who have exercised a system for more than 18 years, and who have made this move only in the dying moments of what is probably their last Parliament. So much for the concern that they have expressed.

It was suggested that we should approve the motion because it would involve Northern Ireland politicians much more than heretofore. That is true; but Northern Ireland politicians have been involved in many serious policy matters, and have addressed those matters, not just individually but jointly—and, on almost every occasion, their unanimity has been rejected by the Government. So much for addressing the democratic deficit. We have seen that over the years, and particularly in recent years, when our health and social services system has been attacked by Tory party policy, and when our education system has been attacked. As often as not, when parties throughout the community asked for change, they were ignored. Unfortunately, therefore, I do not accept the Government's deathbed conversion to the principle of addressing the democratic deficit in Northern Ireland.

Let me digress for a moment. It has been said that the democratic deficit can be observed in local government. Why? Because of the abuse of powers, which, to some extent, is still going on. It is not as bad as it was, because there is much cross-party, cross-community co-operation, based primarily on the principles established by the SDLP—which we called power sharing in 1972, all of 25 years ago. Although that theory of partnership was rejected out of hand as being impractical, it has permeated much of local government—although there are notable exceptions.

So we have had 18 years during which the democratic deficit could be addressed. Let me speak bluntly. The announcement at the Tory party conference on 11 October that Northern Ireland was to be given a Grand Committee was seen by the nationalist community as just another sop or pay-off to the Ulster Unionists for helping the Government in the House. It was as simple as that, and that perception remains today. It may be argued that the perception is wrong, but it is there.

The point has been emphasised time and again in connection with other matters over the past 12 months, in particular. That was the perception back in 1994, when the Select Committee was established. Early in 1996, elections were held under the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996: they were not really necessary for the negotiations, but were held at the behest of, primarily, the Unionist parties. On each of those occasions, the nationalist community saw its parity being destroyed or, at the minimum, held in much less esteem than that of the Unionists.

The same theme has continued throughout the present Administration, for many years. One of the main reasons why my party objects to the Grand Committee—in addition to what I have already said—is that it was always acknowledged that the real solution to the problem of Northern Ireland was representatives of the two communities getting together and arriving at a means whereby Northern Ireland could be best administered. Every time a little piece is taken out of that jigsaw, the need to reach such a compromise is weakened.

Dr. Godman: Is there not an inconsistency in the Government's conduct in regard to the democratic deficit? The Prime Minister promised us in Scotland a stock taking exercise concerning the governance of Scotland—and what have we finished up with? The Scottish Grand Committee.

Mr. McGrady: No doubt the same will be reflected in the establishment of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, when it is established. We see the Grand Committee as another degradation of the parity of esteem—the esteem in which nationalists were supposed to be held by both Governments.

I should also like to know whether consultations took place on the international scene under national agreements, on whether the Grand Committee should be part of the administration of Northern Ireland. We see this as anti-nationalist legislation.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Surely the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that this sovereign Parliament, dealing with one of its regions in setting up a Committee with parity with those of Wales and Scotland, should discuss the matter with the southern Ireland Government, and that that Government's OK should be given before this Government can set up the Committee?

Mr. McGrady: I am not saying that that Government must be consulted to the point at which their agreement must be obtained. I am saying that, if there is to be agreement between the two Governments, the Dublin Government must be consulted. I do not know whether they were consulted and what their opinion was; perhaps the Secretary of State will tell us whether consultations took place under the international agreement, and what the consequences were if they did.

As I have said, we see this as a degradation of the vitality that must be preserved in the inter-party talks. If everything is already agreed to, there is no push, no initiative and no drive to reach an arrangement with opposite political numbers. That is what we have been trying to do in the 25 years since the establishment of direct rule. It is for those reasons that my party has been against the formation of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee and has consistently stated that that is our position. It remains so tonight.

Before I sit down, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to say to the Secretary of State that, despite what I have said in terms of his propositions, personally, we wish him all the best on his retirement. I have no doubt that his very many talents will be put to good use in some other place. Thank you.

8.29 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I join my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) in the general thrust of his argument, but I too would like to join him in paying my compliment to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for his efforts in Northern Ireland. Certainly he started off with very high hopes and, with the Prime Minister, achieved a great deal in the Downing street declaration and in the framework document. It is sad that those matters have not come to earlier and quicker fruition. We can perhaps argue about the reasons for that on other occasions, but it is right that the Secretary of State's efforts should be acknowledged. He must to a certain degree feel disappointment that so many of those high hopes have not been realised, as he would have hoped.

One of the reasons for that is the matter that we are debating today. We have seen the last cheque being cashed for keeping a discredited and faltering Government in power in the past two or three years. The votes of the Ulster Unionists have been purchased. We have seen that happening, first, with the Maastricht debate and, immediately after that, with the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. We saw it in the altering of the legislation so that we had fewer orders for Northern Ireland and more British legislation covering the rest of Northern Ireland—that was another demand.

We saw it in the establishment and acceptance of the Unionist agenda. The price that had to be paid for getting Unionists into talks was the mini-general election in Northern Ireland for the establishment of the forum for the establishment of the talks. That again was their price, and it kept a faltering, staggering Government in operation. However, it achieved on the other side a continuous feeling that its interests were being downgraded. There was no parity of esteem on the Select Committee, on the legislation and on the negotiations for entry into talks. All those things were done against the express wishes of the minority party in Northern Ireland. If that is true, we have to be very suspicious about what has been happening today.

Sir James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I wonder whether he would want to include in his condemnation of the present Government, condemnation of the Wilson Government and particularly the then Leader of the House, Ted Short, who took the initial steps in forming the Northern Ireland

[Sir James Molyneaux]

Committee. That progressed to the later stage of the Grand Committee and to the final third stage tonight under another Government. I suppose that the hon. Gentleman would want to record, because I know that he is basically a fair man, his condemnation of the Callaghan Government, which he supported, in granting Northern Ireland free and equal representation in the Parliament of the United Kingdom. I think fair dos for all three Governments.

Mr. McNamara: I am quite happy to say that I did disagree with my then right hon. Friend, Lord Callaghan. The right hon. Gentleman will remember, because he was in the House at the time, that I voted against the extra seats—the price that was demanded of the then Prime Minister Callaghan to keep him in power. I remember that I warned him. I said that, as long as he paid the Danegeld, he would never get rid of the Dane. When hon. Members did not get their gas pipeline, they brought Callaghan down. I remember that that was the majority of their votes, so this is nothing fresh to me. I know where the Ulster Unionists stand and where they are coming from.

Rev. Martin Smyth *rose—*

Mr. McNamara: Sit down for a moment.

I thought that it was a little disingenuous of the Secretary of State to say that this matter in no way prejudices the three-stranded talks and that those talks will continue onwards. That is completely incorrect. This is a complete alteration of the playing field in relation to strand 1 of the talks, which deal with internal relations in Northern Ireland. It creates a situation where there are no pressures in any way on the majority parties in Northern Ireland to come to any agreement. They were able to spin out the Brooke talks. They spun out the Maple talks and the Mitchell talks. They did it very cleverly from their point of view; I understand that.

Sir James Molyneaux: We were expert.

Mr. McNamara: As the right hon. Gentleman says, they were expert, and no one was more expert than him, whether it was the size of the table, where we met, what the agenda would be, or whether we would sit down under the leader of a foreign Government. It went on and on. The talks were spun out, as they have continued to be. When the majority parties got into difficulties, bingo, out of the air, they produced decommissioning, so we understand their tactics and the way in which they have dealt with it. That is why this is a bad idea. The pressures for getting a settlement in Northern Ireland are reduced that much by this proposal.

Mr. Peter Robinson *rose—*

Rev. Martin Smyth *rose—*

Mr. McNamara: I will give way to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and then to the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson).

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman giving way because I know that he does believe in the facts and the element of truth, which is on the record, and that he would not want to mislead the House. Does he agree that, when on their last legs, the Callaghan Government were supported by two Ulster Unionists, who fondly believed that they might have got a gas pipeline, but it was his colleague, the former hon. Member for Belfast, West, now Lord Fitt, and the absentee who came to abstain in person, Frank Maguire, the then hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, who brought down the Government?

Mr. McNamara: If the majority of the Ulster Unionists, who had been so obsequious to Callaghan while they were getting their extra seats and their other stuff, had voted with the Labour Government, they would not have been brought down.

We also knew how my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had treated Mr. Maguire and Mr. Fitt. We also knew what was going on in Castlereagh and in the Bennett inquiry. We knew how we had used those people, with the Liberals, to maintain the Government. Then, when the Liberals left us, they were discarded like an old pair of gloves in favour of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) and his friends.

We know exactly what went on then. That is why we are saying that the present development represents a weakening of the position.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The hon. Gentleman is becoming something of a revisionist. May I take him back to his earlier comments, when he said, gesticulating to give greater effect to his words, that the Unionists grasped the issue of decommissioning out of the air. Would he like to reflect on that comment, given the fact that the Unionists were required not simply by necessity but by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the Dublin Prime Minister, who said that the issue had to be addressed at the start of the process? Under the instructions of his friend the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, as well as those of our own Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Unionists were required to do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I remind the House that we should not get into a debate about decommissioning. We are talking about the Northern Ireland Committee.

Mr. McNamara: I agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I merely point out that when all the discussions were taking place about ceasefires and so on, decommissioning was not raised by anyone—

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): Oh yes, it was; ask Mr. Spring.

Mr. McNamara: Oh no, it was not. That was not quite the case.

I shall finish on the following point. My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), who will soon be the Secretary of State, was correct to say that all matters involving forums, Grand Committees and so on will have to be considered again. It is absolutely wrong that a great constitutional principle such as we are now establishing should be dealt with on the penultimate day of a

Parliament, without proper consultation or examination, and without considering all the ramifications of what is being done.

The Government are paying their debt. I understand that—but one thing is more important. In a few weeks' time the British people will pay their debt to the Government, and we will not see much more of that Government.

8.40 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): We have listened to a most interesting speech by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). In one amazing part of it he said that we were subjecting the Northern Ireland people to British legislation. I happen to be part of the United Kingdom, and this is the United Kingdom Parliament.

We do not want Irish republican legislation. We do not want anyone interfering in Northern Ireland's internal affairs. We want to be ruled by this Parliament, which is constituted to rule us. It is utter nonsense for any Member of the House to say that it is a sort of disgrace that British legislation techniques are being brought in to rule us. That sort of speech, instead of forwarding good relations, puts them back and back.

Mr. McNamara: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman wants to be ruled by British legislation; I simply remember how splendidly he performed at the time of the Ulster Workers Council strike.

Rev. Ian Paisley: All citizens of this kingdom have a right to protest against laws they do not agree with. If they are wrong, the law can take its course. It has taken its course with me on three occasions, when they locked me behind bars, to the hon. Gentleman's delight—*[Interruption.]* Yes, to his delight and celebration. I remember some of the things he said at the time.

Let me make it clear to the House that Ulster—Northern Ireland—is part of the United Kingdom, and that this is the United Kingdom Parliament. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North made it clear—or perhaps it was his friend across the Gangway, the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady)—that the southern Government should be consulted about what we are doing tonight.

What are we doing tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I do not want to make you restless, so I emphasise the fact that we are dealing with House business—the business of Committees in the British House of Commons for this United Kingdom of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. That is the concern of no one but the House.

The House alone can appoint its Committees, and it is outrageous for Members of that House to suggest that a foreign Government should now be able to put their hand into the Chamber and dictate to it whether we should appoint a Committee to look after the business of citizens of the United Kingdom. Would we have liked France telling us that we could not have a Grand Committee for Scotland, because France and Scotland were always very close? Are we saying that Spain should look after Welsh people and should decide whether we have a Welsh Grand Committee? This matter goes to the very heart of our situation. People say that we antagonise one part of the population of Northern Ireland if this Parliament does its duty, but this Parliament has not been doing its duty with regard to Northern Ireland for years. Would we be talking about a democratic deficit if we had been doing our duty?

The people of Northern Ireland have no real authority in local government, planning, education, health and social services and the bread and butter issues. The Minister responsible for education in Northern Ireland told us that he was going to abolish the five education boards, but when we all went to see the Prime Minister, he put up his hands and surrendered. He said the Government would not do away with the boards—that is on the record. I said that it was a good thing for a Prime Minister to surrender to a Unionist, while the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) said that it was a bad thing. Is that the way Northern Ireland is to be ruled?

Is it good government when the Minister responsible for education goes against everybody? He thought that because the Social Democratic and Labour party was not in the forum, it would not associate with us on this issue, but there are schools in the areas represented by the SDLP, and it knew what was happening. There was unity. That controversy did damage, and we do not know to this day how much was spent in all the Minister's investigations into trying to introduce a three-board rule, which has something to do with Drumcree, and nothing to do with anything else.

We have not had good government in Northern Ireland because this House has not been acting in the way it should. We had the same controversy about the number of seats in this House when we had 12 seats. I heard the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) say that we had a fair proportion, but we have nothing of the kind. In proportion to the population and size of Scotland, according to the Library we should have 22 seats, but we received only 17. We were undersold by the British Government, who would not give us our entitlement. Some say that the Government are now paying us off, but it is a poor pay-off.

Elements of the Committee in Northern Ireland will be entirely different from the Scottish Grand Committee. In a document we presented many years ago to the Prime Minister—some Ulster Unionists rapped us for it—we said that we should have a proper Grand Committee and Select Committee to look after the business of Northern Ireland. I do not know whether the hon. Member for South Down is making it up, but in the appointment of the members of a Select Committee, how did the nationalist population not receive parity of esteem? It received the same number of members, in proportion, as other parties. It was entitled to only one member of that Committee, and it got one member. If the hon. Gentleman reads the *Hansard* reports, he will see that he referred to parity of esteem on the Select Committee.

Let me make clear that anything this House does to give us the government to which we are entitled as part of the United Kingdom will be opposed by nationalists—that can be expected. Everything is considered as some sort of a pay-off. It is a pity that this Parliament did not listen to representatives from Northern Ireland years ago, and set up a Grand Committee and a Select Committee. At least then we would not have had that faux pas over the five boards; at least we would have been getting somewhere with the good government of Northern Ireland.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

The Labour party spokesman briefly mentioned decommissioning. The talks could have covered decommissioning, but by a vote of this Government, the southern Government and the Social Democratic and Labour party, we were not allowed to discuss that matter or vote on it, so do not blame the Unionists for that.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North who used to sit on the Labour Front Bench but has gone backwards and higher, tells us that we stopped the Brooke talks and the second part of the talks. We did nothing of the kind. The Irish Government brought them to a halt by calling an Anglo-Irish meeting, having agreed that there would be no Anglo-Irish conferences during the talks. On two occasions, the Irish Government called such meetings—and now we are blamed in this House for stopping the talks. Why does that man not go to Dublin and blame those who did stop the talks? We will be blamed for everything. The framework document is on the table and is the policy of the two Governments. Their agenda is a united Ireland—at the talks. Are we expected, as Unionists, to go there, bow the knee to them, and say yes?

I do not know what the policy of the next Government will be. I was delighted that the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) said that she is looking forward to an unequivocal ceasefire. So am I, because we did not have one. We had a farce. Look at the people who were crucified, who were beaten up, who were shot and who were destroyed, and it is all coming back again. A ceasefire ought to be a ceasefire.

We do not want the restoration of the unequivocal ceasefire of the past, for it was not unequivocal. We want an unequivocal ceasefire, so that all the belligerence stops and does so in such a way that we know that it has stopped. How does it stop in such a way? When the weapons that can break the peace are surrendered.

One can have Sinn Fein at the table, and I believe that it will declare a ceasefire—it is coming and I think that the Labour Government will accept it. Perhaps before the end of May, they will say that Sinn Fein will be at the table.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going wide of the subject of the Grand Committee. It would help our procedures if he could get back to the matter in question.

Rev. Ian Paisley: In closing my remarks on that subject, I simply state that my party will not be at any such talks. Let me make it clear to the House and to the world: we will not be sitting down with those who have guns in their hands and are committing crime in the Province.

We are going to have this Grand Committee, and I wonder why it is not in the pattern of the other two Grand Committees for other parts of the United Kingdom. I want to know why a majority of Ulster Members cannot be on the Committee. Will the Whips whip their parties to reject what the Ulster Unionists, the Democratic Unionists, the SDLP and other representatives of Northern Ireland agree on together? The Whips will always have the power to destroy any agreement that the Committee arrives at.

The Grand Committee should be representative. I do not look forward to the Secretary of State presiding in Belfast and making it a press conference, as has happened in Scotland, as the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) said—even if it is the hon. Member for Redcar. It is interesting that the proposed 20-minute rule—20 minutes for the Government and 20 minutes for the other leaders—has been forgotten, so that Government members of the Committee can go on and on and then have their press conference afterwards. *[Interruption.]*

This is the last night of debate on Northern Ireland, and at five minutes to 9 the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) wants to shut us up. Is that what he will do when he comes to Northern Ireland? The Northern Ireland people will teach him a lesson. We need to have our say; we sat here all day, and the business did not proceed according to the Order Paper; other hon. Members went on and on, yet when I speak for 10 minutes I am effectively asked to sit down. I will not be put down.

All I want to say at the end of this debate—we have two others coming—is that it is a pity that the House did not frame the Committee as the other Grand Committees were framed; at least then we would have had a chance to make it work better for the people of Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, as it will be a Committee of the House, Northern Ireland Members will do their best to get the best out of it for the people we represent.

My deputy, my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), offered the Secretary of State good wishes for the life that he was going to. I do not know whether he was proposing a life in time or a life in eternity, but I remember an old Scottish minister who never wished his congregation a happy new year, but always a happy eternity. I wish the present Secretary of State a happy eternity.

8.56 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): The Secretary of State made great play of the word "equivalent" in his opening statement, comparing the Scottish Grand Committee with the proposed rules for the Northern Ireland Grand Committee. His equivalence did not stretch to the Tory party conference last year, when the Secretary of State for Scotland had the St. Andrew's flag on the stage and joined hands with the Secretary of State for Wales with the Welsh flag, and a glaring absentee was the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, so I can see where the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) is coming from when he challenges the Secretary of State's Unionism.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) made the point, rightly I think, that many people, if not the majority, will regard the Northern Ireland Grand Committee as a good debating forum for people debating issues in Northern Ireland, because we all know that Northern Ireland affairs are not given enough time on the Floor of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) mentioned the equivalent Scottish Grand Committee. He was absolutely right about how that Committee has been abused. The Secretary of State for Scotland said at the time of that Committee's inception that there would be plenty of time for Back Benchers to have their say, but we have ended up with a situation in which the Secretary of State and other Ministers at the Scottish Office hog the time. We came to an agreement that there would be 20 minutes for the Front Benches,

but at the most recent meeting the Secretary of State blatantly ignored it, despite my repeated request that he honour the convention.

Northern Ireland Members should be careful: if by some fluke the Conservatives win the general election, they could use and abuse the Northern Ireland Grand Committee as they have abused the Scottish Grand Committee. If we win the election, my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will never be guilty of such an abuse.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman made that qualification. Does he accept that Northern Ireland Members might not be prepared to accept the Secretary of State behaving like that? They have already shown that they can handle themselves as a minority group in the House.

Mr. McAvoy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. Scottish Members are not exactly the most docile, either. I assure him that it is difficult to follow the rules of the House. The Scottish Grand Committee has had the rolling travelling show of press conferences and stunt spending announcements by the Scottish Office. Those would have happened anyway, but they were packaged for announcement in the Committee. Northern Ireland Members should not expect too much from the changed Northern Ireland Grand Committee. It will have powers not of decision, but only of dealing with Adjournment votes.

It is disgraceful that, at the tail end of this Parliament, rushed proposals have been put before the House. My hon. Friends the Members for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) talked about a Unionist pay-off. I would not use such language, but our Unionist colleagues should take account of the fact that, thanks to the cack-handedness of the Government, there is a perception that deals have been made.

I support the statement of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), who said that Labour will reconsider the proposals. The hon. Member for Belfast, East declared that tonight's decision should be game, set and match and that nothing should be re-examined. I do not agree. It is reasonable to look at Northern Ireland from a fresh Labour Government point of view and see how the Committee would be set in place with other arrangements. There is a place for the Committee, which can be a good debating chamber if it is used properly. If the Conservatives get in again, that will not happen.

I welcome the proposal to re-examine the workings of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee. I assure all Northern Ireland Members that the Labour party will approach it with the benefit of our experience in the Scottish Grand Committee. When Northern Ireland Members say that they would not allow it to be abused, I assure them that Scottish Labour Members would not stand for any abuse either. However, I certainly do not expect any abuse from my hon. Friends.

9.1 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): There is one thing about which I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), and it may be the only thing: it is wrong to introduce this measure at the end of 18 years of Conservative government. However, it is wrong because it should have been introduced long ago. The democratic deficit in Northern Ireland is the big argument for the measure.

In the last Parliament, we had a three-hour Order in Council debate on the equivalent for Northern Ireland of the Education Reform Act 1988. It had 187 clauses and schedules and had to be debated in 180 minutes. It was not a repeat of the legislation for Britain because education in Northern Ireland differs in some characteristics from education in Britain. In the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, it should have had the fullest possible discussion. That democratic deficit is the reason for a Grand Committee, irrespective of arguments about the details.

There are bad arguments and bad reasons for establishing such bodies. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North pushed the negative aspects and suggested why it was in some people's interest to put them forward. However, the democratic argument gives good, strong and solid reasons for adopting the measure. Everyone who votes for the measure will not vote for a good and solid reason. People will have their own agenda, their own position and their own interests. However, as democrats we should be concerned to establish the right type of arrangements.

The Government's failure to establish a Northern Ireland Select Committee was rectified only recently. It seems to me that a Select Committee should be attached to each Department of state. It was disgraceful that there was no Select Committee for Northern Ireland. The Select Committee is separate from considerations about talks, the future of Northern Ireland and constitutional change. It deals with the current position and bread-and-butter policy issues for the people of Northern Ireland. All the bodies that have been established in connection with Northern Ireland should operate.

The Northern Ireland Select Committee deals not with constitutional matters, security or wider matters but with social and economic affairs. Although alterations could be made in its operation, the Northern Ireland Grand Committee should continue to sit. The Northern Ireland forum has passed resolutions that I see as progressive, but to which Ulster Unionists on both sides of the House have not always adhered in debates in the Chamber. The forum has passed grand resolutions on setting up a commission on disability, water privatisation and other matters. I only wish that the Social Democratic and Labour party and Sinn Fein would involve themselves in discussions in the forum, so that their influence could come out.

Then there is another body. The British-Irish parliamentary body deals with a host of bread-and-butter issues. It produces reports. It does not interfere with the sovereignty of the Republic of Ireland or the United Kingdom. The separate Administrations have to decide how to respond to its proposals. It is a valuable body; it allows the sharing of ideas and helps developments to take place. Unfortunately, there are vacancies for Unionists on the parliamentary body. Unionists should be involved in that body, as the nationalist and Republican community should be involved in the Northern Ireland forum.

The Select Committee, the Grand Committee, the forum and the British-Irish parliamentary body provide valuable cross-fertilisation of ideas. To say that they are just talking shops does not decry their position. What is required is discussion of matters of daily concern in

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

people's lives and the sharing of experiences. People find sometimes that they have far more in common than things that come between them.

I have been impressed in the House by how often, on Northern Ireland issues in the Grand Committee and elsewhere, the divisions on constitutional and security issues just disappear and there is considerable cross-party unity. For example, in the debates on student loans, speeches were made by Northern Ireland Members on both sides of the House which set out a position that could almost have been Labour's position. The same position ran across the political spectrum within Northern Ireland on that issue.

The opportunity for people to meet and discuss matters and for some to hop from one body to another, carry their own ideas across and influence matters, and to learn from the procedures of those bodies is invaluable. I am not against our looking again at the arrangements, but I am against our destroying the principles of the bodies that have been established unless something entirely different comes out of the talks which could then lead to an adjustment and a different framework.

9.8 pm

Ms Mowlam: With the leave of the House, I shall wind up for the Opposition very briefly. My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) made his usual clear and positive contribution to the debate, and I reinforce his remarks about the British-Irish body, which is something at which we will want to look in future. His comments were constructive and were made in the face of some of this evening's more interesting contributions.

I also wish to reinforce the point made by the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) about the history of local government in Northern Ireland, which is a terribly important subject. We must never forget the sectarianism that functioned at local government level in the past and that persists in some areas. Equally, it would be helpful to acknowledge those local government bodies that have improved and in which cross-party work takes place. They represent a far more positive experience.

I also want to throw into the pot the local authority partnerships and the 26 district councils, where, with European money, work of a positive nature is being done across the divide, not only by local politicians, but by community groups, businesses and trade unions. Those experiences should not be lost. I accept the logic of the hon. Gentleman's comment that, if we take part of the jigsaw outside the talks process, we begin to weaken the talks process, but it is important to look at how we can begin to build trust and confidence in areas around the talks process in the hope of moving it forward.

The contributions from many hon. Members reinforced the view expressed by Labour Members on the need to revisit the issue of improving accountability and transparency across the board in Northern Ireland. We are intent on doing that and I hope that, to some extent, that answers the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). Hon. Members on both sides of the House this evening—especially my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy)—have reinforced our view that we should look at the history of the Scottish Grand Committee, because there may be positive lessons for a potential Northern Ireland Grand Committee.

Labour will not divide the House on this motion. We have said many times that it is important that we should let the measure through. However, we shall review it, if we are given the chance in government.

9.11 pm

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I must begin a short winding-up speech by thanking those right hon. and hon. Members who have expressed kind wishes for what has been described as my after-life. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) wished me a happy eternity, which good wishes I gratefully acknowledge and reciprocate. Kind suggestions were made as to how I might employ myself; the only plan that I have made is to buy a horse, and now that there is no concern about a by-election, that will cause no anxiety to anybody.

This has been a valuable debate, and I welcome the Opposition's support for the motion. A number of general points have been made: first, that it is a good idea, but it comes at the wrong time; secondly, that it is a good idea, but the Committee is wrongly constituted; thirdly, that it is a bad idea, primarily because Unionists seem to want it, nevertheless we favour accountability; fourthly, that it is a bad idea because it is a pay-off, the last cashing of a cheque; and, fifthly, that it is a bad idea because it will prejudice the outcome of the talks. I should like briefly to deal with some—although probably not all—of those points.

In respect of the argument that it is a good idea but the wrong time, I should like to point out that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced the measure back in October. Thereafter, within a few days, I wrote to party leaders asking for their views and saying that it would be nice if we could introduce the measure with the support of everybody. It is enough to say that some were more prompt than others in responding. Nevertheless, here we are, and if it is a good idea then it is never too late to introduce it.

To the assertion that it is some sort of pay-off, I say, well, big deal—the number of times we have had the Ulster Unionists voting against us does not suggest that we have received good value for money. I hope that the House will look at the proposal on its merits and will see it for what it is intended to be—an enhancement of accountability. The first thing I said when I got to Northern Ireland, nearly five years ago, was that I wanted to get rid of direct rule. The sort of responsibilities and powers I have are absurd—absolutely ridiculous. I want locally elected people to take responsibility for some necessarily rather hard decisions.

As for the argument that the Grand Committee is a bad idea because Unionists want it, it seems an odd way of forming one's opinion to decide that, if someone else wants something, it must be bad.

I want to make a serious point about the constitution of the Committee. We have endeavoured to make it a practical Committee. If it was limited to Ulster Members only, it would be a much smaller Committee than either of the other two Grand Committees, and it is of course a part of our belief in the Union in the House that so many hon. and right hon. Members who are not Ulster Members take a close interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland. I therefore consider it reasonable that that composition should pertain.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) asked whether, in a letter that I wrote on 27 February, I was saying that we intended to pass all Northern Ireland

legislation through the Grand Committee. Certainly not. He will see that in that letter I said that it should also be possible on a Government motion for draft Northern Ireland orders and Orders in Council to be referred to the Grand Committee. It is simply to enhance that as a possibility that we make this proposal.

In the time available, I cannot sensibly do anything much more than to say this about an important point in conclusion. It has been said—with sincerity, I am sure—that the proposal is bad because it will take away some of the drive for that comprehensive settlement which it is the object of the talks process to help the people of Northern Ireland secure.

I see no case for that whatever. Here is something that mitigates one of the worst consequences of direct rule—what we call the democratic deficit. It is entirely without prejudice to what we are seeking to do in that talks process. The Grand Committee will not have legislative capacity; in all probability, it will be used primarily for non-controversial Bills. It will have no power to amend. It is completely different from what we are seeking to achieve in this context in the talks process.

I very much hope that, after an interesting debate, we can proceed, and that the motion will be carried. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 99 (Northern Ireland Grand Committee) shall be repealed and Standing Orders No. 99A to 99H below shall have effect;

(2) Standing Order No. 87 (Attendance of law officers and ministers in standing committees) shall be amended, in line 9, by inserting 'or a motion in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee under Standing Order No. 99A (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (composition and business))' after the words relating to the Welsh Grand Committee which were inserted on 11th March 1996;

(3) Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation) shall be amended, in line 21, at the end, by inserting 'or to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee'; and

(4) Other Standing Orders shall have effect subject to the foregoing provisions of this Order.

99 A. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (composition and business)

(1) There shall be a standing committee called the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, which shall consist of all Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland, together with not more than twenty-five other Members nominated by the Committee of Selection, which shall have power from time to time to discharge the Members so nominated by it and to appoint others in substitution for those discharged.

(2) The quorum of the committee shall be ten, subject to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)).

(3) the business of the committee shall include—

(a) questions tabled in accordance with Standing Order No. 99 B (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (questions for oral answer));

(b) short debates held in accordance with Standing Order No. 99 C (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (short debates));

(c) ministerial statements proceeded with under Standing Order No. 99 D (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (ministerial statements));

(d) bills referred to it for consideration or further consideration in relation to their principle, in accordance with Standing Order No. 99 E (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle));

(e) such legislative proposals and other specified matters relating exclusively to Northern Ireland as may be referred to it in accordance with Standing Order No. 99 F (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (legislative proposals and other matters relating exclusively to Northern Ireland));

(f) instruments (whether or not in draft) referred to it in accordance with Standing Order No. 99 G (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (delegated legislation)); and

(g) motions for the adjournment of the committee, made under paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)).

(4) Any Minister of the Crown, being a Member of the House, though not a member of the committee, may take part in the deliberations of the committee and may make a motion, but shall not vote or be counted in the quorum.

99 B. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)

(1) Notices of questions for oral answer in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee by Northern Ireland Office ministers on a day specified in an order made under paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)) may be given by members of the committee in the Table Office.

(2) Notices of questions given under this order shall bear an indication that they are for oral answer in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee.

(3) No more than one notice of a question may be given under this order by any member of the committee for each day specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)) for the taking of questions.

(4) On any day so specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)), questions shall be taken at the commencement of the sitting; no such question shall be taken later than half an hour after the commencement of the proceedings thereon; and replies to questions not reached shall be printed with the Official Report of the committee's debates for that day.

(5) Notices of questions under this order may be given ten sitting days before that on which an answer is desired, save where otherwise provided by a memorandum under paragraph (8) of Standing Order No. 18 (Notices of questions, motions and amendments):

Provided that when it is proposed that the House shall adjourn for a period of fewer than four days, any day during that period (other than a Saturday or a Sunday) shall be counted as a sitting day for the purposes of the calculation made under this paragraph.

99 C. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (short debates)

(1) Notices of subjects to be raised in short debates in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, on a day specified in an order made under paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)), may be given by members of the committee in the Table Office.

(2) Subjects of which notice is given under paragraph (1) of this order must relate to Northern Ireland.

(3) Not more than one notice of a subject may be given under this order by any member of the committee for each day specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)) for the holding of short debates.

(4) On any day so specified such debates shall be held at the commencement of the sitting or, if the order under paragraph (1) specifies also the taking of questions on that day, immediately after questions.

(5) (a) No Member except the Minister of the Crown replying to the debate shall be called to speak later than half an hour after the commencement of the first such debate.

(b) The Member who gave notice of the subject and the Minister of the Crown replying to the debate may each speak for five minutes. Other Members may speak for three minutes.

(c) The chairman may direct any Member who exceeds the limits in sub-paragraph (b) to resume his seat forthwith.

(6) Notice of subjects under this order may be given ten sitting days before that on which they are sought to be raised:

Provided that when it is proposed that the House shall adjourn for a period of fewer than four days, any day during that period (other than a Saturday or a Sunday) shall be counted as a sitting day for the purposes of the calculation made under this paragraph.

99 D. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (ministerial statements).

(1) The chairman of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee may permit a Minister of the Crown, whether or not a Member of the House, to make a statement, of which prior notice has been given to him, on a matter relating to Northern Ireland, and to answer questions thereon put by members of the committee.

(2) Ministerial statements may be made—

(a) at the commencement of a sitting; or

(b) if questions are taken, immediately after the conclusion of proceedings thereon; or

(c) if short debates are held, immediately after the conclusion of those proceedings.

(3) Proceedings under this order shall be brought to a conclusion at the discretion of the chairman.

(4) A Minister of the Crown making a statement under paragraph (1) of this order, who is not a Member of the House, may not do so from the body of the committee; and shall not vote, make any motion or be counted in the quorum.

99 E. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)

(1) On the order being read for the second reading of a public bill relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, a motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown (or in the case of a private Member's bill, by the Member in charge of the bill), 'That the bill be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee', and the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed:

Provided that such a motion may be made by a private Member only with the leave of the House.

(2) A bill so referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee shall be considered on a motion, 'That the Committee has considered the bill in relation to its principle', and, when the committee has considered that question for a total of two and a half hours (whether on one or more than one day), the chairman shall put the question necessary to dispose of the motion, and shall then report accordingly to the House (or shall report that the committee has come to no resolution), without any further question being put thereon:

Provided that a Minister of the Crown may, immediately before the motion 'That the Committee has considered the bill in relation to its principle' is made, make without notice a motion to extend the time-limit specified in this paragraph; and the question on such motion shall be put forthwith.

(3) A bill in respect of which a report has been made under paragraph (2) above shall be ordered to be read a second time on a future day.

(4) When a motion shall have been made for the second reading of a bill to which paragraph (3) above applies, the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed.

(5) At the conclusion of proceedings on consideration on report of a bill in respect of which a report has been made under paragraph (2) above, or on the order being read for the third reading of such a bill, a motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown (or in the case of a private Member's bill by the Member in charge of the bill), 'That the Bill be referred again to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee', and the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed:

Provided that such a motion may be made by a private Member only with the leave of the House.

(6) A bill so referred again to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee shall be considered on a motion, 'That the Committee has further considered the bill in relation to its principle', and, when the committee has considered that question for a total of one and a half hours (whether on one or more than one day), the chairman shall put the question necessary to dispose of the motion, and shall then report accordingly to the House (or shall report that the committee has come to no resolution), without any further question being put thereon:

Provided that a Minister of the Crown may, immediately before the motion 'That the Committee has further considered the bill in relation to its principle' is made, make without notice a motion to extend the time-limit specified in this paragraph; and the question on such motion shall be put forthwith.

(7) A bill in respect of which a report has been made under paragraph (6) above shall be ordered to be read the third time on a future day.

(8) When a motion shall have been made for the third reading of a bill to which paragraph (7) above applies, the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed.

99 F. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (legislative proposals and other matters relating exclusively to Northern Ireland)

(1) A motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown at the commencement of public business to the effect that a legislative proposal or other specified matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee for its consideration, and the question thereon shall be put forthwith.

(2) If such a motion be agreed to, the committee shall consider the legislative proposal or matter referred to it and shall report only that it has considered the said legislative proposal or matter.

(3) In this order and in Standing Orders No. 99 A (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (composition and business)) and No. 99 H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)) 'a legislative proposal' means a proposal for a draft Order in Council relating exclusively to Northern Ireland.

99 G. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (delegated legislation)

(1) Where—

(a) a Member has given notice of a motion for a humble address to Her Majesty praying that a statutory instrument be annulled, or of a motion of a similar character relating to a statutory instrument or to any other instrument (whether or not in draft) which may be subject to proceedings in the House in pursuance of a statute, or of a motion that the House takes note of a statutory instrument, or

(b) a Minister of the Crown has given notice of a motion to the effect that an instrument (whether or not in draft) upon which proceedings may be taken in pursuance of an Act of Parliament (other than a draft deregulation order) be approved,

a motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown, 'That the instrument be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee'; and the question on such motion shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed.

(2) The Committee shall consider each instrument referred to it on a motion, 'That the Committee has considered the instrument'; and the chairman shall put any question necessary to dispose of the

proceedings on the motion, if not previously disposed of, not later than two and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings thereon; and shall thereupon report the instrument to the House without any further question being put:

Provided that a Minister of the Crown may, immediately before the motion 'That the Committee has considered the instrument' is made, make without notice a motion to extend to three hours the time-limit specified in this paragraph; and the question on such motion shall be put forthwith.

(3) If any motion is made in the House of the kind specified in paragraph 1(a) or 1(b) of this order, in relation to any instrument in respect of which a report has been made to the House in accordance with paragraph (2) of this order, the Speaker shall put forthwith the question thereon; which may be decided at any hour, though opposed.

99 H. Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)

(1) A motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown providing (or varying previous provision) for the Northern Ireland Grand Committee—

(a) to sit on not more than two specified days in Northern Ireland (at places to be named by the Member appointed chairman), the sitting commencing, and proceedings being interrupted, at such hours as shall be specified;

(b) to sit on other specified days at Westminster at such hours as shall be specified;

(c) to take questions under Standing Order No. 99 B (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) on certain of the days specified under paragraph (a) or paragraph (b) above;

(d) to hold short debates under Standing Order No. 99 C (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (short debates)) on certain of the days so specified;

(e) to consider specified bills which shall have been referred to it under Standing Order No. 99 E (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)) on certain of the days so specified;

(f) to consider legislative proposals and other specified matters which shall have been referred to it under Standing Order No. 99 F (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (legislative proposals and other matters relating exclusively to Northern Ireland)) on certain of the days so specified;

(g) to consider specified instruments (whether or not in draft) which shall have been referred to it under Standing Order No. 99 G (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (delegated legislation)) on certain of the days so specified; and

(h) to consider motions for the adjournment of the committee made under paragraph (5) below on certain of the days so specified;

and the Speaker shall put forthwith the question on such a motion, which may be decided at any hour, though opposed:

Provided that nothing in this order shall prevent the committee from considering further at a sitting at Westminster business adjourned at a previous sitting in Northern Ireland, nor from considering at a sitting in Northern Ireland business adjourned at a sitting at Westminster.

(2) The provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees), so far as they relate to the naming of a day in respect of business by the Member appointed chairman and the committee's appointment of future days in respect of business not completed at a sitting, shall not apply to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee.

(3) The chairman shall interrupt proceedings (other than on a motion made under paragraph (5) below) at the time specified in relation to the sitting by an order made under paragraph (1) above or, in the absence of such provision, at one o'clock, subject to paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees).

(4) At the moment of interruption, proceedings under consideration and not disposed of shall stand adjourned.

(5) On a day specified in an order made under paragraph (1) above, after the interruption of proceedings, or on the completion of the business appointed for consideration at that sitting, whichever is the earlier, a motion for the adjournment of the committee may be made by a Minister of the Crown, and, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees) the chairman shall, not later than half an hour after the motion has been made, adjourn the committee without putting any question; and in respect of business taken under this paragraph, the quorum of the committee shall be three.

Crime (Sentences) Bill

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I have to acquaint the House that a message has been brought from the Lords as follows. The Lords have agreed to the Crime (Sentences) Bill with amendments, to which the Lords desire the concurrence of the House. I understand that copies of the Lords amendments are now available in the Vote Office.

Ordered,

That the Lords amendments to the Crime (Sentences) Bill be considered forthwith.—[*Mr. Howard.*]

Lords amendments accordingly considered.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 1, before clause 1, to insert the following new clause—*Conditions relating to mandatory and minimum custodial sentences—*

(".—(1) This section has effect for the purposes of setting out the basis on which the court shall carry out its sentencing functions under this Part.

(2) Under section 1 below, when determining whether it would be appropriate not to impose a life sentence the court shall have regard to the circumstances relating to either of the offences or to the offender.

(3) Under sections 2 and 3 below, when determing whether it would be appropriate not to impose a custodial sentence of at least seven years under subsection 2(2) or, as the case may be, of at least three years under subsection 3(2) the court shall have regard to the specific circumstances which—

(a) relate to any of the offences or to the offender; and

(b) would make the prescribed custodial sentence unjust in all the circumstances.")

9.17 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 4 to 7.

Mr. Howard: These amendments all relate to the circumstances in which the court should have discretion to set aside the mandatory sentences prescribed by clauses 2, 3 and 4. These are of course the automatic life sentence for second serious violent or sex offences, and mandatory minimum prison sentences for persistent burglars and drug dealers. The Bill, as passed by the House with a majority of more than 200, provided that, where the stringent qualifying conditions are satisfied, the court must impose the mandatory penalty unless it considers that there are exceptional circumstances that justify not doing so.

The amendments that were carried, against the Government's advice, in another place retain the exceptional circumstances test in relation to the automatic life sentence but substitute a different test in relation to the mandatory minimum penalties in clauses 3 and 4. The new test provides that the court must impose the mandatory minimum penalty unless it considers that there are specific circumstances which relate either to the offences or to the offender, and which will make the prescribed custodial sentence unjust in all the circumstances.

I, my noble Friend Lady Blatch and the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), have explained the Government's view on this matter many times during the Bill's passage. We accept that there may be exceptional cases for which a mandatory penalty would be unjust or inappropriate, and that the court needs to have discretion to set aside the mandatory penalty in such cases.

At the same time, the whole purpose and point of mandatory minimum sentences is to ensure that persistent burglars and drug dealers know that they can expect a stiff minimum penalty if they continue to offend. Mandatory penalties would have the salutary effect that we expect and intend them to have only if offenders knew that they would be imposed as a matter of course in the generality of cases.

This will not now happen. The Lords amendments drive a coach and horses through the provisions of the Bill that deal with burglars and drug dealers.

In Committee, Plaid Cymru, supported by the Liberal Democrats, proposed a very similar amendment—but the Labour party abstained. The moment the Bill left the spotlight and went to another place, however, Labour did a U-turn. Its spokesman in the other House proposed this amendment himself. Opposition Members sometimes pretend that these are minor amendments, designed to clarify, which will have little effect. Not so. Indeed, the Master of the Rolls has said, of a form of words which was virtually identical:

"We shall be back to the present position".

He is right. There would seem to be a difference of opinion about that between the two Liberal Democrats in the Chamber. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) appears to be nodding in agreement with the Master of the Rolls; the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) shakes his head in disagreement. On this occasion the Master of the Rolls is undoubtedly right—

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the Bill will still contain mandatory sentences, and that the courts will have to go through a quite different sentencing exercise in order to reach a sentence that is not of the mandatory period? Does he therefore agree that the Master of the Rolls was somewhat overstating the case when he said that we will return to the present position?

Mr. Howard: No, I do not agree. The hon. and learned Gentleman is right to say that a different process would have to be undergone in order to reach, in the Master of the Rolls' words, "the present position" again; but that—a return to the present position—would be the effect of the amendments.

The Lords amendment would allow the present pattern of sentencing broadly to continue. A first-time burglar gets an average 16.2 months. A third-time burglar gets an average 18.9; and a seventh-time burglar gets an average 19.4 months. Almost 30 per cent. of burglars convicted for a seventh time in the Crown court are not sent to prison at all.

Is it any wonder that career burglars treat a sentence of this kind as a minor occupational hazard? I want to change the terms of trade against the career burglar. I want the career burglar to take up an alternative career.

Opposition Members say that they changed the Bill because they did not want to be unfair to burglars and drug dealers. I want to be fair to their victims—that is the difference between the Conservative party and the Opposition parties.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): If I heard him correctly, the Secretary of State has just said that Opposition Members have said that they do not wish to be unfair to burglars and drug dealers. When did any Opposition Member say that?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman should read the debates held in another place. He will find that the thrust of the arguments behind the amendment showed the extraordinary lengths to which he and his hon. Friends would go to ensure that there was no possibility of a third-time burglar getting a minimum mandatory sentence under any circumstance in which that just might not be entirely in accordance with the wishes of the judge in the case. That is the effect of the amendment which the hon. Gentleman and his party supported in the other place.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State has not answered my question. He made a serious allegation that Labour Members believe that such sentences would be unfair to burglars and drug dealers. Will he give one example of a Labour Front-Bench Member making such an assertion?

Mr. Howard: I said that that is the effect of all the arguments that were used—

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The Secretary of State is withdrawing.

Mr. Howard: No. That is the effect of all the arguments used in another place in support of the amendment.

There is a fundamental difference on this matter between the Conservative party and the Opposition. The Opposition are both soft on crime and soft on criminals. They always have been and they always will be. I wish to take this opportunity to make it clear that we shall amend the Bill to reverse the change as soon as possible after the election. The Opposition cannot and will not give the same pledge. That is the message that we shall take to the country in this general election: on law and order, as on every other issue, people can be sure only with the Conservatives.

We have accepted the amendments simply to get the rest of the Bill on to the statute book.

Mr. Michael: It will be voted down by Conservative Back Benchers.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman, from a sedentary position, makes a preposterous allegation.

The Labour party pretends that it supports much of the Bill but its spokesman in another place, as he always does, gave the game away late last night. Unfortunately for him and his party, *Hansard* was still present, alert as ever, to record his words. The noble Lord said:

"I would rather not have the Bill at all."

He went on to say:

"The issues which the Bill raises will involve considerable heart searching after the election. I still do not know whether that will be done in statutory form, but something will have to be done about the provisions of this Bill."

That threat cannot be left unchallenged. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) repeatedly said that he would not tell the country what his attitude was to the Bill until he saw its final shape. Its shape is now there for all to see. It is time for the hon. Gentleman to come clean. Does he support the Bill? Does he agree with his noble Friend, who said that he would rather not have the Bill at all? Does he endorse his noble Friend's call that something will have to be done about the Bill after the election? Does he endorse the praise that his noble Friend heaped on the Liberal Democrats? Does he agree with him that

"the Liberal-Democrat party has maintained its principle of civil libertarianism . . . in a relentless way"?—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 March 1997; Vol. 579, c. 885.]

The hon. Gentleman must answer those questions—and answer them tonight.

The Bill, which provides automatic life sentences of imprisonment for repeat rapists and other serious sexual or violent offenders, honesty in sentencing so that no one can be released after five years when he or she has been sentenced to 10, and the principle of minimum mandatory sentences, constitutes the most radical step change in criminal justice this century. For the time being, for the reasons that I have given, I beg to move that the House accepts the Lords amendments.

Mr. Straw: We have just been treated to a foretaste of the technique that the Secretary of State intends to employ during the election. He makes assertions with no factual base and, when challenged, he shamelessly tries to wriggle out of the claim that he has just made by changing the words that he used. The Secretary of State laughs about this serious matter; no doubt he will laugh all the way to his Government's defeat in six weeks' time. It is a serious matter to stand at the Dispatch Box and charge Labour Front-Bench Members and Liberal Democrats with saying that it is unfair to gaol drug dealers and domestic burglars for three and seven years and, when challenged on that, to be unable to produce a single reference to justify it. To my knowledge, no such speech has ever been made. When the Secretary of State realised his error, he did not even apologise, but simply wriggled out of it by saying, "Oh well, it is the effect."

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

We had another example of that technique this morning on the radio when, in an increasingly hysterical interview, the Secretary of State said that the Opposition parties had sympathy for career burglars and dealers in hard drugs. The right hon. and learned Gentleman smirks about that. Every time he makes such ludicrous statements on the radio, all that happens is that more and more people have confidence in the Labour party's policies on law and order, not in his party's policies.

The simple truth is that the Government have been soft on burglars and drug dealers over the past 18 years. If the Secretary of State wants to judge on the record, not on

[Mr. Straw]

the rhetoric, burglary has rocketed since 1979. It has more than doubled. At the same time, there has been a threefold increase in the chance of a burglar getting away with his appalling crimes—getting off scot free. In 1979, one in 11 burglars were caught and convicted. Last year, the number had fallen to an appalling one in 33.

Illegal drugs now pervade and disfigure our society in a way that was unthinkable two decades ago. In the first five years of the present Prime Minister's Administration, the number of drug addicts notified to the Home Office more than doubled, from 18,000 in 1990 to over 37,000 in 1995.

9.30 pm

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman and his party are so keen to get burglars, drug dealers and other criminals convicted, why did they oppose the changes to the right to silence, which have led to a reduction of almost a half in the number of suspects refusing to answer questions put by the police and an increase in the number of guilty men convicted in the courts of this land every day of the year? Why did the hon. Gentleman's party oppose that change?

Mr. Straw: Yet again, the Secretary of State is trying to rewrite the record. We proposed what the royal commission recommended—*[Interruption.]* He now says that it did not go far enough. That is a different point from his claim that we wholly opposed what the Government were seeking to do.

Let the Secretary of State remember what happened. The royal commission recommended that inferences from the exercise of the right to silence ought to be adducible by the trial judge to the jury, in particular circumstances. We tabled amendments to put that into practice. The Secretary of State put forward a proposal that went further. At the time, those two were voted on. I made it clear to him in correspondence about six months ago that we are happy for the current law to remain.

As for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's claim that the number of suspects refusing to answer has declined by a half, that is accurate in one sense, but it is worth remembering that it is a percentage of a percentage. The proportion who are now willing to answer has increased from 75 per cent. to about 85 per cent. I am happy that that has happened, but it is a rather different figure from the one that the Secretary of State implied.

Mr. Beggs: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Secretary of State should make it clear when he refers to the Opposition parties that the Ulster Unionists would not wish to be associated with any effort not to impose the maximum sentences on repeat burglars, rapists and drug dealers?

Mr. Straw: Of course I accept what the hon. Gentleman says.

I mentioned the fact that the number of drug addicts had doubled in the five years between 1990 and 1995. Where there is such drug addiction, there is inevitably much more crime, not just in the drug dealing itself, but in theft, burglary, robbery and all kinds of dishonesty to obtain the cash to feed the drug habit.

For all the Home Secretary's ridiculous, absurd bluster and his thrashing around to blame anyone and everyone for the rise in crime but the Government who have presided over it, he knows that the Government have been soft on burglars and drug dealers, as they have been on crime overall.

The Bill is an admission of 18 years of failure, for it fundamentally reverses the sentencing policy of 16 of those 18 years and turns on its head the Criminal Justice Act 1991, for which the right hon. and learned Gentleman voted. That Act, as he knows, sought not to increase the length of prison sentences, but to cut them. It sought to prevent the courts from taking into account the character or the previous criminal record of defendants. That Act introduced the badly worded unit fine system, which almost brought the magistrates courts to their knees.

The Secretary of State voted for the lot. He now has the audacity, however, to claim that others are soft on crime. He complains about inconsistency in sentencing, yet in 1990 he voted against Labour's proposals to secure more consistency. He did so on the ground that what we said would interfere with judicial independence. He talked about

"the dead hand of conformity"

and argued that we would end up with the experience of the United States.

Reverses of policy have taken place on each of the 34 criminal justice Bills introduced over the past 18 years and during the passage of other Bills. The policy behind the Bill before us in respect of minimum sentences and much else has been characterised by one botch after another, one U-turn after another.

What exceptions should there be to prescribed minimum sentences for repeat burglars and drug dealers? That is the issue before the House. When the Secretary of State made his speech at the 1995 Conservative party conference, his message was at least clear:

"If you don't want the time, don't do the crime."

There were to be no exceptions of any sort. No exceptions were mentioned in any part of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech that October. It is—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. and learned Gentleman shakes his head, but we can call for a copy of his speech. There were to be no exceptions. The word "exceptions" was never mentioned. No synonym was ever mentioned and there were no mentions of exceptions in the explanations added in the notes to editors, which are always a feature of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speeches to party conferences. The message was clear and unequivocal. As I said, there were to be no exceptions. Three convictions for burglary meant three years and three drug dealing convictions meant seven years.

Two months later, there was the first signal of a U-turn. *The Law Society's Gazette* was told in December 1995 by the Secretary of State that there might have to be exceptions. When the White Paper appeared in November last year, there was a reference to variations from the minimum in "genuinely exceptional cases". When the Bill was published in November, the wording had changed again. We were told through the Bill that there could be a lesser sentence in "exceptional circumstances".

Two people were probably responsible for the Secretary of State's U-turns. First, I suggest, was the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), who in

1991 warned the House about the problems of minimum sentences. He described them as a "slippery slope". He argued that if one case is allowed as an exception, it becomes difficult to resist others. The hon. and learned Gentleman made it clear that exceptions there would have to be because, as he explained, there are many degrees of blameworthiness.

I suggest that the second influence on the Secretary of State in his U-turns on exceptional circumstances was the Lord Chancellor. Lord Mackay has made no secret of his unhappiness with the way in which the sentencing policy outlined in the Bill was originally proposed, nor his unhappiness with the Secretary of State himself.

Lord Mackay gave a revealing interview in *The Times* on 5 November, which appeared on page 8. Having admitted in the interview that he had balked at the idea of minimum sentences, he said of the exceptional circumstances wording that he had ensured that that phrase was included

"so judges could escape what they saw as a restriction on their ability to match punishment and crime."

He added:

"I think it"—

the phrase—

"enables them"—

the judges—

"to deal justly with particular cases."

No one doubts the good faith of the Lord Chancellor. The problem is that the more the Bill has been examined in this place and the other place, the more it has become clear that its wording would not enable judges to deal justly with particular cases, as the Lord Chancellor said.

This is not a matter of speculation. Indeed, it is one of the few issues on which both Ministers and senior members of the judiciary are at present agreed. The Minister of State, for example, quoted with approval the view of the Lord Chief Justice that the relevant phrase will be construed narrowly. The Lord Chief Justice has led his colleagues in arguing that the wording will produce injustice.

In its abstract sense, injustice would not have been the only consequence of the Government's wording. There would have been personal, concrete injustice for any near-mentally defective individuals, whom not even Ministers in their quieter moments believed should have been locked up for three years, but who, on the tiny examples that we have been given by the Secretary of State, could easily have been, on three individual convictions.

There would have been even worse injustice to victims and their communities as, with the wording proposed by the Secretary of State, many more guilty criminals would have walked free from court.

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State shakes his head, but it is not us but the Government who say that. Exactly that was said by the Government in their 1990 White Paper. The point was rubbed in by the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) when, as Minister of State, Home Office, he said that minimum sentences

"could result in juries acquitting more guilty men and women to avoid excessive punishment. That is always one thing that worries me about minimum sentences."—[*Official Report*, 20 February 1991; Vol. 186, c. 349.]

In response to that point, the hon. and learned Member for Burton said quite correctly that proper exceptions would have to be written into the Bill.

Mr. Howard: As, in general, juries do not know whether the defendant before them has previous convictions, they would not know whether a minimum mandatory sentence would apply in their case, so the hon. Gentleman's point completely falls.

Mr. Straw: I know that the Secretary of State had a very distinguished career at the planning Bar, but even from my—

Mr. Howard: Answer.

Mr. Straw: I was going to answer from my limited experience at the criminal Bar, and the much greater experience of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) at the criminal Bar. The Secretary of State does not live in the real world. In such circumstances, of course the character of the defendant would be given. Juries are not foolish or stupid. Perhaps the Secretary of State will explain why he, as a member of the Government, assented to the 1990 White Paper, which claimed categorically that minimum sentences could result in juries acquitting more guilty men and women to avoid excessive punishment. Why did the Government put that forward in 1990?

Mr. Howard: I have tried to explain to the hon. Gentleman, but he seems bereft of understanding this evening. There is a difference between the proposition identified in the White Paper, which deals with minimum sentences in general, and the very specific targeted proposals in the Bill that provide for minimum sentences for repeat offenders, for third-time burglars and for third-time traffickers in hard drugs. It would be a very bold counsel for the defendant who would automatically put before the jury the character of the defendant in those circumstances. That is the difference between the two.

Mr. Straw: But in any circumstance, one could arrive only at a situation where guilty men walked free as a result of the prospect of an automatic minimum sentence, if that was put in by the defence; and the Government of which the Secretary of State is a member clearly had that in mind when they asserted that absolute minimum sentences could result in juries acquitting more guilty men and women to avoid excessive punishment.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, these days, it is far more common for defence counsel to include their client's character in order to be able to bring out all the other advantageous facts for the defence that can flow only from the character going in, and that juries these days are very fair about defendants whose character is put in? That is the experience of all of us who practise

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

in the criminal courts. There is potential in the provisions for the totting up to be used by skilful counsel as a way of securing sympathy from the jury that would not be available currently. That, I suggest to the hon. Gentleman, is the real world in which those of us who practise as criminal barristers operate.

Mr. Straw: I agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman. Of course that is the real world, and that it is why there has to be proper provision for exceptions.

Without any regard for the facts of our amendment, the Secretary of State bleats that it would drive a coach and horses through the Bill. We have heard that phrase time and again, and it is increasingly less convincing. It will do nothing of the kind, as Ministers in the other place made clear. We heard that nonsense just now from the Secretary of State, but in the other place the Government Chief Whip, Lord Strathclyde, said categorically that the Bill, as amended by the House of Lords, provides for

"automatic life sentences for serious violent and sexual offences; establishes the principle of mandatory minimum sentences for persistent drug offenders and domestic burglars".

Baroness Blatch added on Third Reading that the Bill

"addresses some very serious concerns in the community about violent offences, dealing in Class A drugs and persistent burglaries."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 March 1997; Vol. 579, c. 838, 891.]

We agree with those sentiments. Much as they try, the Government cannot have it both ways.

Our amendment would give life to the intention of the Lord Chancellor to enable judges, within a framework of minimum sentences, to deal justly with particular cases. That was the phrase that the Lord Chancellor used. Why cannot the Government see that, or do they want the courts to deal unjustly with particular cases? Do they want to betray the interests of victims, as guilty people walk free from courts?

Our amendment has been carefully worded, and contrary to the claims of the Secretary of State, is very different in character and effect from that moved by the Liberal Democrats here and in the other place.

9.45 pm

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman seems to be coming to the end of his remarks. Before he sits down, I remind him of the undertaking that he gave to the House before the Bill left for the other place that, when it was in its final shape, he would tell the House and the country of his attitude to it. We look forward to his answering that question, and the other specific questions that I put to him on whether he agrees with the remarks made last night about the Bill by his noble Friend, Lord McIntosh of Haringey.

Mr. Straw: Of course, I shall deal with our approach to the Bill. But as I was saying, our amendment is carefully worded, and is different in character and effect from that moved by the Liberal Democrats here and in the other place. There would be a clear presumption in favour of the minimum sentence. That was accepted when the debate on this amendment was held in the other place. The discretion of the court, which the Secretary of State has accepted in principle, would be properly defined to avoid injustice and the betrayal of victims that would follow from his wording.

In addition, there would be the added safeguard that in every case the Attorney-General would be able to appeal any sentence that he felt made undue use of the limited discretion being given to the court. If we are in government, we intend to make use of that discretion. I do not believe for a moment that 40 per cent. or 50 per cent. of cases that would otherwise trigger minimum sentences would result in an exercise by the courts of discretion. That was never the intention of this place or the other place. If that were to happen, it would obviously have to be looked at again by the House and by the Government.

In the other place, the amendment was supported not only by their Lordships on the Opposition Benches, but by 29 Conservative peers, including the noble Lord, Lord Hailsham, the former Conservative Lord Chancellor. The Secretary of State should consider that the next time he accuses anyone who supports the amendment of being soft on burglars and soft on drug dealers. Is he suggesting that that long list of distinguished former Law Officers, Lord Chancellors and other Ministers of the Crown in Conservative Administrations in the past 18 years are soft on crime, soft on drug dealers and soft on burglars? I hope that in the next six weeks he will seek to elevate the debate above such insults not only to us—we can take those—but to members of his own party.

The other place having made its decision on the amendment, the proper constitutional way would have been for this House to debate and vote on it in the usual way. It is for this elected House to make final decisions on all such matters. That is what I agreed with the Secretary of State, and what the Labour Front Bench in the other place voted on yesterday. I regret that that has not happened. In many respects, however, the other place did the Home Secretary a favour yesterday. The Home Secretary knows that there was substantial support for our amendment, on his own side in the House of Commons as well as in the other place. He knows that, had the amendment been subject to a vote here, he would have been in great danger of being defeated by his hon. Friends.

I have made it clear throughout proceedings on the Bill, and I make it clear now, that we support automatic life sentences for repeat rapists and other serious sexual and violent offenders, as laid down in the Bill. We support the principle of minimum sentences of three and seven years respectively for thrice-convicted burglars and drug dealers, and, under the amendment, the practice as well. If such arrangements are to achieve their end, however, they must work justly and efficiently. The amendments that we have tabled will help that process.

The Government go into this election with a worse record on crime than any Government since the war, and a worse record than any other major industrialised country. A former Home Office Minister, the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), told *The Guardian* on 1 August last year:

"The Labour Party is outflanking us on law and order and there is a serious danger of the Conservative Party at all levels losing the plot".

The Home Secretary has certainly lost the plot on law and order. Under his party, crime has rocketed, victims have suffered and communities have been disfigured by crime.

The sooner the present Government are swept from office, the sooner we can again have measures to make our communities safe again.

Mr. Alex Carlile: In my last gasp in the House, I make no apology for reviving—and, indeed, speaking from the heart of—the Liberal credentials that made me a Liberal and a member of the Liberal Democrat party.

When we hear the Labour party talk of being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, and when we hear the Home Secretary say,

"If you don't want the time, don't do the crime,"

we are not hearing policies or proposals; we are just hearing slogans. It really is time that both the present Government and the party that may well form the next Government got to grips with an issue that has been driven home to them time and again.

The issue has been driven home by, in particular, the likes of Lord Bingham, our present Lord Chief Justice; Lord Taylor, his immediate predecessor; Lord Woolf, the Master of the Rolls; and Lord Donaldson, the previous Master of the Rolls—no socialist he—that the basis for making new laws in relation to criminal justice policy is worthless unless it is founded on principles of justice.

When the Bill left the House of Commons after Third Reading, the Labour party was doing a sort of soft shoe shuffle around the issues. It was not sure whether it was for or against the new provisions, or somewhere in between. In the House of Lords, it was Liberal Democrat peers who started the debate that has led to the amendment that the House of Commons will accept tonight—and I am proud of that, too.

What was the basis of the argument advanced by the Liberal Democrat peers? It was purely that the law should be just and should continue to be administered by judges, and that the House of Commons should not tell judges how to exercise their discretion in matters that go to the very root of judicial discretion.

The Labour party, of course, could not adopt the Liberal Democrat amendments in the other place; apparently, it would have been undignified for it to do so. It therefore created its own amendment, and that is what is contained in the amendments that we are debating now.

Yesterday, we were in a very odd position. It is clear that it took the Liberal Democrats to force the circumstances in which we now find ourselves, in which the House will accept a Labour amendment that was passed in the House of Lords, because the Labour party is not sure whether it really wanted its amendment—which was passed by the Lords—to be passed in the House of Commons. What a strange situation that is. However, things often move in a mysterious way and here we are.

What are we left with? For the Home Secretary to say that his particular prejudices being defeated results in a coach and horses being driven through the Bill is very unconvincing. He has a distinguished past as an expert in town and country planning law—I am told that there was none better—but he has shown his inexperience time and again in the understanding of what happens in criminal courts.

One is bound to ask oneself: what does one have to do to a Home Secretary such as this if he will not listen to the Lord Chief Justice, the previous Lord Chief Justice, the Master of the Rolls, the previous Master of the Rolls, the former Lord Chancellor and the right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd), who was a Minister of State in the Home Office and who single-handedly won the argument on Second Reading on the Bill? What does it take to persuade the Home Secretary that the basis for changing criminal justice policy must be to produce just results?

I am disappointed that we have not gone a stage further than the amendments. They contain the apparently unacceptable proposition that someone should not receive a mandatory minimum sentence for burglary or the possession of class A drugs if it would be unjust for him to receive such a sentence for the possession of class A drugs or burglary, so the Government want sentences to be passed that are unjust. That is the only conclusion that one can draw, and it is a most extraordinary one.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): By definition.

Mr. Carlile: By definition, as my hon. Friend says.

We can view with great satisfaction the outcome of the negotiations. There will be minimum mandatory sentences. The Home Secretary should recognise that we for one have moved some way towards his position in accepting that there should be new presumptions in sentencing policy. Today, when the judge sentences for a third burglary or a third class A drugs offence, he takes what he considers to be the appropriate sentence, having regard to the leading cases that are in the standard books on sentencing. He then tinkers one way or the other with those standard sentences.

When the Bill enters into law, the position will be completely different. It will be presumed that the minimum mandatory sentence should be passed, but, if the judge goes through a different thought process from today's sentencing procedures and decides that it would be unjust to pass such a sentence, he will pass another sentence. What on earth can be wrong with that? It considers the victims of crime, it ensures that the criminal receives the proper sentence, and it is a sensible process. It is extraordinary to be told that that drives a coach and horses through the Bill.

We Liberal Democrats were not as successful as we would have wished to be in relation to mandatory life sentences. Yesterday in the other place, Lord Bingham, the Lord Chief Justice, in a moving and eloquent speech, pointed out that the passing of a sentence of life imprisonment is a solemn and formidable occasion. The person who is sentenced forfeits not only the time that he spends in prison, but the rest of his life, to the state. In certain circumstances, the state can recall him to prison, even if he does not commit a criminal offence.

I have been in court, probably on more occasions than the Home Secretary, when life sentences have been passed. Unfortunately, not a small number of them have been on people whom I have defended unsuccessfully, and I am delighted to say that a fair number have been on people whom I have prosecuted successfully. It is a solemn occasion, and not something to be trifled with.

It is extremely important that, when a life sentence is passed and the judge makes the prisoner forfeit the rest of his life to the state, even after that prisoner is released, if he is to be, there should be a clear understanding that

[Mr. Carlile]

there is a system of real justice embracing that solemn process. There is no more solemn process in the courts than the passing of a life sentence.

I would therefore have liked to see the same amendment made in relation to mandatory life sentences as in relation to burglary and class A drugs offences. None the less, we have agreed to go a little bit of the way with the Home Secretary, by means of subsection (3) of the new clause to be inserted by Lords amendment No. 1.

In life sentence cases, there will be an even stronger presumption that there should be an automatic life sentence. A case in which that will not happen will have to be very exceptional. To describe that as driving a coach and horses through the Bill passes understanding. I am afraid that it is another of the Home Secretary's slogans.

In sum, we, the Liberal Democrats, are pleased to have been the instrument of justice—for that is what we have been, when the Labour party was reluctant to play that part, and when the Home Secretary could not see it when it stared him in the face.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question required to be put at that hour by Order [this day].*

ESTIMATES, 1997–98

Resolved,

That a further sum not exceeding £115,536,748,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges for Defence and Civil Services for the year ending on 31st March 1998, as set out in HC 335, 336 and 337.

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing resolution: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. William Waldegrave, Mr. Michael Jack, Mr. Phillip Oppenheim and Mrs. Angela Knight do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (APPROPRIATION) BILL

Mr. Michael Jack accordingly presented a Bill to apply a sum out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the year ending on 31st March 1998; to appropriate the supplies granted in this Session of Parliament; and to repeal certain Consolidated Fund and Appropriation Acts: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time this day and to be printed [Bill 140].

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Order [this day] and Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the consideration of any Lords Amendments or proposals relating to bills which may be received may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

Question agreed to.

CRIME (SENTENCES) BILL

Lords amendments again considered.

Question again proposed, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

10.1 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile: I was about to add one comment. I hope that, during the general election campaign, those who may be in the House afterwards will allow the public to be given a sensible and informed debate on the issues surrounding the criminal justice system.

Members of Parliament serve the public ill by misleading them about the nature of legislation and the attitudes of other political parties. Every party represented in the House, without exception, wants to improve criminal justice policy. No party in the House is soft on crime. We are all striving to find better solutions to a serious problem. Let us hope that, during the election campaign, the subject can be debated intelligently, for a change.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 88 agreed to.

Education Bill

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I have to acquaint the House that a message has been brought from the Lords as follows. The Lords have agreed to the Education Bill with amendments, to which the Lords desire the concurrence of the House. I understand that copies of the Lords amendments are now available in the Vote Office.

Ordered,

That the Lords amendments to the Education Bill be considered forthwith.—[*Mr. Forth.*]

Lords amendments accordingly considered.

Lords amendments Nos. 1 to 110 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations)

10.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 (Cessation of Section 3) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 10th March, be approved.

The order would withdraw from effect, subject to possible later revival, the provisions of section 3 of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996, which established a forum for discussion of

"issues relevant to promoting dialogue and understanding within Northern Ireland".

Putting it in plain English, the order would wind up the forum, at least for the time being.

If, in the language of section 7 of the Act, it appears to me that the negotiations that have been proceeding in Northern Ireland since last June are suspended, I am obliged by that section to make an order of this character, which requires the approval by resolution of each House of Parliament.

At a session of the opening plenary of the negotiations on 5 March it was acknowledged that, in the words of the chairmen's statement, while some areas of potential agreement had been identified, no basis had emerged for reaching agreement on the question of decommissioning.

That crucial subject has been under discussion since last autumn. There was a general recognition that further progress in the talks was impossible before the general election and the local elections that will be held in Northern Ireland on 21 May, so the plenary agreed to adjourn until 3 June. By reason of that and of all other relevant circumstances, it appears to me that by that adjournment the talks are suspended. Accordingly, I must make the order.

It has been a disappointment to us all that the talks were not able to make greater progress in their first nine months. It is important that the participants want to resume, and they will do so on 3 June. We should not underrate the progress that has been made under the dedicated and excellent chairmanship of Senator George Mitchell of the United States, General John de Chastelain of Canada and Prime Minister Harri Holkeri of Finland.

The participants agreed a complex set of rules of procedure, and there was a wide measure of agreement on the agenda for substantive negotiations—although there has so far been no vote on that question—but they have not been able to reach agreement on the question of decommissioning of arms, despite much discussion and the emergence in some areas of a significant degree of potential agreement.

Decommissioning is a question of capital importance. There is very wide agreement that there can be no place in a democracy for the use or threatened use of force for political purposes. It is the Government's view that the only approach likely to deliver decommissioning of arms illegally held by terrorist organisations is the approach recommended by Senator Mitchell and his colleagues in the international body. That is the approach requiring that some decommissioning take place during the progress of political negotiations.

That is a question to which the talks will undoubtedly have to return. I hope that it will prove possible to advance quickly over the decommissioning hurdle and

[Sir Patrick Mayhew]

enter into the substance of the negotiations. I am delighted that the independent chairmen have reaffirmed their personal commitment to the process. Meanwhile, by reason of the forthcoming elections, we have reached an impasse, and hence the suspension.

I want to emphasise that I believe that the negotiations have the potential to deliver the settlement that the great majority of people in Northern Ireland hope for. The process is capable of bringing together all the main political interests in Northern Ireland, but they must each acquire the same entry ticket: they must show that they are willing to work only by democratic and non-violent means.

Sinn Fein should at once remove its self-imposed exclusion. An IRA ceasefire should be unequivocally and credibly restored, and Sinn Fein should show that the other conditions set out in section 2 of the Act are fulfilled. That will open the way for an invitation to Sinn Fein to enter the talks.

Most important is the fact that the process is one of dialogue. Without dialogue, the prospects for Northern Ireland are at best unpromising. I profoundly hope that, early in my successor's time, there will be sustained movement into substantive negotiations, and progress through the heavy agenda that must be addressed, in a generous and constructive spirit. That, I believe, is what much the greater part of the people of Northern Ireland hope for from the talks, despite the anxieties and hesitations that they will inevitably feel.

If such progress can be brought about, we have the prospect of a far brighter and more hopeful future for Northern Ireland. However, if it cannot be brought about, prospects will be far worse across the entire range of everyday life for everyone who lives there. I firmly believe that there are sensible grounds for hope. For the moment, however, a pause in the process has supervened.

It is right, therefore, to review briefly the work of the forum. It opened shortly after the talks, on 14 June last year. It set to work with industry, under the distinguished and dedicated chairmanship of Mr. John Gorman, who deserves warm thanks for agreeing to take on so novel and challenging a set of responsibilities.

Many of the forum's early meetings were taken up with discussion and agreement on its rules of procedure. They were eventually agreed, and were approved by me in September 1996. Since then, it has debated and considered a wide range of social and economic issues, including education, health care, disability, bovine spongiform encephalopathy and environmental pollution. In addition, it has established five standing committees, whose remits currently relate to education, health, agriculture and fisheries, the economy and public order. Some of its proceedings have attracted criticism, but I believe that, by a substantial balance, its work has been beneficial. It was a pity that the Social Democratic and Labour party thought it right to withdraw from the forum, and I greatly hope that, when it is revived, the SDLP will return.

When considering the motion, we should note that the forum's initial lifespan would in any event have expired at the end of May this year. The Secretary of State is, however, with the approval of Parliament, empowered to revive it for a further period, or periods, until its definitive expiry at the end of May 1998. It cannot go on longer. That will plainly not be a matter for me, but I can say that it will be the intention of a future Conservative Government to revive the forum as early as practicable in the life of a new Parliament. That is for the future. Meanwhile, I invite the House to agree that the forum should, in conformity with the scheme that the House approved last year, cease to meet because the talks are suspended. I commend the draft order to the House.

10.22 pm

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): As this will be my last debate with the Secretary of State, I acknowledge and put on record his personal commitment over his years in the job to trying to move the Northern Ireland peace process forward. We know that from trying to keep up with him seven days a week when he is working as hard as I know he has. His determination to keep Northern Ireland high up the political agenda is well known, and we wish him well when he leaves the House at the forthcoming general election at the end of a distinguished career. In view of what he said earlier, we ought to wish the horse well, too.

It is unfortunate that the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux), who has been here all evening, has left. This is also his last Parliament, and I put on record the Opposition's acknowledgment of his breadth of knowledge and of the fact that his commitment both to the House and to his constituents over many years has been unstinting. The House will miss him.

The order is relatively uncontentious. It is the expression in statute of our view that the sittings of the Northern Ireland forum should be entirely dependent on the existence of the talks process. Labour's insistence on that helped to produce the legislation in this form. The elections held last May were designed to build confidence and provide a route into negotiations. As the Prime Minister said, there were two options—some prior decommissioning or an elective process—to determine who should take part in negotiations. The second option provided the route for talks to begin on 10 June. That Sinn Fein was not part of those negotiations when they began was entirely its own responsibility. It is up to the IRA and Sinn Fein to do what is necessary to convince us that they genuinely want peace.

The elections also provide delegates to the forum. The existence of the forum was not approved widely in both communities in Northern Ireland. To offset that disadvantage, it was given a specific remit to discuss

"issues relevant to promoting dialogue and understanding within Northern Ireland".

Some members of the forum, whether they currently attend or not, would dispute that that objective had been adhered to, but many of the debates have been informative, such as the debates on the damage caused by the action for community employment cuts, on the problems in the health service and on drug abuse. The committees set up by the forum have also produced some interesting reports, for example on the BSE crisis, on opposition to the Government's proposals on the education and library boards, which were mentioned in an earlier debate, and on water fluoridation.

I am not making a judgment this evening about the operation or effectiveness of the forum, but democratic accountability and openness in Northern Ireland are of

concern to us. They are themselves issues of trust and confidence. We hope to have the chance to examine them in much greater detail across the board in Northern Ireland. I have said that, in the event of a Labour victory in the election, we will introduce the necessary order to give the forum its second year of life. I trust that, if we do that, the central objective of discussing issues relevant to the promotion of dialogue and understanding in Northern Ireland will be at the forefront of people's minds when they begin again to take part in the forum debates.

We support the order. As the Secretary of State said, it is a procedural matter. If we are in government after 1 May, our main focus will be on making a success of the talks process. It is essential that progress is made towards a just and fair settlement that is supported by both traditions. It is crucial that current hurdles are overcome, in view of the remarks of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), in line with both the principles and the recommendations in the Mitchell report.

Those taking part in the forum can help by working to build an atmosphere of trust and confidence to encourage those taking part in the talks on both sides to engage with each other and reach a new accommodation. I trust and hope that they will do so.

10.26 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): The Secretary of State will forgive me if I do not follow the line that he took for much of his speech, which was, by way of giving his view of the worthiness of the talks process, the work that it has gone through and the basis of the forum. I do not follow him because I think that he is attempting to achieve by deflection what the Northern Ireland Office attempted to achieve by deception.

In a press release issued on 10 March, the Northern Ireland Office stated that the forum was being suspended. The order shows clearly that there is to be a cessation. The Secretary of State is wiping away the Northern Ireland elected body that was set up as a result of the elections last year. He does that without any degree of balance.

When the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 went before the House, it had an equivalence—on the one hand a talks process, and on the other the Northern Ireland forum. The Act made it clear that the elections that would be held would be for those two purposes. On that basis, Unionists were prepared to take part. For Unionists, the process clearly required those two facets. As soon as the Secretary of State takes away one of those facets, he undermines the whole. In short, there will be no talks if there is no forum.

The bottom line in terms of the order is that the Secretary of State is wasting the time of the House. The House does not need to deal with the order. There is no requirement for it. The Secretary of State has a responsibility under the Act to bring the forum to a conclusion if he judges that the talks have been either concluded or suspended.

The participants in the talks process made it abundantly clear when asked for their views at the last meeting that they were adjourning the talks and that they were doing so to a specific date. There was no question in their minds but that they were suspending the talks. There was no view expressed that the talks were concluded. The talks were adjourned to a specific date and that was not the first occasion on which that had happened. On several previous occasions, the talks had similarly been adjourned, the most recent being the adjournment over the Christmas and new year period. There was nothing new in the participants' deciding to adjourn proceedings.

The talks participants did not adjourn for the reason the Secretary of State offered the House tonight. I was somewhat surprised by his indication that there were problems in relation to decommissioning—that an impasse had been reached; thus, he said, suspension, but disagreement on decommissioning had nothing to do with the reason for the adjournment. The adjournment came because of the expected elections for the House of Commons and for local government in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State is asked in section 7(4) of the 1996 Act to determine whether negotiations have concluded or suspended. Clearly they had not done so, so the forum could have continued its business until it decided, in its wisdom, that it would be appropriate to adjourn. What did the forum decide? It decided that, because of the two elections, it would adjourn its business. It has already resolved that it should adjourn—it has taken the decision and is now in adjournment. The body that the Secretary of State seeks through tonight's order to put into cold storage has already put itself into cold storage. It is master of its own business. It has determined that it will adjourn until 30 May—the last possible date to which it could have adjourned under the present legislation.

The Secretary of State, in proceeding with this order tonight, must therefore have some motive other than to stop the forum from meeting—the forum did not intend to meet. Why does he do it? I can offer two explanations, and he can choose between them. One explanation might be that he is afraid that the committees might continue and do some valuable work, or that the forum might decide to come out of adjournment and make some public comment unfavourable to the Government. That is one possibility, but the Secretary of State should not run away from the views of the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland.

The other possible explanation is that the IRA-Sinn Fein organisation demanded that the Secretary of State close down the forum. Is he being obedient to Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, who have required him to do what he is doing here tonight? I let him choose which of those two explanations is the right one. If he has a third, let him tell it to the House tonight, because he has yet to tell the people of Northern Ireland what reason he has for doing something that is totally unnecessary. The forum has decided itself that it should adjourn, and the legislation does not require him to cause the forum to cease to have effect if it has adjourned to a specific date.

I hope that the Secretary of State will face up to those issues. He has put on public record his understanding that a future Conservative Government after the 1 May election would be prepared to resurrect the forum if talks were to proceed, and I seek a similar statement from the Labour party. I heard Labour Front Benchers' comments on local radio, and I hope that they, too, will put their views—dare I say unequivocally—on public record tonight. I put it to them that in the forum we have a body that has done a significant and positive job for the people of Northern Ireland.

Labour Members should not decry the fact that, in some areas, politicians in Northern Ireland have not achieved agreement. It does not automatically follow that we have

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

done a good job in areas about which we agree—such as agriculture, health, education or drugs—and a bad job in areas on which there is not unanimity. If those were the criteria, what obituary would the House have, given that we disagree on a wide spectrum of matters? The record of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation would be much better than the record of the House of Commons if the litmus test that the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) offers were the right one.

The forum has done a significant job in airing controversial issues. The fact that a matter is controversial does not mean that it should not be raised in the forum. If we are to achieve understanding in Northern Ireland, it is important that each party understands the angle of vision of the others, so the forum has performed an important role. There were 31 plenary meetings. About five or six committee reports have been produced. The committees would have wanted to continue their work and produce further reports. As an innovation, a representative whom the Secretary of State had appointed to carry out a review of policing in Northern Ireland spoke to the forum and was questioned by it—all in a calm, deliberative manner.

The work of the forum deserves significant credit, and I am glad that the Secretary of State made it clear that, even in his assessment of the performance of the forum, substantially, it had worked to its credit.

Before I conclude, may I say to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) that there really is a requirement—I put it as strongly as that, a requirement—on the SDLP to return to the forum? Its representatives cannot turn their back on the elected body to which they were elected. The people of Northern Ireland from their tradition determined that they should be at the forum to speak and vote on their behalf. Through no fault of the Unionist representation in the forum, the SDLP turned its back on the forum and decided, because it was under pressure on an issue of public concern in Northern Ireland, to take it out on the forum. That is essentially what the SDLP did.

The only ugly scene that I witnessed in the forum involving the SDLP was an attack on the SDLP, not by the Unionists, but by the so-called sister party of the Liberal Democrats, the Alliance party, which sneaked into the forum, stole the seats of the SDLP and tried to push it into the background.

Who stood up for the rights of the SDLP in the forum? The Unionist parties. The SDLP has no reason to say that the Unionists were not sympathetic to ensuring that its rights were protected in the forum.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I am sure that that was an odd line that the hon. Gentleman was fishing with to get me to respond. Let the House know that the SDLP withdrew from the forum because it was the only democratic weapon that we had to show our horror and disgust at the Drumcree events, the intimidation of our communities and the blocking of every road in Northern Ireland, led by the leader of the Ulster Unionist party. What did people want us to do—go to the barricades?

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman has confirmed that he took out on the forum something that was not its responsibility. He talks about taking up a democratic weapon, but there is little sense in taking up a democratic weapon if one merely shoots oneself in the foot with it, as he and the SDLP have done.

I noticed the hon. Gentleman marching in the St. Patrick's day parade a few days ago. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, on calm reflection, while going around his constituency during the coming election, will spend a moment to think of the useful work he could be doing on behalf of his constituents in the forum. If the new Government take the step of resurrecting the forum, and we then attend our first meeting, I hope to see the pleasant, smiling face of the hon. Member for South Down as he takes his seat on the forum benches.

10.39 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): St. Patrick, great British personality that he was, has been mentioned this evening. I have just spent a long weekend in Washington attending various events marking the annual occasion. I was at the White House, at our British embassy and elsewhere. I travelled back last night, and have been on my feet for the past 36 hours, so I shall certainly not speak at great length.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) for her tribute to our former parliamentary leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux), who is leaving the House at the forthcoming election. I know that he will thank her himself, but I wanted to place my party's appreciation for her kind thoughts on the record.

In turn, we wish the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland all the best. As a former Stormont Minister, I know that the role he has had to play is one of the most difficult in the Government of the United Kingdom. It is not just a matter of deciding policies; the job concerns issues of life and death. No other Cabinet Minister carries such serious responsibilities. Although my party has had many differences with the Secretary of State on issues of policy, I and my colleagues in the Ulster Unionist party know that he believed at all times that he was acting in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland. We appreciate the time and service which he has given our community.

I find it difficult to understand the order under discussion. I share the views of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson); I remain unconvinced that such an order is necessary. If it is possible to adjourn the forum for the Christmas recess, it seems to me possible to adjourn it for the few weeks of a general election campaign. I fail to understand the need for an order formally suspending the body. I can certainly understand the need for an order to resume the forum after 31 May—the legislation requires that if the forum is to have a second year of life.

In Northern Ireland, there are three possible ways forward. One is to resort to violence, to killing, to terrorism and to destruction. We have had that for more than 27 terrible years, and we do not want to fall back into it. The second option is for the Dublin Government and our Government to attempt to impose a solution on Northern Ireland. That will definitely result in street reaction by the people of Northern Ireland. We have had that before, and we do not want violence again.

The only way forward, therefore, is dialogue and agreement. That is what the legislation providing for the forum and the talks process was all about. I am glad of

the recognition of the progress that has been made in the talks process at Stormont. We have reached agreement on a number of issues: on the chairmanship, the rules of procedure, and the agenda for the first plenary session. Whenever there was a crisis on those issues, it was the Ulster Unionist party that gave the lead in bringing about agreement. I believe that the talks process can make progress.

The good news is that the nine participating parties that entered the talks nine months ago, even if others tried to throw them out, are still there tonight. That is an achievement in Northern Ireland, where so many people have walked out of talks on various issues over many years.

Tributes have been paid to the forum's work. I agree that it has passed many motions and resolutions that would appeal to Labour Members, as was said in an earlier debate. Likewise, the committee work has been imaginative and has contributed towards parties in Northern Ireland working together for the good of all the people there. We have had reports on BSE, potatoes, agriculture and many other issues, all of which have been first-class productions.

Like hon. Members on both sides of the House, I appeal to the Social Democratic and Labour party to reconsider its position. Dialogue requires everyone to participate—that is, everyone who opposes violence. The SDLP has portrayed itself as—and is—a constitutional party. From time to time, through its leader, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), it has said that it will talk anywhere, any place, any time. Our national Parliament created a forum in Belfast and I hope that, after the forthcoming general election, when the political temperature subsides, we shall find the SDLP taking its proper place in the Northern Ireland forum.

We in the Ulster Unionist party want to see the forum and the talks proceed. If there is no forum, there will be no talks process because the legislation combines both—one goes with the other. The Government clearly understand that message, which is why we welcome the Secretary of State's statement that, after the general election, a future Conservative Government would restore the forum in Northern Ireland. Likewise, the hon. Member for Redcar also made a commitment that a future Labour Government would restore the forum in Belfast. We welcome the Labour party's statement and look forward to the election. Whichever party wins, we are thankful that we shall once again have a forum in Belfast in June 1997.

10.46 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) and I have worked closely together on many occasions. We had deep divisions but always respected one another, and he knows that well. He and I entered the House at the same time; he is now leaving the Chamber—although I do not think that he is leaving the House; he is going elsewhere and will still be seen in the Corridors as an ex-Member of Parliament. We wish him well. I used to tell him that, if he got married, I would do the marriage ceremony for nothing, but he never took up that offer. That is a pity—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) could have shared it.

Some things need to be said tonight. I agree whole-heartedly with what my deputy, my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said: there was no need for tonight's debate. Nothing in law makes the Secretary of State come to the House and say that he is exercising those powers, because the forum can go on until the end of May. A new Parliament would then be in existence and it could deal with the issue.

The forum has been severely criticised, simply because Sinn Fein said that it would not be there. How could anybody trust Sinn Fein? It tells us that it wants to look at the whites of our eyes and enter into debate. It could have debated with us every Friday at the forum; we could not have kept it out. It was a member of the forum; why did it not come?

Sinn Fein did not come because the forum is the only representative body in Northern Ireland that mirrors the wishes of the electorate. The crowd that meets at Stormont does not mirror the electorate, because the largest party has three people at the table and the smallest party has two. There is no proper representation at the talks at Stormont. At the last meeting, the two Governments and the SDLP were able to block any discussion about decommissioning. All the other parties wanted to talk about the 17 resolutions that we had on the table, except the southern Government, the British Government—our own Government—and the SDLP, so we were not allowed to talk.

At least in the forum there is a mirroring of the percentage of votes of each party. Of course, I disagree with the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). We did not push the SDLP out of the forum. We wanted SDLP representatives to stay. We fought and we adjourned the talks, so that the chairman could shift the Alliance party representatives out of their seats. They had to be shifted out of their seats—the Alliance party that reads us all lectures about good behaviour, law keeping and so on.

I fought to get the SDLP representatives seated, but what thanks did we get? They all went away. They told us tonight that they went away because of what happened. The hon. Gentleman may as well have gone away from the House, because the House has more responsibility for what happened in Northern Ireland than the forum ever had. The Secretary of State took decisions about what happened in Northern Ireland. To go away because one does not get one's own way is childish.

The issue in the forum centred on the fact that we believed that the flag of our country should fly, but others disagreed. That was the bone of contention: should the Union flag be seen on the building? A great deal of rubbish was spoken about whether it was a public building, whether people could object under the present laws and so on. A strange country we live in, when the national flag cannot fly on an elected forum. That would not be said about Dublin castle. If I went there and said, "Take down that flag—it offends me," I would be strung up from the nearest lamp post.

It is a shame that the SDLP representatives do not go to that forum. They should be there and they should be debating with us. If they can persuade us, they should do so. They do not like the forum because it mirrors the percentage of the electorate of Northern Ireland. They are not a majority. Even if they brought Sinn Fein with them, they would not be a majority. That is their trouble.

Those who are in a majority position in Northern Ireland are reduced by boycotts of public bodies. We sat at Stormont. We did good work on the prior assembly.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

The SDLP would not come to Stormont either. The official Unionists boycotted the other talks. My party was at all the talks.

I was amazed to hear the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) speaking about Washington. I got an invitation to the Washington do, and I was amazed. It was in honour of his excellency the Prime Minister of Ireland and Mrs. Bruton. I am sure the hon. Gentlemen did not say in their constituencies that they were away to Washington to honour the Prime Minister of Ireland—not the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic—oh no, the Prime Minister of Ireland and, I am sure, his dear, sweet wife. I had no intention of going.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rev. Ian Paisley: No, I am not giving way. Did the right hon. Gentleman not get an invitation?

Let us have a little common sense and realise that there are deep feelings in Northern Ireland about the territorial claim of the Irish Government and of Mr. Bruton himself. I will not honour the Prime Minister of Ireland because there is not a Prime Minister of Ireland. There is a Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, but he is not the Prime Minister of the whole of Ireland, and the same applies to his sweet wife.

This Parliament is following the foolish path that it took years ago when it abolished Stormont. I heard the former Prime Minister say, "We have settled things in Northern Ireland. There will now be peace." That was when Stormont was prorogued. I said, "It has been like a Sunday-school party hitherto. Now you will see the real happenings." How true that prophecy was. Look back upon what happened when Stormont was abolished.

I acknowledge that Stormont was not a perfect assembly. I was a member of it only at its end. I was a leader of the Opposition when all the nationalists left. That was when I got a job. I led for the Opposition. It is interesting that all the leaders of the Opposition were nationalists until I came along at the end of the day. I know of Stormont's weaknesses, but it was pulled down when it could have worked. It could have been mended. It could have been helped. Instead of that, the House said, "Wipe it away."

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): That was not my vote.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I know that.

What happened? We had chaos. I say to the Government and to those who think that they are the Government in waiting, but only God knows that, that my party will not be at the talks until the forum has its first meeting. My party will not be bluffed. I am aware of the deals that have been talked about with Dublin. One of the deals is that the forum cannot meet if the IRA declares a ceasefire. That is the IRA's position and its negotiating stance. In effect, it is saying, "We can't have that forum meeting. We never went to it. We don't want it to meet. We don't want the Unionists to be discussing what is happening." If there is to be a move on either side of the House to bring back talks without the forum, that will not be on. I am glad that there are signs that some agree with me.

It is not on to say to the majority of the people of Northern Ireland, "We are not going to listen to you." The reasoned majority of the Ulster people must be heard. The election will prove that once again. The people will not have their elected assembly destroyed merely because the Social Democratic and Labour party or Sinn Fein says, "We are not going to sit in it."

It could be that, before the forum returns, Sinn Fein will declare a ceasefire. There are some who say that that will be before the election. I do not think so. I think that the announcement will be made after that. If Sinn Fein does better than is expected in the election, it will say, "We have got our votes and we will now have a ceasefire." Before anyone can say anything in Northern Ireland, the Secretary of State, who holds the key, can say, "Yes, we are inviting you." If Sinn Fein is to say to the British Government, whichever party forms that Administration, "Right, we are prepared to return to the previous ceasefire," that will not be sufficient. It was a phoney ceasefire. The Government should be warned of that, whoever that Government may be.

My party will not be sitting with the gunmen who have not given up one weapon. They are engaged in terrorism. There is serious news from Northern Ireland. Shipments of arms and armaments are getting through. We could be in for the darkest and bloodiest of times. Is it thought that any self-respecting Unionist will negotiate with people who can put a gun to his head and say, "I don't agree with the talks at the forum; we shall start up violence again"? They will be responsible. They are responsible, and the Government—whoever they are—must deal with IRA-Sinn Fein and anybody else who has weapons and is not prepared to give them up. Let the House learn that tonight.

It is sad that, at the end of this Parliament, we shall abolish something that does not need to be abolished. Why not let it ride out its time? On a free vote, the forum decided unanimously that it would adjourn. That is how it should have been left. It is a pity that we are having this discussion, which will not help the decent people of Northern Ireland who want peace and liberty, who want, as does everybody else, to do their work and to rear their families in peace and quiet.

11 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): I have only two brief points. I have a suggestion as to how the Ulster Democratic Unionist party and the Ulster Unionist party can get the Social Democratic and Labour party into the forum. I made this point in an earlier debate. If the Unionists entered, or proposed to enter, the British-Irish parliamentary body, could they not make a deal with the SDLP so that the SDLP could go to the forum and the Unionists could go to the British-Irish parliamentary body?

The British-Irish parliamentary body has nothing to do with interfering with territory and arguments of that nature; it operates in much the same way as the forum in terms of committees, and produces reports on day-to-day concerns. There must be many matters that it would be useful to discuss with the Republic of Ireland—matters that do not in any way interfere with sovereignty. The two

separate countries would have to decide, through their own systems, the extent to which they accept any proposals.

We have Select Committees in the House, but that does not mean that, if a Select Committee produces a report, the Government have to respond to its recommendations. The British-Irish parliamentary body is a weaker link to some extent. Representatives from two different nations meet and discuss ideas. Reports are produced on valuable measures on social security and a whole host of issues that are quite enlightening to the representatives of the two nations.

There is a chance for the DUP, the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP to talk turkey and to make arrangements so that they overcome the limitations of being involved in forums and bodies in which it would be fruitful for them to be involved.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that there are three strands in the present talks structure, and that strand 3 addresses the issue of relationships between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom? Therefore, to follow the line that he suggests would undermine the purpose of strand 3.

Mr. Barnes: From the talks, all sorts of things might develop about the future of Northern Ireland. It might affect whether there is to be a forum and what the arrangements are. In the end, the people of Northern Ireland will decide. In the meantime, the British-Irish parliamentary body would not interfere in any way with these matters. Its discussions are mainly about economic and social matters, the role of the European Union, funding and so on. Those are matters about which it is quite fruitful to have different viewpoints.

TDs and senators on the Irish side of the discussion are keen for Ulster Unionists to be involved, not to dominate them or to influence the decisions. They feel that a viewpoint is not being put. It is fruitful to have debate between people to sort out one's position. The Unionists could do a valuable job within the British-Irish parliamentary body.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I have carefully followed the hon. Gentleman's remarks. We are always interested to hear what he has to say in a Northern Ireland debate, because he is one of those who contributes to Northern Ireland business. He does not compare equals. The forum is a body elected by the people of Northern Ireland. It was elected to bring the talks about, as the way into the talks is by the forum. One cannot participate in the talks without being a member of the forum.

The hon. Gentleman is talking about a body of people representing two Parliaments. That raises the issue of the claims of the Irish Parliament, which was built on the 1937 constitution. That constitution states that the Irish Parliament's authority is over the whole of the island. I will not sit down with any representative who says, "I rule you anyway. You're here only on my sufferance." I do not want to sit down in such a body. If the colleagues to whom the hon. Gentleman refers really want peace, why do they not get rid of that immoral, illegal and criminal constitutional claim? We would then have the Berlin wall down.

Mr. Barnes: Many hon. Members on both sides, from Ireland and from the United Kingdom, who attend the British-Irish parliamentary body, would like articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution to be removed. Some of them want that to happen more quickly, and for some it is a long-term aim. Understanding would be much greater if the Ulster Unionists were involved and could put that view strongly.

I grant that these are different bodies with different arrangements, and that one has a direct democratic mandate, whereas the other is an indirect arrangement between the two Parliaments. However, given the present impasse—the Social Democratic and Labour party does not attend the forum and the Ulster Unionists and the Democratic Unionist party do not attend the body—such involvement may be fruitful, and I hope that serious thought will be given to my suggestion.

I often show my dislike of the Conservative Government and much of what they stand for, but I have great reservations about such criticism when it comes to the present team led by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I often feel that their position is somewhat undermined by other factors.

The problem of parliamentary arithmetic has had an impact on developments, although not as great as some Opposition Members believe. The Northern Ireland team have the problem of the ideological baggage that the Conservative party carries around with it. Sometimes they take up economic and social policies that are replicas of those applied to Great Britain. That undermines some of their work to establish peace and reconciliation.

I welcome the work that has come out of the framework documents and the role that the Secretary of State has played. I have encouraged that, although I have not always accepted everything. I want to associate myself with the comments that other hon. Members have made about the Secretary of State.

11.8 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I shall be fairly brief. I open my remarks by saying how much Conservative Members owe my right hon. and learned Friend for the way in which he has filled the difficult position of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We have heard much about the forum, but it is a tribute to him that the forum has been established.

I also want to pay tribute to the British armed services, which have protected the people of Northern Ireland through difficult times, and have perhaps offered reassurance in times of comparative peace.

I regret that the forum is to be suspended, and I am just a little worried about what other issues in Northern Ireland are being suspended. Let me draw my right hon. and learned Friend's attention to the findings of the judicial review back in December, when the cases of my constituents Jim Fisher and Mark Wright—two Scots Guardsmen—were referred back to the life sentence prison review board. Since then, there appears to have been stagnation and inaction.

I should have liked to hear that, as well as the forum's being suspended, the process in that regard would be reversed—that there would be no suspension of the review board's examination of the position of those two guardsmen, with the possibility of a fair and just settlement in respect of their current imprisonment at an early date.

[Mr. Phil Gallie]

Other soldiers who have made errors of judgment on the streets of Northern Ireland have served three and three and a half years respectively. These two soldiers have now served more than four and a half years, and every week that passes is wasted time for them and their families. I feel that those in the Northern Ireland Office, particularly the civil servants, should get a move on with the inquiry in which they have been asked to engage, make recommendations to my right hon. and learned Friend, and bring justice to the cases of Mark Wright and Jim Fisher.

11.11 pm

Ms Mowlam: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have heard a number of interesting speeches. Let me make clear our hope that, when the forum resumes after the election, whichever party is in government—for the commitment to resumption has been made clear by both sides of the House—matters relevant to promoting dialogue and understanding in Northern Ireland are at the forefront of the minds of all delegates, and that all parties to the talks bring a renewed vigour and commitment to their efforts to reach agreement.

11.12 pm

Sir Patrick Mayhew: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me give grateful thanks for the kind and gracious things that have been said about me, and couple with that the name of my future horse. I refer to the tribute kindly paid by the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam). I am also grateful to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), in particular, for mentioning the team.

I should point out that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office—who is now in his place beside me—will no longer be here, his constituency having sadly been shot from under him by the boundary commission. My right hon. Friend has greatly assisted the people of Northern Ireland. I also associate myself with what was said about the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux), who is an old friend as well as a very wise bird.

The key to the critical things that have been said tonight is: "There is no need to do this." Alas, I disagree: there is not only a need, but a requirement on me by law, because it appears to me—that is the language of the legislation—that the talks have been suspended. That is what it says in the Act.

I could have said that this was one of the adjournments that happen from Friday to Friday or even over the Christmas holidays, and that it was plainly not a suspension; but I have had to take a number of factors into account. I have had to take into account all relevant factors.

Those factors include, but are not limited to, the fact that this is a period of adjournment—so expressed, as I made clear in my opening speech—of some three months. It is intended not to see us over the period from one week to the next, or over a holiday period, but to enable us to overcome a difficulty that can now properly be described as an impasse. During that period, there will be a change of Parliament, and there will constitutionally be a change of Government, although whether there is a further Conservative Government or a Labour Government remains to be seen.

Those questions led me to conclude, after careful thought, that this was not one of those adjournments that were simply adjournments and not suspensions; this was a suspension. That being the case, it is imposed on me by law that I withdraw from effect the provisions of the Act that bring into force a forum.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): This House adjourns every year from July to October. Why does it not suspend itself if it were a question just of the length of time?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: This House is not subject to a constitutional statute that speaks of suspension. The talks process is in the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act and is subject to such a statute. It does not fall to anyone to determine whether the House is suspended. It falls to people to decide whether it has been adjourned. There are adjournments and adjournments in the context of the Act. That is why I have had to introduce the motion—it is imposed on me by law.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) made the amiable suggestion that I introduced the motion because the IRA told me to do so. At this time of night, I will allow that to speak for itself. He also thought that it might be because the forum would continue and come out with something uncomfortable. I have made it perfectly clear why I have had to introduce the motion.

I warmly endorse what has been said—and the manner in which it has been said—about the desirability of the Social Democratic and Labour party rejoining, if and when the forum is resumed, as it will be if there is a Conservative Government after the election. I repeat what I have said about, on balance, the value of the forum's work. It would be much better if the SDLP were able to resume.

I am grateful for the way in which this matter has been debated. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 (Cessation of Section 3) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 10th March, be approved.

Prevention of Terrorism (Northern Ireland)

11.16 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Emergency and Prevention of Terrorism Provisions) (Continuance) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 10th March, be approved.

The draft order will continue in force for 12 months, from 16 June, the temporary provisions of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996. The Act comprises a range of provisions, almost all of them temporary, which supplement the ordinary criminal law for the purposes of combating terrorism in Northern Ireland. It provides the police and the Army in Northern Ireland with specific operational powers to assist them in successfully deterring and disrupting terrorist attacks, and to enable them to bring to justice the perpetrators of serious terrorist crime. It also strengthens the criminal justice systems in certain important respects.

In particular, the Act provides for the Diplock system of non-jury trial, with its associated safeguards; for the classification of certain offences as terrorist offences unless certified otherwise by the Attorney-General; for the police and Army in certain circumstances to have powers of stop, arrest, search, entry and seizure beyond those found in ordinary criminal law; for roads to be closed; for offences against public security and public order; for the detention of terrorist suspects without trial, although that particular power is currently lapsed; for the regulation of the provision of private security services, historically a sector in which terrorists have been active; and for the special regime that operates in the police holding centres, where terrorist suspects are interviewed. The Act also provides for independent scrutiny of military complaints procedures.

I should remind the House of events as they unfolded during the early part of 1996, because it was against that background that the emergency provisions Act, then a Bill, passed through its parliamentary stages. I shall not list the atrocities. Hon. Members remember them vividly. They remember the two innocent people murdered at South Quay. They remember the people injured there, at Aldwych and in Manchester. They know that, as a result of those atrocities, many more lives were blighted for ever by terrorist thugs who think that they will get what they want by killing, maiming and bullying.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): In the light of his recital of those events, and bearing in mind the fact that in our perception the ceasefire was a sham, will the Minister accept, on behalf of his fellow Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who is responsible for education in Northern Ireland, our congratulations on having given a sharp educational lecture to Senator Kennedy when he suggested that Sinn Fein could come into talks straight away, without a credible ceasefire?

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful for those remarks. I can always count on my right hon.—perhaps I should add "and learned"—Friend to give sharp lectures when they are appropriate and needed.

Under cover of darkness, the terrorists continued their nightly punishment attacks, and behind the scenes they continued to train, to organise and to plan more evil.

Then, on 7 October, the provisional IRA detonated two car bombs, one shortly after the other and without a warning, inside Thiepval barracks, Lisburn. Thirty-eight people were injured, and Warrant Officer James Bradwell later died of his injuries. More recently, Lance-Bombardier Stephen Restorick was murdered by the provisional IRA while checking a car at a vehicle checkpoint in Bessbrook.

Those incidents are notable on account of the casualties; they are also notable in another respect. The Thiepval bombing illustrates the provisional IRA's callousness in deliberately placing the second bomb outside the medical centre—the one place that, as a result of the first bomb, could be guaranteed to be crowded with the injured and those attending to them.

The Bessbrook incident, a sniper attack at a vehicle checkpoint, illustrates starkly the provisional IRA's complete disregard of the general public, and of anything or anyone that gets in their way. Even schoolchildren merit no special consideration. Only yesterday, security forces recovered two mark 16 mortars close to a school in Derrylin, County Fermanagh. There are countless other similar examples.

In January and February this year, serious terrorist attacks were occurring at the rate of one every three or four days—and that does not include attacks aborted or thwarted. Already this year there have been two deaths, including the brutal murder of Mr. John Slane last Friday at his home in Belfast.

Here I pay tribute to the courage and dedication of the men and women of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, supported as always by their family members, and to the armed forces, to whom the people of these islands owe so much. Their professionalism is reflected in the considerable catalogue of successes achieved against the terrorists in recent months.

Repeatedly, terrorist operations have been prevented, some at advanced stages of preparation, weapons have been recovered and arrests made. Last December, for example, five significant finds of arms were made. Nine such finds were made in January, eight in February, and four in the first week of this month. Since the beginning of January, there have been 155 arrests in connection with terrorist crime, and 57 people have been charged with terrorist-related offences. Several terrorist operations have been disrupted at an advanced stage.

Among the significant quantity of weaponry recovered since the end of November are 17 mortars and rocket launchers, over 5,000 lb of explosives and a number of firearms, including several automatic weapons and nearly 2,500 rounds of ammunition.

Several of these finds would not have been possible were it not for the special powers that the emergency provisions Act provides—powers to search, for example, or to stop. There can be no doubt that lives have been saved because of successful security forces operations, and because the security forces can rely on the emergency powers.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): My right hon. Friend referred to a number of successes achieved by our armed services.

[Mr. Phil Gallie]

Does he agree that the armed services are always working on a knife edge, and that they never know when danger will strike? On that basis, does he agree that their performance has been absolutely superb? Is it not remarkable that so few errors of judgment have been made over many years by members of our armed services who have perhaps acted marginally out of line with their instructions?

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is right. I understand the special interest that he espouses in connection with the skills of our armed forces serving in Northern Ireland.

Special provisions of the kind contained in the Emergency Provisions Act have been in place in Northern Ireland since the early 1970s. Successive Governments have felt them necessary, and successive Parliaments have voted to keep the provisions. As the House is only too well aware, in the intervening period the people of Northern Ireland have experienced only a brief respite in the evil campaign, which, but for their resilience and successive Governments' resolve, would have destroyed the fabric of their society.

The Government have consistently said that their aim is to see the emergency powers dismantled, and that the powers will remain only for as long as they are necessary to counter terrorism. It is important that emergency powers of the kind I have described are regularly reviewed and questions asked about whether they continue to be needed and about whether they have been used fairly and properly, as Parliament intended.

For this reason, the Act incorporates a mechanism to ensure that it is reviewed annually. To inform the House's debate this evening, we shall rely on the report published earlier this month by Mr. John Rowe QC, the independent reviewer of the operation of the Act during 1996.

I take this opportunity to say that the Government are especially grateful to Mr. Rowe, who, at short notice, completed his review and produced his report to a much more constrained time scale than normal to accommodate this year's curtailed parliamentary calendar. Mr. Rowe has examined both the use made of the various provisions of the Act against the background of the prevailing security situation in Northern Ireland and their utility in terms of deterrence since it came into effect in August last year.

Mr. Rowe's conclusion is unequivocal:

"Undoubtedly the powers and provisions of the Act are required for another year. There is continuing terrorist activity, and there is a real threat of more of it."

He adds—and the House will, I know, be reassured by this—that, so far as he can see, the provisions of the Act have been used fairly and carefully and he has not seen any examples of abuse, nor has he been told of any.

Mr. Rowe notes:

"During the course of my reviews of the PTA and EPA I am reminded that the United Kingdom is bound by the Treaty obligations of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, which require national laws to comply with principles and standards regarding the rights of individuals".

He adds that these make specific provision for arrest according to law, and proper judicial and trial procedures, and they should be borne in mind when considering whether the emergency legislation has been used fairly and properly.

Mr. Rowe goes on:

"I bear in mind also that a balance must be struck between the measures necessary to combat terrorism on the one hand, and on the other the extent to which those measures infringe human rights. A State must have a right to protect itself, but the means of protection may limit the freedom of the individual."

In addition to the invaluable role performed by Mr. Rowe, we are fortunate to have the services of a number of other distinguished independent observers, who monitor particular areas of the emergency legislation. I am happy to say that the recently published reports of the independent commissioners for the holding centres, Sir Louis Blom-Cooper and Dr. Bill Norris, and of the independent assessor of military complaints procedures, Mr. David Hewitt, provide further reassurance that the emergency powers are not being abused.

For the fourth successive year, the independent commissioners have said that they have found nothing to give anyone the slightest cause for concern about the care and treatment of detainees held in police custody by uniformed officers at the holding centres. For his part, the independent assessor of military complaints procedures notes the continuing low level of formal, non-criminal complaints against the Army—24 in 1996—despite the increase in Army patrolling in response to the renewed threat.

The Government share Mr. Rowe's view that the provisions are still needed. They accept his conclusions, and urge the House to continue the Act in force for a further 12 months. Against the background of South Quay, the current Act—then a Bill—completed its parliamentary stages. The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996, drafted against a peacetime scene, has a lifespan of two years.

Right hon. and hon. Members will recall that, following the Provisional IRA's renewed campaign, there were calls for the Act's lifespan to be extended. The Government resisted, in the hope that sense would prevail and the ceasefire would be restored—a genuine ceasefire. They had already requested Lord Lloyd of Berwick to consider the future need for counter-terrorism legislation in the United Kingdom in the event of a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. The lifespan of two years would allow the Government to consider Lord Lloyd's recommendations for proposals for a new legislative framework.

In the event, Lord Lloyd reported in October 1996, against the background of the intensifying campaign by the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland. He has said that, even if there were lasting peace in Northern Ireland, permanent counter-terrorism legislation would be needed to meet the threat of other kinds of terrorism, both domestic and international. He makes a series of other recommendations, all of which assume lasting peace.

The Government acknowledge the considerable contribution that Lord Lloyd makes, against the climate he was asked to assume, but as announced to the House by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on 20 February in a written answer to a parliamentary question, in the continuing absence of a lasting peace, the Government believe it is too early to reach a firm view on possible fundamental legislative change.

We hope sincerely that there will be a renewed and permanent cessation of violence, which would enable us to re-open Lord Lloyd's idea of a new legislative

framework for combating terrorism. Meanwhile, the Government intend to produce in due course proposals to strengthen existing controls on terrorist finances, along the lines of Lord Lloyd's helpful analysis.

The Government continue, through the talks process currently adjourned until 3 June, to seek to secure a comprehensive political settlement, which would take account of the different aspirations of the two traditions in Northern Ireland. We seek to establish political institutions that command cross-community acceptance and thus to remove all excuses for those who would pursue political change by means of violence.

With the notable exception of Sinn Fein, which has excluded itself from the talks process, representatives of all political parties successful in the elections held on 30 May last year are working with the Government and the Irish Government to help to bring about a lasting political solution. Sinn Fein knows what it must do to get to that table. It must realise that democracy imposes obligations: it is not all rights.

Now is not the time for the House to divide on an issue such as this. I urge Opposition Members to vote with the Government tonight to continue in force the provisions of the Act and in doing so to send a clear message to the terrorists: "You haven't gone away. Nor have we. You must rethink your strategy, because we will never give in to violence. By violence, you will continue to achieve nothing. You should end it now."

11.34 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): May I pay tribute at the outset to the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler)? I believe that the following debate will be his last appearance at the Dispatch Box. Being on the Front Bench and having responsibility for security is not in the normal run of political experience, and I pay tribute to him for his unfailing courtesy and helpfulness. His respect and admiration for the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the security services were evident in his speech: he has come to have a deep respect for those at the sharp end in Northern Ireland, and I am sure that they will hold him in deep respect for the contribution that he has made.

In the present circumstances, there might be a tendency, especially at this time of night, to nod through the continuance order and move on to other matters, but that would be wrong, because of the importance of the issues and because it would certainly be discourteous to the advisers to whom the Minister referred, who have invested a great deal of time in considering how the legislation has operated.

As the Minister said, we are aided by four pieces of research: the Lloyd review; J. J. Rowe's report; the report by Sir Louis Blom-Cooper and Dr. Norris, the independent commissioners for the holding centres; and Mr. Hewitt's work as the independent assessor of military complaints procedure. The most important, ultimately, will be the Lloyd review.

This is not a criticism, because we did not make the point at the time, but in retrospect it seems unfortunate that the Lloyd review's terms of reference were so predicated on the continuation of the ceasefire. When the ceasefire did not continue, the tendency was to think that the review was not immediately relevant; that is not so.

In setting up the review we had the knowledge that terrorism is endemic in the modern world; we want legislation that responds to that fact. Unfortunately, the threat of all kinds of terrorism may be there in perpetuity. We should also remember that terrorism, using the definition of it as the use of violence for political ends, continued during the ceasefire.

The Government's response to Lloyd has been disappointing. Lord Lloyd himself said that many of the procedural provisions in the Emergency Provisions Acts might have taken a different form given the existence of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. He also said that once lasting peace had been established in Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom there would be no need for separate Acts: one would suffice.

Of course we all hope that there will be an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire, but if there is not, what have the Government learnt from the Lloyd review which would lead to a change in the legislation? One of Lord Lloyd's useful contributions was to formulate a set of principles about anti-terrorist legislation.

Lord Lloyd said that legislation against terrorism should approximate as closely as possible to the ordinary criminal law and procedure and that additional statutory offences and powers may be justified, but only if they are necessary to meet the anticipated threat; and that, as the Minister acknowledged, such measures must strike the right balance between the needs of security and the rights and liberties of the individual.

Lord Lloyd said further that the need for additional safeguards should be considered alongside any additional powers and that the law should comply with the United Kingdom's obligations in international law. Those are useful yardsticks against which to judge the Emergency Provisions Act.

I found J. J. Rowe's assessment of the working of the EPA disappointing this year. I understand the constraints to which the Minister referred, but it is a thin document and often simply describes background events or the contents of the Act. There is little that is analytical or reflective. For example, nothing is said about internment, except that the power should remain lapsed. However, let me take particularly the section on scheduling.

Scheduling takes an offender into the Diplock court procedure rather than into the normal criminal court procedure. We and others in the past have suggested that instead of cases being automatically scheduled unless the Attorney-General certifies them out, the presumption should be that they would normally be dealt with by the criminal courts unless certified in to the abnormal procedure of the Diplock courts. Rowe says:

"I do not think that the time has yet arrived when this can occur".

However, appendix D of the report shows that a remarkable change has occurred between 1990 and 1996.

In 1990, 51 per cent. of 908 offences were taken out of scheduling. In 1996, 85 per cent. of 1,522 offences were taken out of the Diplock procedure and out of scheduling by the Attorney-General. Unless I have misread it totally, that seems significant. However, the matter is even more significant than that. The principal characteristic of the Diplock courts is that the judge sits without a jury to avoid intimidation of jurors, but in 1996, out of 170 offenders, 128 pleaded guilty. Those people were dealt with under

[Mr. Tony Worthington]

the Diplock procedure, so in a sense, the services of a jury would not have been necessary anyway. Only 42 people pleaded not guilty, of whom 21 were found not guilty.

Although J. J. Rowe seems not to have noticed, the Attorney-General appears to have moved to certifying in. Only a tiny number of people in the Diplock procedure would need juries because 75 per cent. of the offenders involved pleaded guilty. It is almost as if the Attorney-General has taken the suggestions that we have been making—and we are not against this—and is moving the procedure away from the Diplock system.

I have a question about waiting times. With smaller numbers, waiting times for trials have fallen slightly, but the average time from remand to committal is 27 weeks, or just over six months. The average wait for trial, as far as one can tell from the figures, is 45 weeks, or just under a year. Averages can conceal a great deal. Would it not be valuable to include in the statistics the spread of times that people waited? We should know the maximum and minimum times waited for trial, and not only the average figure. The average seems large, although movement is in the right direction.

I commend Sir Louis Blom-Cooper and the assistant commissioner, Mr. Norris, for their report on the operation of holding centres. It is a model of what Parliament needs to consider—whether we need holding centres and what their regime should be. When Sir Louis Blom-Cooper pays tribute to the RUC by saying that over four years

"we have found nothing that might have given the public of Northern Ireland the slightest concern about the care and treatment of detainees held in police custody by officers at the Holding Centres",

we have confidence in his statement because the rest of the report is so questioning and probing.

Can the Minister give us answers to the following questions set up by Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's report? Just what plans do the Government have—just what plans are the Government leaving—about the future of Castlereagh holding centre? This is the fourth time that Sir Louis has said that it should be closed. He has said:

"We think the time has come, if it has not long since passed, when Castlereagh must go and go today and not tomorrow. We find it intolerable that the substandard conditions at Castlereagh should disfigure a system which, in almost every respect, conforms to the required standards of treatment for detainees."

Sir Louis says that even if a new building is not planned, as he believes that there should be—probably for joint use with a new police station—it would be better to close Castlereagh now that the numbers are so much reduced and use Gough barracks and Strand Road. The Government should have a position on that.

Why have the Government been so slow on the issue of silent video recording? The Secretary of State said on 12 June 1995 that he intended to introduce electronic recording. That is not far off two years ago. We considered the Report stage of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill on 19 February 1996, exactly 13 months ago, so why has the consultation period only just come to an end on a code of practice on silent video recording? No installation of the equipment has taken place yet.

When will Sir Louis and the rest of us receive a reasoned answer to his proposals on the circumstances in which disclosure of audio tapes could be allowed? He made detailed proposals for safeguards. Silent video recording is restricted in what it can tell you. Sir Louis in his report used a football analogy about what one can tell about what might have been said by one person to another during a football incident. One cannot tell accurately what was said. Audio recording would be much more useful. It has particular appeal because it would deal smartly with the problems associated—the Minister will remember our interchanges in previous discussions on the Bill—with what is known as the voir dire argument and would save weeks of court time. Is it not time that Sir Louis had an answer to his proposals?

I should like to put to the Minister a couple of points made by the independent assessor of military complaints in his report. Mr. David Hewitt remits his post at the end of this month. I sincerely thank him for his work, which has been valuable to us. We thank him in particular for the work that he did in 1993 and 1994 in revising the complaints procedures. He pays tribute, with which I concur, to the Army for improving its procedures. I have only one question and it relates to appendix C, but Mr. Hewitt does not concern himself about it in his text. There is a large difference between the number of informal complaints lodged against 3 Brigade, as compared to 8 Brigade and 39 Brigade. In 1996, there were 192 informal complaints against 3 Brigade, compared with 36 each against 8 Brigade and 39 Brigade. What were the reasons for that? I appreciate that there may be reasons of geography, or the tensions of the time, although the complaints seem to be fairly well spread throughout the year.

I regret that I have raised so many issues on the Minister's last day at the Dispatch Box, but he would not have expected anything else of me. They are important issues, in terms of justice and civil liberties. Even if the Minister cannot fully answer the points that I have raised today, I have at least told the civil service the questions that an incoming Labour Government will want to have answered.

We shall not vote against the order because it is important to safeguard the people of Northern Ireland. I should like the Minister to respond to the points that I have raised.

11.49 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): First, I offer the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), the good wishes of my colleagues and myself as he retires from the House. It is one thing to resign one's seat; it is another to fight and lose; but it is a far worse thing when the boundary commission destroys one's seat and takes it away. I do not know whether in his mind there is a feeling that it is some sort of conspiracy to get rid of him altogether from the House, but we wish him well and I am sure that the people of Northern Ireland would join us in that.

The Government and the security forces will ignore at their peril the warning contained in John Rowe's report on the annual review of the Emergency Provisions Act. On page seven, he says that, since the end of the IRA ceasefire,

"there has been a marked increase in the level of terrorist activity, both in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland. I am particularly dealing with Northern Ireland; activity there is attributable to terrorists on both sides.

There have been deaths caused by explosion, firearm attacks and assaults. Indeed, within a few days before the writing of this, a British soldier was killed by a sniper's bullet at Bessbrook.

There are persistent serious attacks on the security forces. There is the regular movement and preparation of firearms and munitions; and searches reveal such things. Robberies are carried out for the purpose of funding terrorist organisations. In preparation for terrorist attacks like these, ordinary dwellinghouses are taken over by terrorists, who intimate the householders.

Terrorist organisations maintain their structure and influence. There is intimidation of local communities and businesses, and there is overwhelming intimidation of people who would otherwise be witnesses in a court of law. Paramilitary 'punishment' assaults take place regularly."

That is a solemn comment on what is happening in Northern Ireland at this very moment.

In the past fortnight, our Province has tasted more of the IRA's unremitting evil. On Friday, a terrorist bomb seriously injured soldiers and police personnel in east Belfast. Seven days before, soldiers to the west of the city escaped another Provisional IRA bomb. On Friday, a Roman Catholic man was shot dead in his home. Only by the mercy of God have many other attempts on the lives of soldiers and civilians failed to produce the number of casualties the IRA has planned for our Province.

There are some credulous people who publicly suggest that those bombing failures are, in fact, planned failures and that the IRA is in some way planning to miss its targets in a phoney war to keep its more militant members happy. I have never listened to such nonsense being spoken about the ruthless and murderous intent of the IRA. Anyone who believes that the IRA is not intent on mass destruction should take a few minutes to go to the spot in Bessbrook that marks the place where young Stephen Restorick met his death—brutally murdered by the IRA on Ulster's frontier with the Irish Republic.

Many more soldiers, police officers and civilians will be sacrificed in a war with terrorism that should have been won years ago. John Rowe's firm conclusion is that the EPA is still required on the statute book, but I urge the Government—whatever Government are in power—to take the next vital step and start enforcing those measures, so that they have a greater effect against the terrorist.

I welcome the success that the security services have had. I notice that several terrorist suspects have been brought to the courts on serious charges, resulting from arrests in west Belfast last week; I welcome that. I also welcome the fact that in certain areas the IRA has been put under pressure and hunted down. However, I believe that its members must be targeted for round-the-clock surveillance and they must be caught and put behind bars for a long time. These people will not be reformed. They are murderers and intend to murder, and they must be punished as such.

I join others in the House in paying tribute to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, to the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve, to the members of Her Majesty's forces and to all who serve the community to give us protection. I also pay a tribute to people who are often forgotten—the dear mother who, every morning, says goodbye to her husband and lover, the father of her children, not knowing what will happen during the day. Many members of my church serve in the security forces and I know how mothers feel, how wives feel, and especially how children feel when their Dad goes out in answer to the call of duty. Those are the really brave people in Northern Ireland, whose voice is seldom heard, who soldier on from day to day. I lay a wreath of tribute to them tonight.

The Government have embarked on a course that I feel is a tragedy: they believe that they can woo the men of violence. I think they will live to regret it. Already, the IRA has made fools of the British and Irish Governments and of the American Government. I spoke to Bill Clinton when he was in Belfast. He thought that he had the IRA converted and he thought, because Gerry Adams had shaken his hand on the Falls road and he had received such a good reception at the city hall, that it was all settled and he would go home as another saint. Of course, the nationalists would have protested at having a St. Bill or a St. William; that would not have been in keeping with their vocabulary.

I said to Bill Clinton, "You would not bring the murderers from Oklahoma to the White House. You would not shake hands with them. You would not say, 'Keep your guns.' You would not say, 'There is a place for you in government.'" Says I, "What do you think of me? You've said you want to know how an Ulsterman ticks. How I tick is the way you would tick. You would kick me out of this room if I suggested such things. Well, I feel like kicking you out of the room when you shake hands with Gerry Adams, his hands stained with the blood of five of my European constituents who lost their lives in the Shankhill road."

The IRA has played one phoney ceasefire on the Government and would like to do so again. I trust that no British Government will be fooled again, because all the IRA wants is to attain its goal. Let not the people of the Irish Republic think that members of the IRA are their friends, for what they would do in Northern Ireland they will do in the south of Ireland to get their way.

The IRA campaign is tragically for real. The IRA is not interested in peace; it is interested only in total victory for itself. A Government who do not realise that to be the case will feel it their duty to protect the citizens of this kingdom. The attendant facets of terrorism continue with unrelenting accuracy. They are targeting for murder, paramilitary beatings, money laundering, racketeering and all manner of criminal activity, including the drug business, destroying youth and children.

Any society that has been threatened by the level of criminal violence witnessed in Ulster during the past three decades must protect itself in the most meaningful way that it can.

A great deal has been done to alleviate the position of those who have been charged with terrorist offences. I know that conditions, for instance, in the Castlereagh holding centre are not great; but I know worse conditions in which our soldier boys and police men are serving tonight. I have seen how some of them do not even have their own beds. They get out of bed and another man gets into it. I think we should get our priorities right: we should first look after the men who are doing the job on the ground for us.

Anti-terrorist legislation is vital. All too often it is misinterpreted as anti-civil liberties. The fact is that it is in place to uphold our civil liberties—the liberties of the peaceful majority against the murderous evil of terrorism. I want the powers that we have to be effectively used. Some time ago a television documentary programme carried out an investigation into the activities of Martin McGuinness. He is going to be a "respectable" candidate at the election, standing against my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Ulster (Rev. William McCrea).

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

After the documentary's revelations, I called for McGuinness's arrest; so did many other hon. Members. Was he ever questioned for directing terrorism? Was he ever taken to a police station or to Castlereagh? It would not suit the Government to take a leading republican such as Mr. McGuinness. There would be an outcry. Indeed, there was a outcry recently when bail was not granted to a prisoner in this country. I heard a Member of the European Parliament from the south of Ireland tell Europe that she, the prisoner, was being tortured in a London gaol!

We need to be tough on terrorists, whichever side of the fence they come from. The Government must be more creative in pursuit of republican terrorism—and all terrorism. They should use the measures at their disposal instead of just threatening to use them. What is the use of the Act if it is not used? It just becomes an annual farce, not an annual renewal.

12.2 am

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I echo the regret expressed by others that the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), is having, perforce, to leave the House. It is an unfortunate fact that before someone can come here, he must have a constituency; in that constituency he has to get folk to vote for him; and the right hon. Gentleman managed both things—but just as he was getting settled in, finding a useful job to do in Northern Ireland, along came the boundary commission and swept his constituency away.

The very opposite applies in Northern Ireland, of course. At the behest of the Dublin authorities, people run around changing the boundaries to ensure that some Members of this House who rarely attend can remain in it.

Many of us have come to know and respect the right hon. Gentleman. We regret his leaving, and the fact that other constituencies did not have the good wit to take him aboard. He would have been an asset in any new Conservative Government responsible for Northern Ireland. If the Conservatives are elected again, they will face a certain difficulty in the Northern Ireland Office—most of its occupants seem to be going, going or gone.

My eye, like that of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), was caught by chapter 3 of Mr. Rowe's report. I shall not weary the House by reading out what the hon. Gentleman has already read out; but I was surprised to see Mr. Rowe talk about dwellings being taken over by terrorists who intimidate the householders without going on to point out that cars were clearly stolen to order by the same terrorists. Sometimes, cars turn up with false number plates. They are usually the same colour and often the same make as cars that are sitting 20, 30 or 50 miles away. The idea that the attacks mounted by the IRA are put up on the spur of the moment is blown out of the window by that fact alone.

We also have the statement at the bottom of page 7 that

"There is intimidation . . . and there is the overwhelming intimidation of people who would otherwise be witnesses in a court of law."

When the Minister opened the debate, he drew attention to the Diplock courts. I am surprised that Mr. Rowe did not mention that one of the reasons why we have Diplock courts is that the IRA would not only intimidate witnesses, it would murder jurors who dared to find IRA members guilty. People who think that members of the jury could hide away in a society as small as Northern Ireland are wrong: they could not. While I believe that many people would serve honestly in juries, others simply would not be willing to do so, because of the fear that would be caused to them and the dangers to their families while they were doing that work.

In that chapter, we see clear hints of the methods that the terrorist organisations use. But there is more to it than that. They not only use those methods; they take care to terrorise first the Roman Catholic population. If some of them are prepared to stand up against them, they are eliminated or intimidated into silence and acquiesence with the IRA and its activities. Once they have finished with the Roman Catholic population and had it silenced or moved out, they attack the Protestant and Unionist population.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ross: Will the hon. Gentleman wait a moment?

The terrorist organisations carry out attacks on Protestant and Unionist property for two reasons: first, to create a Republican ghetto, in which they are left in complete control; and, secondly, to raise the temperature. We had two such incidents last night: one in Bellaghy, which the hon. Member for Mid–Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) knows well, where an Orange hall was burnt; and a second in Clough, where another Orange hall was burnt. There has not been too much of that during the past few months, but it is now on the up, to ensure that the temperature rises.

Rev. Ian Paisley: May I just mention that that was clearly seen in the murder of young Stephen Restorick? The woman who was beside him when he was shot has come under so much threat that when a memorial service was held in Bessbrook, the young boy's mother and father could not invite her, as she would be under more threat. One can have no stronger threat than that: people being intimidated when they go to a memorial service for a person whom the IRA has murdered.

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman's remarks will no doubt be heard and, I hope, absorbed by the few people in the House to hear them. I have other personal knowledge of the intimidation that has been practised on Roman Catholics.

The horror is that, for the past 25 years, the Northern Ireland Office has treated IRA-Sinn Fein as if it was simply another political pressure group that will at some time reach a compromise deal. The hon. Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), who has sadly left the Chamber, went down the same foolish path as he often goes down, when he insinuated that there is an economic and social solution. The same concept breaks through the surface periodically whenever people talk about doves and hawks in the IRA. I have always believed that those people are all hawks. I have never believed the soft words and crocodile tears that we get from people such as Mr. Adams. Those people are the best of actors; they would all have been worthy of an Oscar, had they gone into films. They are not in films, however; they are in

murder. That is what they are about. They use every concession as a stepping stone. They do not look upon a concession given to them as a way of edging towards an agreement. They look upon those who give them concessions as bloody fools; then they seize the concession and say, "What's next?" They immediately stop talking about what they have been given—that fades into that past—and they move on to their next demand.

Reference has been made to the events of last summer. We should compare that with what has emerged over the months since, especially in the Prime Time TV programme, in which it was revealed that the entire confrontation on the streets of Northern Ireland had been planned by the IRA for three years. It did not drop out of the blue. It was not genuine protest by residents. It had been planned for three years, in the words of Mr. Adams himself. He subsequently complained, because the world saw what he said.

There has been much talk about processions in Northern Ireland. It is surprisingly difficult to get proper figures as to what sort of processions they are. The police list them as loyalist, republican and other. I can think of many different organisations in the broad unionist community, some of which might describe themselves as loyalist, but others would not. I can also think of organisations that might not be too happy to be labelled republican because of the connotations that that term has acquired in Northern Ireland over the years.

There was a parade through my local village of Dungiven on Monday—a perfectly peaceful parade. I am not sure whether those people would each or all describe themselves as republicans. They have had their own troubles with Sinn Fein, IRA and their fellow travellers down the years. I hope that when the police compile statistics in future, they will be rather more precise, so that we can see who is marching, where they are marching and what it is all about.

I also hope that the House and hon. Members on the two Front Benches will learn the simple fact that IRA-Sinn Fein already has its targets chosen for street confrontation in 1997.

The Minister is right. The IRA has not gone away. It never went away. It simply threw a fairly thin smokescreen round itself. Some people were foolish enough to believe that, but we on this Bench were never among those who believed what the IRA said. We have lived among IRA members, we know them and we have had to put up with their horrors, in the present case for nearly 30 years. Some of us in the B Specials, such as myself, in the 1956-61 campaign went out and fought them in the roads, controlled the roads and beat them. I believe that they could be beaten again.

The campaign has been running so long and its roots have now run so deep that there is no easy answer. The first bitter lesson that hon. Members on the two Front Benches and the Northern Ireland Office as an official body must learn is that the IRA is constantly intent on trouble. It has no interest in peace. The reason for its existence is to cause trouble, to create constitutional change in Northern Ireland's position in the United Kingdom. So many people for so long have ignored that simple fact.

I believe that in the coming year, whatever Government are in power, whoever the Ministers are and whoever the Chief Constable is in Northern Ireland, they can do nothing more than select the path that diminishes the possibility of violence and keeps it containable. They will not achieve that by doing what the police did last year.

The legislation is necessary. As the Americans found out when dealing with the Mafia and its drugs and thuggery, normal law is not enough in some instances. It is not enough when one is dealing with a terrorist organisation of the type that we face in Northern Ireland. It is not enough to bring peace. The extra muscle embodied in the legislation is needed.

The IRA will not sit down peacefully at any table to discuss the future of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom. It is not interested in peace. It is interested, as has been said, in victory. It must be convinced, and it is not yet convinced, that it will not be victorious. It must be brought to the conclusion that it will not succeed. If that happens, it will vanish, as it has vanished before. Its numbers will diminish, as will its power, and we shall have peace again. That will not come about while we have the nonsense that so often fills the air in Northern Ireland and across the Chamber.

12.14 am

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): The Minister of State, who introduced the debate, has attracted expressions of good will from both sides of the House, and I associate myself with them. Those of us who have not been Members for Northern Ireland cannot know and understand how different Members' responsibilities are there. Perhaps more compellingly, those of us who have not been Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office almost certainly cannot appreciate the particular burdens, obligations and responsibilities that service in that office undoubtedly creates. I express my good will to the Minister of State and the Secretary of State, who was in the Chamber only a short while ago. Both the right hon. Gentleman and the right hon. and learned Gentleman have served in the Northern Ireland Office with great distinction and great dignity.

It seems that there will not be a Division on the order. If there had been a Division, in accordance with the practice of my right hon. and hon. Friends for many years, I should have advised them to vote for the order. I and they would not do so with great enthusiasm, but rather because I regard the order as a regrettable necessity. I would vote for the order with considerable reservations because I profoundly believe that the rights, protections and civil liberties of all United Kingdom citizens should be the same wherever they live, and that only in the most unusual circumstances can a departure from those principles be justified.

On the evidence that we have heard so far, some of it rather chilling, and on the basis of our own knowledge, we are entitled to conclude that the circumstances still obtaining in Northern Ireland justify once again the renewal of the order. Those circumstances justify powers that in other circumstances would undoubtedly be regarded as draconian. These powers should not be maintained for an instant longer than is necessary. They should be grudgingly tolerated. We in this place, and our successors, should work with all the power available to us to withdraw them at the earliest possible date. They represent a serious incursion into the rights of the citizens of the United Kingdom, which they are entitled to expect wherever they live.

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

Why is it that the powers continue to be justified? That is the position only because it appears that the cancer of terrorism lies still at the heart of life in Northern Ireland. The powers contained in the order will not eliminate that cancer; at the very best they may contain it. Unless and until a political settlement that commands the support of the entire community of Northern Ireland is achieved, we are likely to face the sort of terrorist activity that so affects our judgment of these issues.

Before us is an issue to which we shall clearly return—those of us who are here—in the next Parliament. I understand that new primary legislation will be required. I express the hope that that legislation will not be treated simply as a routine repeat of the primary legislation that gives rise to the order that we are discussing. When that legislation is considered, it will be regarded with public confidence only if it is appropriate to the circumstances of the time.

For the moment, the order should command our support. Indeed, it would be most curious if at this stage of the Parliament the House were to reject it for any reason. That would be akin to Alice in Wonderland. I divine from the speeches so far that that is not likely to happen, but the fact that we have to deal with this each year reminds us that what we are doing is of great significance, and it is something that will have quite startling and significant consequences for the civil rights of a large number of members of the United Kingdom. We should never do it lightly, but in the circumstances that prevail, I believe that we are compelled to continue to renew the provisions of the order.

12.19 am

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I shall be brief. My speech is prompted by Mr. Rowe's report. I should like to ask the Minister a question, but before I do, I offer him my compliments. In my dealings with him, he has always responded in a most courteous and helpful way, and I know that I will receive a courteous response this evening. As one who hopes to return to this place in a few weeks' time, I would like him to know that he may have gone but he will not be forgotten.

My view has always been that those convicted in our courts of acts of violence should receive condign punishment. Not so very long ago, at the High Court in Glasgow, I think—the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) might correct me on this—a loyalist terrorist was found guilty, rightly and properly, and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for arms trafficking. He was attempting to run arms across to Northern Ireland. A few years ago, when I was on the review committee of a prison in Scotland, twice in about seven months I interviewed two prisoners, both of whom were under assessment for release under licence and had been sentenced to very long terms of imprisonment for running arms across to Northern Ireland, so I have a little experience of these matters.

I remind the Minister that he quoted from paragraph 2, page 5, of Mr. Rowe's report, which says:

"I bear in mind also that a balance must be struck between the measures necessary to combat terrorism on the one hand, and on the other the extent to which those measures infringe human rights."

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred to a young woman who is detained in a London prison, and said that an MEP had claimed that this young woman had been subjected to torture. That is an absurd claim, I believe that the circumstances surrounding her detention leave much to be desired. In my view, when a person suspected of acts of terrorism is arrested and detained, they should be treated in a way that does not infringe their basic human rights.

May I point out to the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members that, in Cornton Vale prison in Scotland, when a pregnant woman prisoner has her baby, she is certainly not manacled at any time before, during or after the birth. She is allowed, if she has the wherewithal psychologically and physically, to take care of her child for 12 months. At the end of that period, for understandable reasons, the child is sent to carefully chosen foster parents—and I mean carefully chosen—or to the family of the detained woman. I say to all hon. Members, including the Minister, that that treatment should be afforded to Roisin McAliskey in Holloway prison. It know that it is outwith the Minister's terms of reference, but I hope that he will bring my remarks to the attention of his right hon. Friends.

Mr. William Ross: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Godman: I shall give way in a minute.

I have no truck with those involved in such dastardly activities. That young woman is a remand prisoner. In a Scottish prison, such as Cornton Vale, she would be treated differently. I have written to Mr. Richard Tilt telling him that. I have also written to *The Irish Times*, because one of its journalists, in a recent article on Ms McAliskey's unsuccessful bail application, thrice referred to the British prison system. I pointed out to the editor of *The Irish Times* that his journalist should have referred to the English prison system, because there is an important different between the two systems. A pregnant woman would be treated differently in Cornton Vale prison, irrespective of the crime of which she is suspected or convicted.

It is in the interests of the child that he or she should not be separated from the mother, whatever she has done. As long as the child's safety is regarded by everyone as paramount—I need hardly say that to this audience—a woman remand prisoner or a woman prisoner who has been convicted in a court of law should be afforded the same treatment as would be afforded to one of my constituents who may have committed a heinous crime.

I am making no excuses for this young woman, but her treatment, as it is portrayed in the international media, gives valuable ammunition to primitive republicans everywhere. I was talking to someone in Australia.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. The House knows that I do not mind passing references to matters that go slightly wide of the issue under consideration, but the hon. Gentleman is dwelling on this point, and it goes beyond the scope of our considerations.

Dr. Godman: I beg your pardon, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Godman: May I finish my apologies to Madam Deputy Speaker? I have said before that you are renowned

for your gentle strictures, and I shall not risk another one so close to the end of this Parliament. I just want to say that in my view this young woman should be transferred to the prison in Northern Ireland that has mother-child facilities.

I shall give way to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), but I hope that he does not get me into trouble with you, Madam Deputy Speaker, because he is a terrible man.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The prisons in Northern Ireland and their treatment of prisoners are excellent. I have acted as a prison chaplain, and I have also been a prisoner, so I should know. I was passing no strictures on the circumstances of the case. I was simply saying that a southern Ireland MEP said that the treatment was virtually torture, which was completely and totally untrue.

Dr. Godman: I know of the hon. Gentleman's prison career. I am not sure that he was ever incarcerated in a woman's prison, which would have been grossly unfair on women prisoners.

Mr. Ross: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Godman: Just let me say that I did not impugn the hon. Member for North Antrim. I said that he had referred to an MEP who had made that wild allegation.

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman referred to the possibility of a person who is held on an extradition warrant being transferred to a prison in Northern Ireland. I inquired about that, and my understanding is that that is not possible. The individual has to be held in either a Scottish or an English prison, such as Holloway, and cannot be held elsewhere in the United Kingdom. There is certainly no place in the system in Northern Ireland for such a prisoner. Surely the hon. Gentleman's strictures on the holding of pregnant women in prison apply to all such prisoners in English prisons. That is the understanding that we have been given by the Minister of State, Home Office.

Dr. Godman: I am not saying that special privileges should be given to a specific prisoner who has been detained under these measures. I think that, if Scottish female prisoners are treated in such a way—rightly and properly, in my view—female prisoners south of the border should be treated in like manner. I remind the Minister, who is a decent, fair-minded man, of what he said in his speech, and of the direct quotation that he offered from Mr. Rowe's report:

"I bear in mind also that a balance must be struck between the measures necessary to combat terrorism on the one hand, and on the other the extent to which those measures infringe human rights."

I have dwelt on the point for far too long, and I apologise for that. In this case, however, I think that there has been an infringement of basic human rights, which has provided propaganda for primitive republicans and their supporters not just in the United Kingdom, but throughout the world. As I said, I spoke to someone in Australia who expressed concern.

Of course it is right and proper for the security forces to pursue such persons with the utmost vigour, but when persons are detained they must be treated fairly and properly in our prison systems. I believe that, whatever the technical difficulties, the best course would be to transfer Roisin McAliskey to a prison in Northern Ireland so that her child can be born there and mother and child can be together. That is the plea that I make to the Minister.

12.31 am

Sir John Wheeler: I shall endeavour to be brief in replying to this important debate, but it would be churlish of me not acknowledge the kind references made to me by all who have spoken. I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). I have enjoyed responding to his numerous detailed questions over many hours in the Committee Room and elsewhere during our service on opposing Benches. I am also grateful to the hon. Members for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) and, of course, to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). It has been a great privilege to serve the people of Northern Ireland, and the House, in my present capacity, and I am sorry that I am to be the first and last Member of Parliament for Westminster, North.

As I have said, this has been an important debate. All the issues that have been raised are serious. In particular, the remarks of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie gave notice to Northern Ireland Office officials of the answers that they would need to have ready should he find himself in Stormont castle in six weeks' time. What I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that I very much agree with him about the Lloyd review and its importance to the anti-terrorist law, and the procedures that the House should consider in the next Parliament. There are indeed elements that must be considered very carefully when the next Parliament comes to consider the basis of that legislation—but that is for the future and not for this evening.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie asked about the certifying in of scheduled offences. Parliament has decided with good reason that, because of the situation that has existed in Northern Ireland, certain cases need to be scheduled. The Attorney-General, indeed successive Attorney-Generals, may certify out certain offences on the recommendation of the Director of Public Prosecutions if a particular case has no connection with the emergency situation. It would be invidious for the Attorney-General, who is responsible for prosecutions, to be given powers to confer a restrictive mode of trial in particular cases instead of relieving it, as he may do at present with those cases not associated with terrorism.

A year ago, the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie and I exchanged our thinking about that matter in Committee. The statistical change to which he referred reflects the fact of the ceasefires. I am sure that he will be reassured that that has been the case, and it does not change the basic argument in favour of certifying out.

The hon. Gentleman asked about silent video recording. Responses to the recently concluded consultation exercise on codes of practice governing such recording are being assessed. Tests on the necessary equipment are well advanced, and I assure him that that project is being taken forward with real purpose. I am confident that his points will also be taken into account in assessing that.

[Sir John Wheeler]

Remand waiting times will require some detailed research, but it is still within my gift to undertake it, and should the hon. Gentleman be interested in the outcome during the general election campaign, I shall ensure that he has some additional reading.

As the House knows, the decision to introduce silent video recording was based on the Chief Constable's advice and it represents a compromise in the special circumstances of Northern Ireland but, as with all these things, it is certainly kept under review.

With regard to military complaints, the increase in the number of informal complaints is partly due to the Army implementing recommendations made by Mr. Hewitt at paragraph 4.3 of his current report. That is the basis for the change in those statistics.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow raised an issue that is not, perhaps, really the subject of the debate or within the order, but I hope that I may be allowed to comment on it briefly as he raised a matter of humanitarian importance. The Government believe that prisoners held on remand, who are innocent until proven guilty, are subject to all the proper medical care and treatment. I understand that the remand prisoner in question will be allowed to keep her baby while in prison and that proper facilities are available, but she is facing grave charges, which are accountable in Germany. That is why she must remain in Holloway prison unless a court of law determines otherwise.

Elsewhere in the debate, the hon. Member for North Antrim touched on the appearance of a Mr. Martin McGuinness in a television programme. May I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Royal Ulster Constabulary is never inhibited from investigating crimes and allegations, certainly not by this Minister or by Her Majesty's Government, but bases its investigation on the facts and, alas, the House will be surprised to know, not all television programmes are precisely accurate.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry made many profound remarks about terrorism and its on-going character. I greatly appreciate and agree with what he said. He made an important point about the Diplock courts, which protect jurors as well as witnesses. That is why it is essential that that procedure must continue in the present circumstances in Northern Ireland, in view of the odious list of punishment attacks that occur every 24 hours.

I agree with the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East in that nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to say to the House, "The legislation is not necessary any more, and we can do without it." It is right that we should constantly examine the need for such legislation; that is why the House of Commons exists.

I am grateful to all hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. It has been an important one.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Emergency and Prevention of Terrorism Provisions) (Continuance) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 10th March, be approved.

Public Order (Northern Ireland)

12.40 am

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): I beg to move,

That the draft Public Order (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 17th March, be approved.

In his statement to the House on 30 January, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said that the Government welcomed the report of the independent review of parades and marches, and announced a number of measures that we would take in response to it.

The Government undertook to establish without delay an independent Parades Commission with an education, conciliation and mediation role, in time for this year's marching season. At the same time, the Government began consultation on the wider decision-making and related powers of the Parades Commission recommended by the report. That consultation will last until the end of March. The Government accepted the other recommendations of the report, and undertook to examine opportunities to implement them, including the necessary legislation.

The order will amend the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 to implement some of those recommendations that do not hinge on the outcome of the current consultation exercise. The period required for notification of a parade or procession will be increased from seven to 21 days, and new controls on alcohol at parades will be introduced.

The proposal for a draft order was published on 25 February and was distributed to a wide range of individuals for consultation. In order to ensure, so far as possible, that the provisions of the draft order would be in effect before this year's marching season, it was necessary to shorten the consultation period from the usual six weeks to two weeks. Those who responded to the consultation generally welcomed the proposed measures.

Since the publication of the proposal, the Government have taken the opportunity to make two minor technical amendments, which I shall deal with now. First, we have amended article 4(5), which gives the police power to dispose of intoxicating liquor that has been surrendered. There may be circumstances in which a police officer has confiscated drink that he genuinely, but mistakenly, believed to be alcoholic. To provide for such a situation, we have made an amendment to give the police power to dispose of anything that has been surrendered to them. The change mirrors an amendment made to the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Bill, on which the provision is broadly based.

Secondly, we have added a new article 4(10), to ensure that the time limits on the exercise of the controls on alcohol will also apply in a "stand-off" situation, where persons have assembled for a parade that does not then go ahead. The amendment will mean that the confiscation powers will end at midnight on the day on which those who have assembled disperse.

I shall now deal briefly with the detailed provisions of the draft order. The current seven days' notice to be given of a public procession has been clearly shown to be

inadequate, especially for contentious parades, to give all sides maximum opportunity to discuss differences at a local level and, it is to be hoped, to come to agreement.

The order will therefore increase the period of notice from seven to 21 days. With regard to spontaneous parades, the order will provide that, where it is not reasonable to require the organisers to notify the police 21 days in advance, they may give less than 21 days' notice, but will be required to explain the reason for the short notice. The order will also require that notice is given in a standard form, which will be set out in regulations, and which must be signed by the person giving the notice.

The review team—that is the North team—noted considerable and widespread concern from all parts of the community about the problems caused by alcohol at parades, a problem that the measures contained in the draft order address. The measures make a discretionary power available to the police. Clearly, the use of the powers by the police will be dictated by the operational situation and discretion will be exercised. I am confident that the Royal Ulster Constabulary will adopt a sensible and commonsense approach to the enforcement of this measure.

In summary, the order would implement a number of the recommendations in the review team's report. I hope that we shall be able to press on with other necessary legislation to deal with any other matters raised in the report in the next Parliament, should that prove necessary after the consultation period. I commend the draft order to the House.

12.45 am

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): We find this to be a miserably inadequate order, but we shall support it because we recognise that its two provisions—the need to extend the period of notice to 21 days, and the need to control alcohol—are necessary. Those seem to be common sense and should be applied, but we feel that the people of Northern Ireland have been badly let down. In the words of the Secretary of State on 30 January in response to the North report:

"Last summer, public disorder occurred in Northern Ireland on a very grave scale."

We now have these two small provisions, which have become the total legislative response so far by the Government to the North report. There were 43 recommendations in the North report and the Government's response is that two are to be enacted. We feel particularly aggrieved because it was obvious for so long that the Government should be reappraising how marches and parades in Northern Ireland should be conducted and controlled.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) was pressing from the middle of the summer of 1995 for action on this, and the Government responded only after the appalling events of last summer. They then failed to act upon the North report in full when it was published and we are now left, in effect, with two clauses as the Government's response. Any incoming Government will feel that their task has been made more difficult. As my hon. Friend said on January 30:

"The police were put in an impossible position. The House has a duty to do all that it can to prevent such a situation from arising again."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. 509-10.]

That is not what the House has done.

The central recommendation of North—in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar, "the guts" of the report—was that there should be an adjudicatory body. That was not immediately accepted by the Government, who said that they would need further consultation. Can we hear from the Government the results of that consultation? The Government gave the impression that they were hesitant about an adjudicatory body, but will they now confirm that it is their view that there should not be such a body?

For our part, the Labour party can confirm that it is our intention to enact the North report in full. The Government promised that, in terms of the non-adjudicatory functions—the Minister confirmed this—they endorsed the report's recommendations, which they believed should be implemented without delay. We are less than a fortnight before the start of the marching season, and nothing is in place. The measures that we are considering today will not be in place for the start of the marching season, and even the 21-day rule created by this order will not be effective until the marches that will take place in the middle of May.

What has happened to the advisory commission? What is its membership? I remind the Secretary of State that he said in the House on 30 January:

"The Government therefore intend to establish, as soon as possible, an independent body of five people, to be known as the Parades Commission, with the mediation, conciliation and education roles recommended in the report. We intend that the new commission should be in place ahead of this year's marching season, precisely because we recognise that it has a valuable role to play."

He said that legislation would not be required to establish the commission, so it is fair for us to ask where it is.

If there is a commission, as the Government agree, even if it is only with the mediation, conciliation and education role, it is vital that it is backed up by a statutory code of conduct. From reading *Hansard* of 30 January, it would seem that the Government accepted the recommendation that there should be a statutory code of conduct. They agreed that a code should be prepared and published for consultation as soon as practicable. We want to know where the code is that will apply to this year's parades.

The Government also said that consideration should be given, as recommended by North, to changes to articles 4(1)(b) and 7 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. What conclusions have they come to on that matter? They also pledged that there would be a registration scheme for bands, which would be introduced as soon as the necessary practical arrangements could be put in place. Again, what has happened to that proposal?

The Secretary of State also said:

"There needs to be within all who live in Northern Ireland the will and . . . determination that last year's terrible events shall never again occur . . . the Government pledge that they will play their own part to the full."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. 509-510.]

I hope that I can have a full response to my questions.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Does the hon. Gentleman not yet understand that there is in Northern Ireland an organisation called the IRA and its fellow travellers, who are determined that there will not be

[Mr. William Ross]

understanding and are totally committed to seeing that there is mayhem, violence and confrontation in the streets? So long as they are there, those events will occur.

Mr. Worthington: I understand that. We need to appreciate that many people told North that, to cope with that problem, there needed to be a better statutory framework than exists at present. That will not solve the problem of organisations dedicated to causing mayhem, but we can improve the legislative framework within which we are operating.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the head of the IRA-Sinn Fein has said that those events came about as a result of careful and deliberate planning for three years? If I stood up in Northern Ireland and said that I had planned events for three years, my feet would not hit the ground—I would be in Castlereagh. The head of the IRA-Sinn Fein was never even questioned by the police. Now, we are hearing that there will be trouble in other places where there has never been any trouble. This is an IRA-concocted way to have trouble throughout the Province.

Mr. Worthington: I respect what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I am aware—I could not see it myself because I was here—of the programme that demonstrated that there had been planning and that Mr. Adams said that that had occurred. One also has to recognise, however, that people on the other side of the divide are convinced that similar planning will cause confrontation in the opposite direction.

The North report was instituted with our full support to try to improve the framework within which judgments about marches were made. We believe that the Government could have done more and that any incoming Government will be left in a much weaker position than they should have been because of the lack of action on the report.

12.54 am

Rev. William McCrea (Mid–Ulster): I have listened carefully to the speeches in this important debate. It is important, because I believe that we are witnessing an attack on one group of people in Northern Ireland, within the United Kingdom.

Before developing my theme, I want to join my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) in wishing the Minister a happy retirement. I trust that, as he has found fulfilment in serving the people of the United Kingdom, and the people of Northern Ireland in particular, he will also find it in whatever occupation he turns his hand to. The people of Northern Ireland deeply appreciate the service that he gave, and Members of Parliament have at all times found him courteous and concerned for their safety in the face of IRA terrorism. He has always shown personal concern for individual Members and their constituents.

I express my appreciation on behalf of my constituents in Mid-Ulster, because the Minister played an important role and gave support to the Royal Ulster Constabulary and members of the security forces protecting the citizens of the United Kingdom, and Northern Ireland in particular. I trust that he accepts the appreciation of the people of Ulster.

I am extremely concerned about the order, which is reactionary: as we have come to expect, after some agitation from republicans and others, and interference from outside Governments—from the United States of America or the Irish Republic—there has been a reaction from Government. Unfortunately, the reaction is comparable with that in the legislation on dogs, which was bad law. The order is not in the interests of the Northern Ireland community, and it will be regretted.

Once again, we are creating a nightmare. The situation that has developed is causing great concern in the community. Marches and parades have been part of the culture of the Unionist community over the years. I was raised in Arboe, where Unionists were the minority, and we had excellent relationships with the nationalists. Problems are being created that simply did not occur before. Neighbour is being turned against neighbour, and that has not simply happened: it has been carefully devised over several years.

We are approaching the marching season, and many people are talking about another Garvaghy road. Let me remind the House once again that the Orange parade that walked to the church there two years ago did so in a legitimate and lawful parade. The parade was given the authority to do that and to leave the church and go back down the Garvaghy road to the Orange hall in Portadown. They were not acting outside the law. They had legal authority to go to and from church. The route was laid out, notice was properly given and permission granted. Why are we talking about the situation? How did the order come about? Let us remember the facts.

The IRA went into the Garvaghy estate, took over some of the homes—as mentioned by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) in a previous debate—and threatened the community. Many Roman Catholics were told to get out on to the streets and object to the parade. They were intimidated out, but that does not seem to matter; it was the Orangemen who were at fault. They were just coming to and from church in a proper, legal procession in an honourable and decent fashion, as they had for many years.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): And none of them had had a sip of alcohol.

Rev. William McCrea: No alcohol was consumed. People were acting legally, but terrorists got involved. Their voice seems to mean more, because behind it is not just the ordinary marching of feet but the thud of a bomb or the power of a gun. That registers more. Sad to say, over the years it has registered with more authority with Governments, with those who are supposed to be protecting the community in a democracy. It seems that terrorists must be listened to, because their threat is not that of a debate in the House.

As hon. Members know, over the years, the voice of those who have exercised their democratic right of debating in the House has been little heard, and it has meant very little. We had the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the framework document. Was that the will of the people or of their elected representatives who speak on the people's behalf, and who have gone to the people to

renew their mandates? I was one of those who, after the Anglo-Irish Agreement, resigned my seat, even though Mid-Ulster has a republican majority. I was willing to resign my seat and put myself before the electorate again to ensure that the Government knew that I was speaking with the authority of the people who sent me to the House.

The people spoke; the voice of the ballot box spoke again, but the reaction was that one Minister said that it does not matter how people vote, because the Government would have it their way anyhow. So much for democracy; but terrorist gunmen can say that Orangemen, even in lawful procession, cannot go down a road because they will shoot them. Sad to say, there was a reaction to the threat of the gun. They did not have to shoot, only threaten. The community is being held to ransom.

My family knows exactly what the power of the gun of an IRA terrorist thug means. The blood of my loved ones ran in the streets and homes of the Northern Ireland, and but for the mercy of God, as the Minister knows, every one of them would have been lying dead—no thanks to the terrorists. They threaten the community.

That was what happened on the Garvaghy road. It had nothing to do with Drumcree parish church, but everything to do with murdering thugs who seem to think that they have the right to threaten the community and hold it to ransom. Why do they think that? It is because they have done it for the past 30 years and got away with it.

Mr. Beggs: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is because of the abject failure of successive Governments for 30 years that the outgoing Government and whichever party is the incoming Government had better recognise that the demonstration of solidarity across Northern Ireland, arising from the despicable ban on the lawful parades, is symbolic of a new atmosphere in Northern Ireland? The majority community will not tolerate interference from Dublin or America, or failure on the part of the Government properly to act.

Rev. William McCrea: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making his views heard. They are my views, too. The reality is that there is a different spirit. There is talk of the spirit of Drumcree. Yes, there is the spirit of Drumcree. There is a spirit within Northern Ireland. We are sick of concession after concession. All that the terrorists have to do is hold their guns up in the air and threaten to shoot the people of Northern Ireland. Not only are we threatened with being shot, but our rights, our liberties and our freedoms are being taken away.

I am sickened as a Member of Parliament who has come to the House for the past 14 years to be told by those leading for Her Majesty's Opposition that they will race on. They will not hold back. Once they get in, they are going to race on. It does not seem to me that we have any rights at all, or that we will be listened to at all.

I have a message for the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). He is not coming to Northern Ireland to dictate. We are sick of dictation. There will be a bit of democracy, and in a democracy, the people have some say. They have a right to be listened to. Their elected representatives have a right not to be shot at or silenced, and a right to be heard, and by the grace of God we will be heard because we are going along the road of democracy.

Every concession—Garvaghy road, for example—has been looked upon as weakness. Every concession has been looked upon by Republicans as a stepping stone to more concessions. They hold out the begging bowl. Of course, with every concession they obtain, they can remind us, "Sure, all we had to do in the past was threaten or shoot, and look what we have got for it." I ask the House to think carefully.

What have my people who have been democrats and peaceful, law-abiding citizens got? What has been the end result after we have gone down the road to democracy, and the ballot box has been supreme? The bullet has been cast aside. We do not want it. I will tell the House what we have got. We have got coffin after coffin, grave after grave. Some might not want to listen, but that is the sad reality.

It does not seem that many want to listen to the Ulster Unionists, but my, it seems important to listen to the republican, because he might have an ear in the White House. There might be a hand outstretched in the White House that will take Adams's hand and hold it tight. He might have a southern Government down in Dublin who are happy to play footsie with him, but we are talking about something which affects our rights, our freedoms and our liberties.

What happened at Garvaghy road? Did it happen by chance? Let me quote what Adams said. I will quote it word for word because it is important:

> "Ask any activists in the North did Drumcree happen by accident, and they will tell you 'no' . . . Three years of work on the Lower Ormeau Road, on Portadown, parts of Fermanagh and Newry and in Bellaghy and up in Derry . . . Three years work went into creating that situation, and fair play to those people who put the work in. And they are the type of scene changes that we have to focus on and develop and exploit."

That is what the order tells us tonight—that we are reacting to three years of planning by terrorists.

Did the parades start three years ago? No, they did not. I am 48 years old, and there were parades from the day I was born and for years and years before. We lived side by side with our Roman Catholic neighbours, and we insulted nobody. We lived as good neighbours—we worked together, we sweated together, and, when anything happened to our loved ones, we wept together. It is sad that, today, neighbour is turning against neighbour because of a few thugs who created a situation, planned it, schemed it and now tell us that they are going to focus on it, develop it and exploit it.

What have we heard from the Dispatch Box tonight? That those thugs are going to be aided and abetted and assisted. I hope that, when they leave this House at the end of this Parliament, go back to their constituencies and put their head on their pillow at night, hon. Members have a clean conscience. But I tell them this: anybody who knows that the IRA has planned, focused, developed and exploited the situation in Northern Ireland and who aids and abets them through legislation is guilty.

What are we told? Twenty-one days. What for? Not 21 days for people to talk together, but 21 days to allow republicans to build up a case against us. That is what the 21 days are for: 21 days for them to invent or create scenes and to manipulate situations; 21 days to conspire against lawful, legal, law-abiding people; 21 days for thugs who have never given anything to the community and who have no intention of ever giving anything to the

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community. All they have done is draw out the blood of the community and leave it on the street and laugh when the poor corpses go by. That is the reality—21 days.

There is no doubt that the order will pass, that it will get through tonight, but will it solve the situation? No, it will not. It is another piece of appeasement.

I have this to say on the subject of alcohol. Anyone who knows me knows that I oppose alcohol. I am a teetotaller—I hate the stuff, because I saw enough of it when I was a boy. Is there not rank hypocrisy here? A few months ago, legislation was raced through this House. What for? To extend drinking in Northern Ireland. We were told, "You have not got enough of it, you have not got long enough to do it, you need more time to do it. Not only that, but you have not enough outlets—you'd better get it into every corner shop." It is sickening hypocrisy.

This order might be only a couple of pages long, but it means a lot. It only takes a line on a page to remove a person's liberty altogether, and that is the road this House seems to be taking. God forbid. I did not want to be brought up in China. I was born in the United Kingdom.

1.14 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) pleaded for more action to be taken to put an end to this problem. One of the best ways of doing so would be to change the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the implanting of the Maryfield secretariat in Northern Ireland, which is one of the cancers that has been eroding our community as people have interfered at different levels of government in Northern Ireland. Her Majesty's Government must take the final decision, but time and again they have implemented recommendations from Maryfield, and many people in Northern Ireland are aware of the part played by Maryfield in 1995 and 1996.

The order before us stems from the North report; the Labour Front-Bench team has chided the Government for not fully implementing the recommendations in the report. The North committee was asked to examine the issue of parades. It focused on the loyalist parades, especially the Orange parades. It also moved from the concept of parades to comment on the qualifications of an Orangeman and to accuse the Orange Order of being the cause of sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

Although the committee had an Anglican chairman, the report said nothing about the Thirty-Nine Articles; although a committee member was a Presbyterian minister, the report said nothing about the Westminster confession of faith; and although a member was a Roman Catholic priest, the report said nothing about some of the claims of Vatican Council II, even in its modern form, and nothing about the other sectarian claims, which even forbid a person to have communion although they claim to be one with us in other ways. It was strange that the committee went down that road.

On the issue of the number of days' notice, the laughable fact is that it is well known when the Orange parades will be held: every police station has the rotas and times. Only as a result of the introduction of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 was seven days' notice required. We were told that it was requested by the police, and thereafter we abided by it.

We managed at that time to get rid of some of the more obnoxious interference in civil liberties, although we did not get it all dealt with at that time. Interestingly, the Liberal spokesman, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), visited us to make a plea for civil liberties on prevention of terrorism, but he does not appear to realise that the requirement of seven days' notice interferes with civil liberties.

I am happy to recognise that the Minister's statement earlier showed that the Government are aware that a requirement of 21 days' notice would be unduly restrictive, because it would interfere with many aspects of public life, such as a moment of rejoicing. If a football team won the cup, or if an athlete returned from a foreign sporting event as a champion, there would be a spontaneous welcome, which would be a breach of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. It would be even worse if people had to wait 21 days. The Orange institution has no difficulty with the 21 days from that point of view. Some traditional walks do not go out of their way to provoke people. People can easily remain unprovoked by just staying at home.

I live off the Ormeau road. I cannot see the Ormeau bridge from my house; but some people have such brilliant eyesight that they can see the Ormeau bridge from Dungannon, 40 miles away. They feel provoked, so they come up to prevent loyalists from walking down a main road. Some loyalists take no more than five minutes to walk from the bridge to the Northern Ireland cricket ground—yet that is supposed to amount to provocation.

As for spontaneous protest, last year, in the village of Pomeroy, during the holiday season, a person managed to get an oil tanker supplied with oil to deliver oil around the country. This happened during a boycott of the local non-Orangeman trader who had run an oil business for years. In England, Scotland or Wales, could someone immediately procure an oil lorry and a supply of oil to coincide with a boycott of a local trader? The evidence of that came not from the BBC or Ulster Television but from a prime time programme on the RTE station in the Irish Republic. It all adds up to evidence of plotting to undermine stability.

We question whether the order is needed. It will not solve the problem at all.

When people ask me why I do not drink, I usually say that I am better off without it—I am bad enough without it, too. Someone once asked me, "Don't you enjoy yourself, then?" I said, "I do; and I know I'm enjoying myself when I haven't a headache in the morning."

Will the provision governing alcohol be used for all sorts of public gatherings? We Orangemen have tried in the past to get the police to implement the law. Public houses are not supposed to open before 10 o'clock in the morning, yet they were allowed to trade before that time, with no action taken against them. We also raised the question of special licences being issued on the twelfth, only to be told that nothing could be done but to issue the licences.

I know that the Minister said that the measure would be implemented with sensitivity, but what does that mean? Belfast and other places have in the past experienced "alcohol-free zones". The law is such that a constable can do nothing to a person breaching the law, unless he first warns the person that he or she is in breach of it. The person must then carry on drinking around the next corner

before another constable can do anything about the situation. That is totally laughable. The police have told us that this sort of legislation is unenforceable.

Legislation is being rushed through the House. I empathise with the idea behind it and recognise the old saying, "When the drink is in, the wit is out." We face the problem of lager louts in England and football hooligans around Belfast or elsewhere, but I question whether the police will be able to enforce such legislation.

I draw attention to the Opposition's cry for more action to be taken and ask them to consider where they are heading with that action. If we have an adjudication body that is also charged with mediation, there is an immediate conflict. Nor has there been a clear perception of the concept of mediation.

For example, last year, people in the Ormeau road were asked whether they would accept me, as the apprentices in Londonderry accepted the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), to bring them together and mediate. The Rice faction in the Ormeau road said, "We are not of that mind." Fair enough; I am broad-minded, and I accept that they did not like me. However, they are so entrenched in bigotry and opposition to proper democracy that they were not even prepared to recognise the then deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alderman Dr. Macdonald, an SDLP elected representative for that very area.

I am sorry that our colleagues from the SDLP are not here now. We saw the scenes on television. There was a mass invasion from west Belfast to try to occupy the Ormeau road, and the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), Dr. Macdonald and others were there trying to mediate. They were ignored and insulted, because the Rice faction, which organised those residents' groups throughout the Province, was not prepared to listen to them.

The North report spoke about the conflict between the loyal orders and the residents' groups. The loyal orders had no conflict with anybody; the residents' groups sought the conflict, trying publicly to discredit the RUC and get television pictures of it allegedly battering those innocent people into the ground.

When I was at a football match in London recently, it was fascinating to see the police presence just to control the crowd. I know of no place—certainly not in the city of Dublin—where an unruly crowd is allowed to dominate. I remember student days there, when workers just protesting on the street for the right to walk were batoned off the street by the Gardai. The RUC has not done that.

Mr. William Ross: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in those confrontations over the past two years, we have seen an attempt by the IRA to determine who will rule the streets, and that, so far, it has been getting away with it on too many occasions?

Rev. Martin Smyth: My hon. Friend is correct. I have no wish to detain the House, except to say that the Government now and after the election must watch that they do not repeat the tragedy and folly of 1968–69, when they did not read the philosophy of Dr. R. Johnson, who was then the education officer of the IRA. They are following the same procedures now. Having failed by terror to intimidate the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland, the IRA is now seeking to destabilise the community through street protests.

I congratulate the Minister and thank him for his services to Northern Ireland.

I was interested to note that in the earlier debate there was no reference to the drugs scene, other than by the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross). Is not something going wrong in that respect? In my constituency within five days last week two men with paramilitary connections died from overdoses of drugs.

1.30 am

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): This is an important debate. It goes to the heart of the situation in Northern Ireland. Those who do not know the situation in our Province and are not acquainted with Irish history will not be aware that from time to time processions have been at the centre of much disorder, both when Ireland was part of the United Kingdom and since the separation of the 26 counties from the United Kingdom.

Various Parliaments and Governments of the United Kingdom have dealt with the problem in the way that we are told that it must be dealt with tonight. One can read Irish history from the time when Ireland was one within the United Kingdom and from the founding of Ulster and one will find people who did not know the place attempting to introduce bans and giving in to unruly elements who decided who shall walk the streets. They all failed totally, and this motion will fail, too.

It is not the House that will suffer, but the ordinary men and women in Northern Ireland and their children. The House has come to a sorry state. When anything is to be done in Northern Ireland, people are called in who do not know what is happening there.

We have the problem of decommissioning. It should never have been a problem. The terrorists should have been told from the very beginning, as the Prime Minister told me, that they must hand in their weaponry. Government and Opposition spokesmen said the same. Even the great Dick Spring said the same. But the Government could not do it, so they called in strangers—the peace envoy nominated by the President of the United States, the general from Canada and the former Prime Minister of Finland—people who knew nothing about Northern Ireland. They produced a report, which the Government were accused of rubbishing. All that was brought out of the report was the principles.

I accept the principles, but I do not accept the report, because it came down on the side of mutuality. I must wait for the day when the IRA army council and the combined loyalist military command—two outlawed organisations—come to an agreement, and their arms will be handed in. What utter folly. When will those two illegal so-called army councils achieve mutuality and agree? That is what I am asked to accept in the talks. It is the policy accepted by the Government. It has been accepted by the Irish Government. It has been accepted as the basis of the talks. No right-thinking person will commit himself to that.

And then we have trouble with parades. What happened? We had a person from the United Kingdom who had never seen a parade in his life and knew nothing about them. We also had a liberal Presbyterian ex-moderator who was on the record as being against parading. We had a Roman Catholic priest who was also on the record as being against it. Those were the people

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who came together to find a solution. So they brought in their solution, which was an attack on people who paraded. The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) has said that it was a definition of sectarianism. It was an attempt to tar and feather anyone who walked on the roads who happened to be a Protestant and believed in the Williamite revolution settlement, on which the constitution of this country is built. That is what it was all about.

We were told that the answer was the commission. What will happen when the commission meets? What will happen when the full-blown recommendations are made? Will it be advisory? There will be interests that will prove to be at variance. How will it be possible to adjudicate and then mediate? It is not possible to be an adjudicator and a mediator at the same time.

We are told that everything will be fixed up and we shall have the commission. It will meet and say, "No, the Orangemen are not going to walk down that particular road. Although they have walked down it for 180 years, they can no longer do so because it offends certain people."

On the day of the parade people will turn up and the police officer in charge who is there to keep the peace says, "The only way that I can keep the peace is to let this orderly parade through." And he does that. From every throat of every opposing person there will be a cry for the officer's dismissal from the service. Why will that be? The cry will be made because the officer kept the peace.

I want the House to know that the Orangemen walked to Dumcree church and walked back again. They walked that parade because the route was agreed by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, but Oban street in Portadown was closed to the Orangemen.

I happened to be there. The Orangemen were given a solemn undertaking that their one church parade of the year would not be affected. We know that the parade has taken place for 180 years. They were told, "You will go there and come back again." So two years ago they went on the route as usual. They had the return from the church to Portadown agreed. The route was legally set up by the police. But when the Orangemen came out of the church they were told, "The road is blocked. The IRA are in the Garvaghy road estate with their guns and you can't go down."

The police changed their mind and said, "They will never go down that road." I am not an Orangeman, but I was asked to go to Dumcree by the Orangemen. They asked me to talk to the police, which I did. I talked to the assistant chief constable, Blair Wallace. It was in the middle of the night in Belfast. He said, "We will face the Orangemen down." I said, "What about facing down the men with the guns on the Garvaghy road estate?" The law breakers should have been faced down, not those who were keeping the law.

I said to Blair Wallace, "You have been a friend of mine for years but I tell you that you are a fool because the Orangemen will go down that road. They will wait, wait and wait, and eventually they will go down that road." He said, "Never. You can go back to them and say that they will never go down that road. That is it."

Why did the police not deal with the elements in the Garvaghy road? They did not because of the pressure of the southern Government and the Maryfield secretariat. A storm was stirred up about that, but eventually we went down the road. Let us remember that the last parade was not told that it could not go back down the road. It was open ended, and once the people reached the church the same thing happened. They had eventually to get down the road, because of a problem. People all over the Province said that if that happened it would be the end. The men from Dublin were exhorting the RUC to get stuck in to law-abiding citizens whose only crime was that they were going to a place of worship and wanted to get home.

The House should realise that that cannot be done to the people of Northern Ireland all the time. People have to realise that there must be a democratic solution. What is the use of democracy if the people, through the ballot box, cannot appoint their spokesmen and urge the Government to take the right action? We know what happened. After that, of course, everything was blamed on Drumcree, but Drumcree had nothing to do with it; it was the people in the Garvaghy road. To make out that Drumcree parish church was the centre of some revolution is nonsense. The people who caused the trouble were in the Garvaghy road.

The problem is spreading across the Province. We now have the problem in Drummore, which had never heard of it before. As my colleague pointed out, it is a well-orchestrated IRA plan that they will exploit every time, and there will be serious trouble. Yet we are told that we have to approve the order tonight.

Mr. William Ross: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the whole concept of local agreements is nonsense, because even if agreement were reached between a loyalist organisation and the ordinary Roman Catholics living in the area, it would immediately be seized on by the IRA and a garbled version would come out? The whole thing would be blown out of the water by the IRA. Is not that the lesson that we should absorb from what happened when people have hitherto tried to talk to each other?

Rev. Ian Paisley: There is not a place about which that could be more truly said than Dunloy, in my constituency. In Dunloy is a Presbyterian church where Orangemen have paraded for more than 100 years. Much pressure has been put on it. The present moderator of the Presbyterian church said, "As my people go to church on Sunday morning, they are told by the people in Dunloy, 'We've got the caretaker out of his house and we have it. You now don't have a full-time Minister, and we'll get your church as well.'" After these troubles, they went into the churchyard and desecrated the most prominent grave there, tearing up the moss that covered it and throwing it all around the churchyard. Then they broke all the windows in the area.

Who are these people? As the Member of Parliament for that area, I was very concerned. A friend of mine knew many of the local people in Dunloy. With all our help, he brokered an agreement: that, on 26 November, an Orange service would go through to the church. The decent people of Dunloy said, "Yes, but we have to protest against it." We said, "You have your protest. We'll understand that, but as long as we get through." The people of Dunloy were so impressed by the way in which the Orangemen

handled the situation—allowing no one to walk in a parade except by invitation, and limiting the numbers—that they withdrew their application and said, "We'll not protest. You can go."

On the Sunday that the protest was to be held, IRA men from Loughguile and from the Mid-Ulster area moved in and told the people who had brokered the agreement with us, "You can't do that. You are going out on the street to stop this, and if you don't, we'll shoot you." They produced a gun and put it to a man's ear, and said, "That is what is going to happen", and it did happen. The police let it happen. They did not have enough power to put the procession through. Now those people tell us that they can do nothing, because they are under threat, which is exactly what the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said. That is being repeated all over the place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) referred to neighbour being set against neighbour. What I have described is what is setting them one against the other. They are intimidated and run into the ground by gunmen. Mr. Adams boasts about that, and the police do not take him away. For three years he has been working to destroy our country and to break the law. People will exploit the situation even more. They are getting everything they want. They want 21 days to organise their rebellion.

The House should know that no notice used to be given for traditional parades. That was not needed, because the police knew that they would take place on a certain day. When that day arrived, the local sergeant would confirm that it would take place as usual and arrangements were made. The House took away that traditional parade agreement. Why did they scrap it? Because of the Anglo-Irish agreement and the new Public Order (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

We went to prison in protest about this issue, and the House laughed at us. Hon. Members are not laughing tonight about what happened last year. They should have listened to us and not gone ahead with this order. My hon. Friend and I have dealt with Hibernian processions, which go through predominantly Protestant areas. I resent what the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) said about people on the other side who would stop them. No one lays a finger on those Hibernians: they walk their traditional route and they will continue to do so.

Mr. William Ross: Is it not a fact that, in living memory in Northern Ireland, there has not been an attack on any parade of the Ancient Order of Hibernians by the Protestant population?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I know of no place or time in history since the drawing of the border and Northern Ireland remained within the United Kingdom when the Protestant population attacked an AOH parade. That is a traditional parade, but the traditional parade agreement has been thrown out. This order was hailed by the south of Ireland as a great step forward. It is certainly a step forward for the IRA. We are now going further and further into the mess and mire of this whole situation.

We must draw back, because people will say, "If we cannot go to our church, as we have always walked to our church, the time has come to make a stand." Do not force law-abiding citizens to become lawless. There are plenty of lawless groups in Northern Ireland. Some lawless groups on the Protestant side are being courted by the Government and the Opposition.

When I walk out in the morning and go down the Newtownards road, I see the great big notices put up by the Progressive Unionist party and Ulster Democratic party—the two fringe loyalist groups that are connected with Protestant paramilitaries—which say, "Carson brought in the guns. Paisley says, 'Hand them over'." And I am supposed to sit in quietness with those people, at a table.

That slogan is all over Northern Ireland. Not only did those people write it on the site; they went to a new church that we were building, and wrote it there. It does not hurt me, because everyone knows where I stand on the issue. I have had bullets put through my bedroom window by Protestant paramilitaries, so I know something about it. I am not worried about myself, but I am now seriously worried about the ordinary people of Northern Ireland. They have had enough.

I ask the House to be careful about what it does, and I worry about what Opposition Front Benchers have said. The matter needs careful consideration. We are talking about 21 days to give those in authority time to stop the parade. The longer we give them, the more they will be organised. What are people in Dungannon to do with the Ormeau bridge? Why do they have to bring people from the outlying areas of republicanism into the Ormeau road, and allow them to sleep them over in their houses? The local people in the Ormeau road were not causing the trouble.

It should be remembered that every residents' organisation is led by an IRA man. The IRA controls those organisations, and it can exploit them. I say this to the House: do not go down this road, because it will end in disaster. Hold back, and consider. Why should Northern Ireland be governed, in times of difficulty, by commissions that are set up and present reports? The report that we are discussing has never been properly analysed by the House: I do not think that we have ever had a proper debate to consider it. It has never been submitted to a Committee of the House; it has simply been rammed through.

Father Crilly, Dr. Dunlop and the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford university are not the men to make a decision about something that they have not had to live with. I think that it is time the House considered what it is doing, and had a proper evaluation of where this will lead. The chief constable said that, under the regulations, it would be impossible for him to do his job. It is a policing job, not a job for people who just think, "This is the way to do it." The place must be policed, but it makes the job of a chief constable—or any officer—impossible if, instead of using his professionalism and the opinions that he has after long service and experience, all that is set aside by people who do not know.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

I would be interested tonight—as, I know, would the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie—to see who will be on the committee that will make these decisions. I trust that the House will think again.

1.51 am

Sir John Wheeler: We have had an interesting debate on this modest order. I understand that the House is, as it were, restive for rest, so I shall be as brief as possible.

The hon. Members for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) have made some profound remarks about the character of public order events in Northern Ireland—remarks that the House would do well to heed. I certainly agree with the hon. Member for Belfast, South that the loyalist institutions have within their constitution an obligation not to be triumphalist, to keep the peace and to operate within the rule of law in their activities in Northern Ireland. That needs to be widely understood.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster spoke with great passion, because he has suffered what few hon. Members in the present Parliament have suffered, and perhaps few, if any, Members of the Parliament that is to assemble in May are likely to suffer. He and his family have been under machine-gun fire in their home. They know what terrorism is and the evil of it. He is entitled to speak with the fire and determination that he did because of that personal experience. He and others were right to draw attention to the evil of Provisional IRA-Sinn Fein manipulating residents' groups to cause the maximum disruption during what is commonly called the marching season. The House should recognise where the fault lies. It is to be deplored. I thank the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster for his kind references to myself. I am deeply obliged to him for that.

After I had introduced the debate, the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) raised a number of issues. He castigated the Government for not implementing the North commission report in full. The modest and brief debate that we have enjoyed illustrates to him the difficulty of implementing that report in full, a report with profound and, in some respects, radical recommendations, which, if they are to stand a chance of influence and success, must enjoy the support of the democratically elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland, some of whom have spoken in the debate. I am sure, therefore, that the hon. Gentleman will reflect on the debate and realise that the Government's chosen course of consultation, proper analysis and a determination to introduce in the next Parliament legislation that can be supported, is the wisest course.

The Government will proceed to appoint members of the commission for the narrow purpose of mediation, conciliation and education. It has not been easy to find people willing to serve on that body, but I hope that the Government will be able to announce the chairmanship and membership very shortly.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the codes of practice and other matters of some detail. All those have yet to be resolved and determined. They all take time. The evidence for the necessity of that time has surely been exposed in this short debate.

I commend the order to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 59, Noes 6.

Division No. 100] **[1.57 am**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter (E Surrey)
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques (Gravesham)
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Barnes, Harry
Bates, Michael
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brandreth, Gyles
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Carrington, Matthew
Clappison, James
Coe, Sebastian
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Fabricant, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Heald, Oliver
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Knapman, Roger
Kynoch, George
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
McAvoy, Thomas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Riddick, Graham
Rowe, Andrew
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
McCrea, Rev William
Paisley, Rev Ian
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangf'd)*
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Robinson and
Rev. Martin Smyth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Public Order (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 17th March, be approved.

MINISTERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO PARLIAMENT

[Relevant documents: Second report from the Public Service Committee of Session 1995–96, on ministerial accountability and responsibility (HC 313), the Government's response thereto (HC 67 of Session 1996–97) and the first report from the Public Service Committee of Session 1996–97, on ministerial accountability and responsibility (HC 234).]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 March],

That, in the opinion of this House, the following principles should govern the conduct of Ministers of the Crown in relation to Parliament:

(1) Ministers have a duty to Parliament to account, and be held to account, for the policies, decisions and actions of their Departments and Next Steps Agencies;

(2) It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity. Ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the Prime Minister;

(3) Ministers should be as open as possible with Parliament, refusing to provide information only when disclosure would not be in the public interest, which should be decided in accordance with relevant statute and the Government's Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Second Edition, January 1997);

(4) Similarly, Ministers should require civil servants who give evidence before Parliamentary Committees on their behalf and under their directions to be as helpful as possible in providing accurate, truthful and full information in accordance with the duties and responsibilities of civil servants as set out in the Civil Service Code (January 1996).—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

Question agreed to.

POLICE (INSURANCE OF VOLUNTARY ASSISTANTS) BILL *[LORDS]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

DANGEROUS DOGS (AMENDMENT) BILL *[LORDS]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Christian Millennium Projects

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

2.8 am

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): I am glad to have this opportunity late in the life of the present Parliament—not to mention late in the day—to raise a topic that bears as much on the future as on the past: the coming millennium celebrations, and the Christian input to the various projects that have been proposed.

I am especially grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage for taking the trouble to listen to this short debate and to contribute to it. I must congratulate her on the clear and constructive analysis that she gave in her lecture at Crosby hall on 6 February about the spiritual scope and significance of the millennium event, including a useful guide to the date and time that the millennium is reached and formally starts.

Obviously, we all owe more to Dionysius Exiguus—Dennis the Small—than most of us realise. I think that my right hon. Friend knows that some people in this place, in another place and outside are nevertheless severely disappointed that the Millennium Commission has offered so little endorsement and practical support for the notion that the millennium at perhaps its most fundamental level is a Christian event and landmark.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), who once occupied the post of Secretary of State, said when he set up the Millennium Commission in 1994:

"For many people, the third millennium has a spiritual significance as the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ."

Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in the most welcome and forthright statement said, in a letter to *The Times*, I think on 2 December 1996:

"I have always been determined that people should be aware of whose millennium it is anyway. We shouldn't be ashamed of it being Christian. On the contrary, we want to identify it as a Christian event."

That was well spoken, if I may say so.

However, the spiritual dimensions of the millennium still seem to have been missed in terms of hard cash. There is a yawning black hole where there should be a pearl of some price. That is highlighted when one considers the grants being paid to Christian-based projects. Of the £767 million in grants paid to date, only 0.9 per cent. has been paid to Christian projects in the community, and only 2 per cent. has been longlisted in the final round of the Millennium Commission. Surely that is an inadequate expression of those very priorities that Ministers have espoused and expressed.

If one looks in even more detail at the support committed by the commission for projects in rounds one and two, longlisted in round three and reserve-listed projects, one finds a grant total that reaches the huge sum of £1,767 million, of which specifically Christian projects have scored only £24 million—a derisory sum in all conscience, or 1 per cent. of the total. Indeed, the paid and committed portion of that £24 million comes only to £7 million, which is a mere snowflake on the volcano of grant.

Other heads of expenditure include 22 per cent. of the total for science projects, 23 per cent. for leisure projects, 9 per cent. for community projects, 10 per cent. for education projects and 35 per cent. for environment projects. Worthy though those heads of expenditure are, they serve merely to underline how much land remains to be possessed if the promise of a significant and specifically Christian landmark on the millennium landscape—the cathedral, so to speak, of our era—is to be fulfilled.

Against that background, I strongly urge the Millennium Commission, over which my right hon. Friend presides, to extend its procedures for project selection to a fourth round that will concentrate specifically on the spiritual dimension of the celebrations and on projects supporting faith, the family and young people.

That would chime with my right hon. Friend's striking exposition in her Crosby hall speech of the idea of renaissance: regeneration and renewal, physical, personal and social. In a moving passage, she articulated a vision that struck me as being as practical as it is relevant. She said:

"Individualisation and fragmentation within the communities of Western society is an increasing concern—elderly people isolated, and the world of work and of young people dominated by the computer screen rather than direct personal communication. The Millennium provides an opportunity for people of all ages and backgrounds to come together to meet their neighbours, perhaps for the first time. Street parties and fireworks can provide a one-off chance to do this, but I hope that we can make this contact of enduring and added value."

There are a couple of projects of a specifically Christian character for which I would seek my right hon. Friend's notice, support and interest. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe) will mention at least a third in a short intervention that he intends to make presently.

The first project is a northern one. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh wants to establish a museum or visitor centre to celebrate the tremendous Christian heritage of the ancient kingdom of Northumbria, which is the cradle of Christianity in this country, and produced giants of the calibre of St. Aidan, the Venerable Bede and St. Cuthbert.

Such a centre could be ready for the millennium and perhaps even provide a home back in the north for the Lindisfarne Gospels. Alas, an approach to establish such a centre in Cramlington in Northumberland last year was turned down by the Millennium Commission. The new proposal on which I would focus on behalf of my hon. Friend will be centred on Durham, which is more in the middle of the region, and would incorporate a bid for the Lindisfarne Gospels to be released from the British Library. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider with sympathy and sensitivity that bid by one of her most distinguished younger ministerial colleagues.

The other project of a specifically Christian character is one of which my right hon. Friend is well apprised, thanks to her generous provision of time and her receptivity; it is the so-called Christian millennium village project, which the hon. Member for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms) and I are sponsoring and have spoken to her about. She will know that that imaginative project—involving the environmental renovation of a derelict riverside site in London and, above all, the construction

of a purpose-designed set of buildings for a practical outreach programme for families and young people in particular—has generated widespread cross-party and interdenominational support

That project is not just another London metropolitan project: it is for the whole country, as evidenced by the explicit support that it has received from the two Anglican archbishops, including the Archbishop of York, and the Bishops of Durham, Wakefield, Chelmsford and Monmouth. In addition, leaders of the Roman Catholic, Methodist and Baptist churches have all expressed their support for the project's general vision and purpose.

I am content to let the Bishop of Durham have the last word. In a letter to my right hon. Friend on 28 February last, he wrote:

"I am sure you are aware of the answers given by Lord Inglewood in the House of Lords on 17 February 1997 which seem to indicate a willingness to give more favourable consideration to Christian projects in a possible 4th round of the Millennium Commission. Up to now, only about 1 per cent. of the money allocated has gone to specifically Christian projects, but you have yourself endorsed the need to celebrate the millennium in a distinctively Christian way.

The sponsors of "Millennium Village" are, I gather, meeting with you on 5 March and I would greatly hope that you could then give them an assurance that there is to be a fourth round in which special consideration would be given to Christian projects, and that their imaginative proposals for a "Millennium Village" could therefore be resubmitted."

I am glad to allow the Bishop of Durham to have the last word in my speech, and I am sure that I have left enough time for my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent.

2.20 am

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): On 15 October 1964, the electors of Barkston Ash conferred upon the House an extraordinary benefit, by sending to it my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison). From that time, whether at Barkston Ash or at Selby, he has adorned the House. I was a long way from the House in 1964, but when I came, I found him—as I am sure that every new Member has—a friend, a counsellor, and a help. As a former chairman of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, I pay tribute to him not only for his great personal qualities, but for the extraordinary Christian witness that he has given the House throughout his time here. We are grateful for that.

I am being allowed a word or two to present to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a scheme of which she has already heard something. To celebrate the millennium, a group of us believed that we should challenge every school in the United Kingdom to stage in the school year 1999–2000 an original dramatic production illustrative of some element of the life of Christ. We expect that this will be widely taken up by schools, and we have already secured the whole-hearted support of the Church of England, through all of whose committees the plan has gone.

I have written to Cardinal Hume, who I understand is likely to be very receptive. We have support from the Headmasters Conference, the Secondary Heads Association, the chief inspector of Ofsted, Nick Tate of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and a host of other people. So far, nobody has thought that it was a poor idea.

The idea is that schools should enter a festival at local level, drawing in, if they wish, their local communities to help them to produce it. They would be assessed by their local communities, and those that seemed to have particular merit would be entered for a regional festival round. I have reason to suppose that the Independent Television Network will cover that round and help us, although it is premature to say that. Our hope is that a distinctive group of productions will feature in the festival celebrations in Greenwich.

All this is highly tentative at the moment. We have considerable expectations and hope, but we have nothing assured. We are seeking funding from the Millennium Commission. I suspect that the funding we need is not very great by comparison with that of many other projects.

The purpose is to involve schools throughout the nation in studying one of the gospels—many of them, perhaps, almost for the first time—to give them an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding that the millennium is the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, and to give tangible recognition throughout the nation of the fact that this is a celebration not only of the birth of Christ but of 2,000 years of Christian history, which has shaped the nation.

At the moment, the project goes under the working title of Superstar 2000, but whether we shall keep it, I am not certain. I very much hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who has already shown a friendly face to the suggestion, will smile upon our endeavour, and perhaps give us some practical advice and help on how we may carry it forward.

2.24 am

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): It is an honour and a privilege to respond to this Adjournment debate introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison). He will know that I do so out of respect for his phenomenal service to this place in the past 33 years, as well as out of support for the themes that he has raised today. He has served as a Minister in many Departments. I know not only of the respect in which he is held in the House, but, having had the honour to visit his constituency, of the affection and admiration that his constituents have for him and, indeed, for his wife Sylvia Mary.

As we approach the millennium, we are busy ensuring that the steps we take and the huge resource at our disposal—£1.6 billion through the national lottery allocated to the Millennium Commission—is used wisely and well, and forms a lasting legacy that will build communities, promote regeneration and reinforce the spiritual dimension in our communities.

My right hon. Friend will know that I am not the dictator of the Millennium Commission. I am its humble chairman, and it is composed of nine independent commissioners, who take a range of views. Overall, we have sought to establish a pattern in which the themes have been regeneration, in its literal sense—environmental projects—and in the community sense. Those are the themes that bind people together and give them a sense of belonging and continuity at a time of great change.

My right hon. Friend rightly points out that I have on a number of occasions sought to reinforce the message that the millennium is a Christian anniversary. It marks 2,000 years since the birth of Christ. It is a key landmark

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

in the history of the Church. He will be aware that the Pope has declared the year 2000 a holy year for the Roman Catholic Church. Thirty-five million pilgrims are expected in Rome. The Pope will lead a party of Christian leaders of all denominations up Mount Sinai for a dedicated act of worship.

Apart from Rome, we are further advanced than elsewhere in our plans and preparations. I was able in my speech at Crosby hall to set out the timetable so far, the dates already in the diary, the key messages, and our commitment to provide more information as we approach that crucial date. We have set up working groups with the different Churches and faith groups and with local authorities. We have established liaison with the royal household, and set up working parties to deal with overseas issues and with the media. We believe that this is a moment in time when people will want not only to celebrate but to reflect—a moment to take stock, a moment for renewal and regeneration, whether seen from a secular or spiritual perspective.

My right hon. Friend referred to some of the figures from the Millennium Commission. So far, the Commission has awarded £844 million to capital projects across the United Kingdom. That includes some £10.3 million to nine specifically Christian projects, which will provide benefits not only to Christian congregations but to the wider community.

The commission recently published its shortlist of third round projects, which will go forward for detailed appraisal. It contained an additional eight Church projects, seeking a total of £20.4 million pounds in grant. Of course, there have also been many initiatives which have been led by the Churches but which are not specifically Christian. An example I visited recently is the national discovery park in Liverpool, which, led by the Dean of Liverpool, received an offer of £27 million. I commend the dean for his activities.

Other faith groups have been recognised. All are agreed that the message of the millennium should be inclusive, not exclusive. I admire the way in which all the faith groups have wanted the spiritual dimension of the millennium to be recognised, albeit with a respect and understanding for faiths other than the Christian faith. For example, we have committed £4.9 million to two projects put forward by Hindu organisations which are designed to foster multicultural awareness and inter-faith understanding.

I could gladly give my right hon. Friend a full list of Christian projects for which the Millennium Commission grant has been approved or shortlisted. Several are particularly exciting. I am most interested in the Thornbury centre in Bradford. A grant of £1.2 million has been committed to providing a new community centre built on the site of a former church.

The centre will greatly enhance the appearance of a large housing estate in an area of considerable economic disadvantage, and will provide a new focus for the local community. It will include facilities for recreation, vocational training, flexible worship, conferences and exhibitions, as well as a community restaurant. Elaine Appleby, who works there, is typical of the social entrepreneurs whom we want to support, where possible, with millennium resources. I have visited similar initiatives—St. Martha's in Nottingham and St. Mark's in Godalming in my own constituency—that enable Churches to perform their work in the 21st century.

There are, however, many other ways in which the Millennium Commission has sought to support Churches. Four hundred churches are to be floodlit for the millennium with a £2.3 million grant. Bells will be supported—not only the bell tower at Basildon: £3 million has been committed to the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers' proposal for ringing in the new millennium. The money will pay for the founding of new bells and the restoration of old bells and belfries in 100 churches, so that, at noon on the first day of 2000, there can be a stirring peal of church bells throughout the land, which is a splendid way to greet the millennium year.

My right hon. Friend referred particularly to the millennium Christian village project in Battersea. He will know that I have great personal sympathy for that project. The commissioners nevertheless took the view that, although the project would have a regenerative impact in Battersea, and would certainly have provided valuable Christian support for young people, it was not possible to support it in this round.

I have to tell my right hon. Friend that, in the third round of applications, 1,011 projects submitted bids; of those, only 119 were selected for the long list. It will not be possible for the commission to support even those 119, once they have been through their detailed appraisal. My right hon. Friend can therefore see that the competition for funding was certainly intense.

I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 6 March, saying:

"I must pay tribute to the excellent work which was done to produce such a well worked-up proposal. I expect that the imagination and commitment which you were able to show, and continue to show, will mean that you achieve your objectives at the end of the day."

I share the disappointment of those involved in the project, but I should like to address my right hon. Friend's point in respect of a possible fourth round.

Certainly I and many other commissioners hope that it will be possible to have a fourth round. It would not be wise to make a formal announcement until we are clearer about the resources coming through in the long term, but I will certainly reflect to my fellow commissioners his request that the theme of faith, family and young people should be supported.

In many other areas of the national lottery, such as sport and arts, we have indeed been moving towards investing in young people as much as in old buildings, and the new heritage legislation will enable us to involve young people and use lottery money for that purpose. Youth is one of the themes that the Millennium Commission has sought to endorse, as is science, along with the main regeneration theme.

Let me inform my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby of some of the many other ways in which lottery money has already been helping Christian projects. So far, the score is about 238 awards, totalling about £30 million. The Arts Council gave £1.2 million to the Royal School

of Church Music. Many organs are being restored. The heritage lottery fund has made 150 grants, totalling £17.8 million and, this week, another 22 more awards, totalling £4 million, were made. Churches throughout the country are benefiting from that opportunity.

I especially welcome the largest grant—£2.5 million to Canterbury cathedral for an education centre, to tie in with the great focus on our Christian heritage that English Heritage is celebrating this year as we move towards the millennium.

On a smaller scale, churches throughout the country are receiving assistance with bells and with restoration. A new visitor centre is to be built at Westminster cathedral. All Saints, Putney, where I worshipped as a child, received £96,000 for the Burne-Jones/William Morris stained-glass windows. The church of St. John the Evangelist, close to the House at Waterloo, received £217,000. St. Peter and St. Paul's church at Watlington received money for its bells. So it goes on.

It is a wonderful opportunity to release congregations from the need to raise money for the restoration of their buildings, so that they may raise money for their mission—for their work in the community, which they often very much welcome.

Many of our cathedrals have received help, not only Canterbury but Chester, York Minster, St. Edmundsbury, Southwark, Bradford, Peterborough: all have received money or are shortlisted for help.

My hon. Friends know that I want to build communities as well as buildings. That is why it is so important that the Millennium Commission has set aside £200 million for millennium awards for people who invest in their communities.

I take to heart the message of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe)—we do need to involve and inspire young people in the millennium, and excite them about it. I shall talk further about the sources of assistance that might be able to make a contribution, either through the Millennium Commission's festival programme or perhaps through the Arts Council, which, like the sports and heritage lottery boards, is likely to fund initiatives in its field of endeavour that chime with the aims and objectives of the millennium.

All those organisations regard the millennium not only as the moment for enjoyment, for a street party, for a celebration, for knowing our neighbours and friends, but as a moment of more lasting significance. We have set in train discussions with Church leaders who reinforce that message. Details are being settled of national millennium services, international events and a regional programme.

We believe, however, that Christian precepts should underpin all our work implicitly, if not explicitly. The millennium is a Christian anniversary. The impressive activities that churches are already planning give ample testimony to the fact that we endorse that message. The wide range of Church-based and Church-backed initiatives already being supported by the Millennium Commission and other funding bodies are an excellent start. I believe that, in the run-up to the millennium and during the millennium year, the Christian faith, heritage and culture of the United Kingdom are being, and will continue to be, cherished and celebrated.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 20 March 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Polling Stations (Accessibility)

1. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to improve the accessibility of polling stations to people with disabilities. [19782]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): We issue advice and guidance to acting returning officers, who are most directly responsible for selecting polling places and polling stations, and provide grant aid towards the costs of purchasing temporary ramps and polling booths specially adapted to the needs of voters who are wheelchair users.

Mr. Gerrard: Does the Minister recall that a survey conducted at the time of the last general election revealed that 88 per cent. of polling stations had access problems? Does he accept that the vast majority of disabled people want to vote in person? Does he accept also that many of them will not be able to do so at this general election because simple improvements, such as ramps, better lighting or allowing people to vote at a more accessible location, have not been carried out because the Government failed to do what they could, and should, have done in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to ensure that accessibility is not an option, but a legal requirement?

Mr. Sackville: I am certainly aware of the Spastics Society report to which the hon. Gentleman refers. We want to minimise the number of people who have to vote by proxy or by post because of disablement. However, I remind the hon. Gentleman that, since the last general election, we have paid out £175,000 in grants to local authorities to try to help improve access to polling stations. Many of the buildings concerned are primary schools and libraries at which access arrangements are improving all the time.

Mr. Butler: Can my hon. Friend confirm that this is another case where the generosity of the Treasury is unlimited, and that the grants available are uncapped? Is he aware that, in common with many colleagues on this side of the House, I wrote to my returning officer some weeks ago asking him to ensure that arrangements for the disabled were in place before the general election?

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend is taking a risk in revealing the fact that the budget is uncapped. It is true that any requests for grants for those purposes are met, so long as they are eligible, and that any local authority may seek grant aid to improve access to polling stations.

Rev. Martin Smyth: We welcome that information. Do electoral returning officers act upon the guidance that they are given? We are all aware that polling day is a social occasion, and it is tragic if the disabled are prevented from voting when alternative accommodation may be available.

Mr. Sackville: I assure the House that we have repeatedly reminded electoral returning officers that people have a right to vote, and that the number of those who are unable to vote in person must be kept to an absolute minimum. I assure the hon. Gentleman that improvements are proceeding apace.

Prisons (Drugs)

2. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent of drug taking in prisons. [19783]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Provisional figures show that of more than 32,000 prisoners tested between April and October 1996 under the random drug testing programme, between 20 per cent. and 25 per cent. tested positive. The vast majority were for cannabis. Further research is in hand to provide a more detailed picture.

Dr. Spink: Knowing how assiduously and effectively my right hon. Friend the Minister of State performs her duties, I ask whether she has found time to visit any prisons in the past few months in order to assess for herself the effectiveness of the work undertaken to cut off the supply of drugs to prisoners. Does she agree that we certainly need to do more work to continue to stop drugs reaching prisoners so that prisons may be austere but reforming institutions, rather than the playhouses that Opposition Members would make them?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that I have now visited all the prisons in England and Wales. During those visits, I have on each and every occasion discussed the issue of drugs with prison governors. I am pleased to say that I have seen a number of good initiatives, including weekend mandatory drug testing, enhanced use of drug dogs and special initiatives in regard to monitoring visits. All those initiatives demonstrate the clear resolve of prison governors to get on top of the problem, which echoes the Government's own resolve. I fully concur with the sentiment of my hon. Friend—prisons under this Government are decent but austere; that is not what is proposed or has been the experience of prisons under Labour.

Mr. Alton: I congratulate the Minister on her assiduousness in visiting so many prisons—[HON. MEMBERS: "All of them."]—in visiting all prisons, but does she agree that the level of recidivism among prisoners who continue to be addicted to drugs when they leave prison remains a major factor in fuelling the link between criminality and the taking of drugs? Does she agree that it is a curse on generations of young people

that so many people ply drugs on street corners in cities such as Liverpool? Is that not a powerful incentive for crime? Does she further agree that nothing should be done to encourage the taking of drugs—particularly calls for their decriminalisation?

Miss Widdecombe: I have good news for the hon. Gentleman on the subject of recidivism. He will be pleased to know that the rate of reconviction for those leaving our prisons is now lower than the rate for those serving sentences in the community. That is a tremendous tribute to what our prisons are achieving in rehabilitating the prison population. He is right to say that there is a clear link between drugs and crime and it is imperative that while people are in prison, we should get them off drugs. This is why our efforts are concentrated not only on the supply of drugs and on stopping them getting into prison, but on offering an extensive range of treatment, counselling, therapy and education.

Mr. Rathbone: I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement—and I remind her of the warmth of her welcome at Lewes prison some months ago—but will she remind and reassure the House that in all the prisons where drug testing takes place, sufficient treatment and counselling are in place so that those prisoners who want to come off drugs are given every encouragement to do so?

Miss Widdecombe: Drug testing now takes place in all our prisons, and has done since April 1996. My hon. Friend is right that it is essential to back up that testing by giving prisoners strategies and alternatives to using drugs and the ability to come off them.

Mr. George Howarth: Is the Minister aware that Home Office statistics reveal that the use of hard drugs in privatised prisons is 60 per cent. higher than in comparable prisons in the rest of the prison estate? Will she confirm that those private companies that operate private prisons have donated £2.6 million to Conservative party funds? Is it not the case that private prisons are soft on drugs and that this Government are soft on private prisons?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman is totally at odds with a number of independent reports, including that of Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, who praised Doncaster prison as a model for the rest of the service. He is at odds with Lord Longford, who said on leaving Blakenhurst that but for the fact he does not much like private prisons, he would like every prison to be run like Blakenhurst. He is at odds with the findings on the Wolds, which is now regarded as a model for the service. He does not understand the achievements of private prisons and is about 10 years behind the times. He is driven by Labour ideology and would do well to look at the increase in rehabilitation. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) draws circles in the air. He is describing Labour's policy, which is a circle that goes round and round. The Labour party does not know what direction it is going in and it speaks with two tongues on privatisation. No wonder the hon. Gentleman draws circles in the air—Labour's policy is one big circle.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must send a clear message to people who deal in drugs, whether they are in or out of prison: that we will have zero tolerance of drug dealing? Will she therefore guarantee that, when we are re-elected on 1 May, one of the first things that the Conservative Government will do is reverse the wrecking amendments that the Labour party tabled to the Crime (Sentences) Bill, so that people convicted for a third time of dealing in hard drugs will automatically get seven years in prison? Does not that demonstrate that the Labour party is soft on crime?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes. I give the House a categorical assurance that we will reverse those amendments when we are returned to power on 1 May. That will be one of the first things that we do, because we are committed to protecting the public; the Labour party is merely committed to making life easy for the criminal. My hon. Friend is absolutely right when he says that we should exhibit zero tolerance of drug dealing. That is why we want seven-year minimum mandatory sentences for people who are convicted for a third time. The Opposition take the issue of drugs so seriously that they appear to regard it as a cause for mirth. I do not think that they will regard it as a cause for mirth when they who have never won an election in 23 years find that they will not win the next one either.

Metropolitan Police

3. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police strength in the Metropolitan police in (a) 1996 and (b) 1992. [19784]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I hope that you, Madam Speaker, will permit me to say how pleased I am sure the whole House is to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) in his place on the Conservative Benches this afternoon.

In answer to the hon. Lady's question, between March 1992 and March 1996, a like-for-like comparison shows that about 800 extra uniformed constables were made available to Metropolitan police divisions for operational duties—an increase of 6 per cent. On average, uniformed divisional constables now spend some 10 per cent more time on patrol than in 1992.

Ms Hodge: In the dying moments of the Conservative Government, will the Home Secretary break his right to silence and confess that the figures that are in *Hansard* of 28 February—column *431*—demonstrate that, year on year, police strength in the capital has gone down; confess that, this year, Londoners are paying more for their police service but are getting less; and confess that this is yet another in a long string of broken promises that Londoners have had to bear from a discredited Government?

Mr. Howard: I have given the hon. Lady the accurate figures and am astonished that she should prattle on in that way when she knows perfectly well that her party's shadow Chancellor has said that not a penny more will be committed to the Metropolitan police. There will be no more money for the police, according to the shadow Chancellor, so the hon. Lady's question is absolutely inexplicable. I should have

thought that she would have wanted instead to draw attention to the fact that, in the Dagenham division, which corresponds to her constituency, since 1992, notifiable offences have fallen by 10 per cent., recorded residential burglaries by nearly 30 per cent., recorded sexual offences by nearly 30 per cent., theft of motor vehicles by nearly 25 per cent.; that the clear-up rate for total notifiable offences has risen from 15 per cent. to 22 per cent., for robbery from 12 per cent. to more than 22 per cent. and for domestic burglary from 11.5 per cent. to 29 per cent. That is good news for the hon. Lady's constituents.

Mr. Jessel: While all sensible people accept that to save lives extra police are needed in central London to combat terrorism and drug trafficking, which may mean slightly fewer police officers in outer London, I remind my right hon. and learned Friend that people in outer London remain very concerned about crime and hope that at some time in future, and before very long, additional police officers can be found for outer London.

Mr. Howard: I well understand my hon. Friend's concerns on behalf of his constituents. I know how energetic he has been in drawing them to my attention and that of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis who I know will want to do everything he can to respond to my hon. Friend's concerns in the future.

Children (Criminal Activities)

4. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to take action to discourage children from taking part in criminal activities; and if he will make a statement. [19785]

Mr. Howard: The Government believe that it is important to identify as early as possible children who may be at risk of offending and to take action to help them stay clear of crime. We have just published a Green Paper, "Preventing Children Offending", which sets out proposals for action to help children before they become offenders and reinforces parents' responsibility for their children's behaviour.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is totally in the interests of society, and children in particular, that they should be taught the difference between right and wrong from an early age, and that therefore Christian or moral education in schools is absolutely crucial, although it is seriously neglected by Labour-controlled authorities right across the land? Is not it totally wrong for vicars, or clergymen of any kind, not to mention the Leader of the Opposition, to condone shoplifting, for example?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The remarks to which he has referred, both by the clergyman concerned and the Leader of the Opposition, were quite disgraceful. The Leader of the Opposition sought to excuse certain kinds of pickpocketing and shoplifting in a most disgraceful remark in a speech that he made a short while ago. We all have a duty to inculcate a sense of right and wrong in our children, and it is particularly regrettable when those in positions of authority fail to contribute to that objective.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Home Secretary explain to the House why it has taken 18 years for the Government to produce a Green Paper on dealing with youth crime, and why he did not even act upon the recommendation of his own Home Office research study 161 which revealed some months ago that even a relatively expensive early intervention against youth crime can save an awful lot of money later because young offenders' institutions are so expensive and ineffective?

Mr. Howard: A great deal has been done during the past 18 years to deal with youth crime in various ways. The Green Paper draws together best practice to try to encourage that best practice across the country and to make new proposals for parental control orders which will encourage parents to exert greater control over their offspring.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that crime among youngsters is one of the main worries of the Burbage safe neighbourhood action group in my constituency? How will the child crime teams envisaged in his Green Paper work when the Government are re-elected after 1 May?

Mr. Howard: I hope that child crime teams will be able to bring all the relevant agencies and voluntary bodies, including, for example, Home Start, to bear on those children who experience difficulties and are likely to become career criminals. I hope that everything that can be done will be done to turn them away from a career of crime, and at an early stage. That will be the objective of the child crime teams.

Mr. Straw: I endorse the Home Secretary's welcome to the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). We are pleased to see him back.

Does the Home Secretary recognise that nowhere has the Government's failure during the past 18 years been greater than in respect of the youth justice system, with an increase in just the past 10 years of 35 per cent. in the number of youth crimes but a drop of an equivalent amount—35 per cent.—in the number of young criminals being brought to court? Is the Home Secretary particularly aware of the large number of 10 to 13-year-olds who are not taught the difference between right and wrong under the current system and who presently escape any punishment at all for those serious offences? In view of that, why have the Government failed so far to bring forward any proposals to reform the law on doli incapax?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman totally misrepresents the current position. It is perfectly possible for 10 to 13-year-olds to be brought to court, to be accused of their crime and to be convicted if it can be shown, as it usually can in those circumstances, that they knew the difference between right and wrong. The Crown Prosecution Service says that there is no evidence of a real problem arising out of the rule to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The Government are keeping the operation of that rule under review. If there is any evidence that it is causing a problem, we will act to deal with it.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that more than 85 per cent. of young people who get into trouble do not reoffend because of the measures taken by the police and the courts? The number

before the courts has reduced, because of the effect of cautioning. Is not the real problem the 15 per cent. who are not deterred from crime by a caution or by getting into trouble once? That is where the growth in juvenile crime lies, and where tough measures are needed. It is no use the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) nodding his head. We need the secure training units that his party refused to support.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I know that he will be particularly pleased to learn that the first contract for a secure training unit was signed on 3 March this year. We can now implement that policy, which, as my hon. Friend rightly said, was opposed root and branch by the Opposition parties. The unit will provide secure accommodation to deal with persistent young offenders in the way that is most appropriate.

Jury Trials

5. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning his proposals to restrict the right to jury trial. [19786]

Mr. Howard: Giving magistrates the right to decide where either-way cases should be tried was one of 33 recommendations in the report of the review of delay in the criminal justice system, which was published on 27 February and is now out for consultation. At this early stage in the consultation period, I have received very few responses.

Mr. Livingstone: Has the Home Secretary had time to consider the views of his former colleague, Alan Clark, who wrote in the *News of the World* dismissing those proposals as a last minute idea? He pointed out that the jury trial is the last line of defence for the ordinary citizen.

Mr. Howard: I always listen very carefully to what Mr. Clark says, because he is perhaps my most distinguished constituent. It is incumbent on me to take his views on all matters extremely seriously. I agree with him on almost everything, but not on that.

Mr. Ashby: This is definitely my last question in the House. My right hon. and learned Friend knows of my opposition and the opposition of many lawyers to restricting the right to jury trial. In his White Paper, he gave as the grounds for such a change the fact that there is too much delay and that that delay must be addressed. Has he considered that such a measure would reduce the delay in the Crown court and increase the delay in the magistrates court? That is what will happen, so there will still be delays in the system.

Mr. Howard: I do not accept my hon. Friend's point. The extraordinary truth is that two thirds of those who elect to go for trial in the Crown court then plead guilty, so they do not avail themselves of the option that they have elected to take. We think that it would speed up justice considerably in the Crown court and the magistrates court if the proposals were accepted. We think that they have merit. We want to listen to what people say about them, and we shall announce our decisions in due course.

Special Constables

6. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in attracting new recruits for the position of special constable. [19787]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Between 1991 and 1995, the special constabulary increased from 15,000 to 20,000. A total of £10 million of central Government grant has been made available to help police forces to improve their training, equipment and recruitment of special constables.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister knows that the Opposition believe that special constables play a special part in bringing law and order to our streets. We want the number of special constables to be increased. In 1992, the Government promised to recruit more special constables. In the past year, they have thrown £4 million at advertising, but have ended up with fewer special constables than they started with.

Instead of paying for glitzy advertising, is it not time that we put money into people's pockets to give them a reasonable return for being a special constable and working for their community? A better recruitment drive would be to spend less on advertising and to put a bit of money in a special constable's pocket.

Mr. Maclean: That shows that the hon. Gentleman is not in touch with the special constabulary, whose cause he claims to espouse. Every time we ask special constables whether they want any form of payment, reward or bounty for what they do, the answer is an almost unanimous no. That view was expressed when we carried out an exercise to boost all aspects of the training and recruitment of special constables last year.

Expenditure on the regular police force is now a record £7.3 billion. The amounts that we have spent on recruiting officers for the specials are modest in comparison. If we had not spent that money, the strength of the special constabulary would have dropped, which is not what we want. Through our advertising campaign, we have managed to maintain numbers in the specials—although 13 per cent. join the regular force each year, which is also good news.

Mrs. Peacock: Can my right hon. Friend say how much is now available for the recruitment and training of special constables throughout the United Kingdom, and how much has recently been allocated to West Yorkshire?

Mr. Maclean: I am delighted to say that we have recently made available £10 million specifically to aid recruitment of special constables, and to improve training and equipment. We recognise that those who volunteer for the special constabulary are making one of the greatest potential sacrifices that any volunteer can make in this country. It is a noble calling. The money that we have allocated is improving the special constabulary, and all forces are grateful for it.

West Yorkshire received nearly £130,000 last year, and last week I was pleased to be able to allocate a further £127,000 to it. That will build on the considerable success that West Yorkshire has had with its specials—along with

the increased number of regulars that it has had since 1979—and on its success over the past few years in lowering the level of all kinds of crime in the area, including violent crime.

Closed-circuit Television

7. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of CCTV in Newcastle as operated by Northumbria police. [19788]

Mr. Sackville: I understand from the Northumbria police that recorded crime in Newcastle city centre has more than halved since the introduction of closed-circuit television in 1992. There were 15,000 incidents in 1991, and fewer than 7,000 in 1996. The neighbourhood CCTV system in the west end of Newcastle also produced a 23 per cent. reduction of crime in 1996.

Mr. Cousins: Does the Minister recognise that neighbourhood CCTV security schemes were pioneered in Newcastle, by a partnership between the best-led and most effective police force in Britain and people in some of the toughest and least well-off communities and neighbourhoods? Given that record of success, why does the Minister not offer Newcastle more support? Why does he keep refusing it new CCTV schemes, given that it pioneered their development?

Mr. Sackville: Two hundred schemes were funded in the last round. We reckon that the total programme over four years will lead to the installation of 10,000 more cameras throughout the country.

CCTV is one of the Government's major law-and-order achievements, and has led to a reduction in crime everywhere. I remind the hon. Gentleman that this year violent crime fell by 9 per cent. in Northumbria, robberies by 11 per cent., burglaries by 19 per cent., theft by 13 per cent., vehicle crime by 12 per cent. and thefts of motor vehicles by 16 per cent. All that leads to a greater feeling of well-being among residents who are protected by CCTV.

Vandalism

8. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new initiatives he plans to introduce to combat vandalism against property. [19789]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): The fight against vandalism is part of the Government's overall fight against crime. We recognise that the best initiatives against this particular crime are co-ordinated at local level, and we have made available £50 million for the introduction of closed circuit television systems which, wherever they are installed, can be effective in the detection and reduction of vandalism.

Mr. Winterton: Is my hon. Friend aware that the majority of incidents of vandalism against property in my constituency are carried out by juveniles? Does he accept that the best way to deal with them is to encourage greater parental responsibility, to bring more secure training centres or units into operation sooner, and to make greater use of closed circuit television? I am pleased to report that Macclesfield has been successful in the third round of bidding for CCTV for the town centre.

Mr. Kirkhope: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his activity in connection with the successful Macclesfield town centre bid. The Government provided more than £92,000 to assist with 11 cameras, which I am sure will have a strong effect on crime in my hon. Friend's area. We should like to have secure training centres in place as soon as possible. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said, we have signed the first contract, for Cookham Wood, which should be operational early next year. It would have been helpful if Labour, where it is entrusted with power at local level, had been more supportive of our planning applications for secure training centres. If Labour really wants to attack crime and criminals, why does it not take actions that are consistent with that?

Mr. Henderson: The local authority in Newcastle upon Tyne has been co-operative, and vandalism has still soared. Is the Minister aware that criminal damage crimes have increased by 197 per cent. since 1979? What does he say to people who have suffered from the damage that soaring vandalism has caused in their communities? Does he admit responsibility?

Mr. Kirkhope: I say to those people, "Beware of a party which has never supported the Government's attacks on criminals, vandals and all such people." People should beware of that, not of a Government who have done so much to attack crime.

Prisons (Ministerial Visits)

9. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Minister responsible for prisons most recently visited a prison, and what was the purpose of the visit. [19790]

Miss Widdecombe: Earlier this week I visited HM prison ship Weare, and before that I visited Spring Hill prison Buckinghamshire, on 11 March. That completed my tour of all prisons in England and Wales. I visit prisons to see for myself what is happening at individual establishments and to talk to staff, prisoners and members of boards of visitors about matters of concern to them. It is a particularly important part of my role as prisons Minister.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her commitment to the Prison Service. She is the first Minister to visit all the prisons in England and Wales. Does she agree that, since the Prison Service became an agency, there have been considerable improvements? For example, the degrading exercise of slopping out has been abolished. There is now a much more constructive, but austere, regime. In short, prisons should not be hotels in which prisoners relax.

Miss Widdecombe: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind remarks. I can confirm that, since achieving agency status, the Prison Service has made remarkable strides.

Not only has it achieved that which my hon. Friend has outlined, but there has been a reduction in the escape rate of some 80 per cent., a rise in purposeful activity of some 7 per cent., an increase in education, and elimination of the practice of placing three prisoners in a cell designed for one. Those achievements have been brought about because the Prison Service, its management and staff and the Government have been committed to such improvements despite the endless catalogue of damnation by the Opposition, who do nothing but point to the bad news. They demoralise the service with their constant criticism. They never acknowledge and praise the service for its achievements. I am pleased to do that and I suggest that Opposition Members join me in so doing.

Mr. Skinner: When the Minister was visiting the prisons in Britain, did she take her handcuffs with her, and how many times did she bump into that well-known recidivist the Home Secretary?

Miss Widdecombe: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on what I am sure will be his forthcoming retirement—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—in keeping with his own policy, and I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on turning round our attitudes towards public protection, again in the teeth not only of ignorant opposition from Labour Members, but of nothing from them but concern for the criminal and for being soft on those who repeatedly prey on the public. When my right hon. and learned Friend returns on May 2, he will carry on that programme to the shame of Opposition Members and to the great benefit of the people of this country.

Criminal Justice System

10. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning delays in the criminal justice system; and if he will make a statement. [19791]

Mr. Howard: I frequently receive representations about delays in the criminal justice system, which is why my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and I set up the review, the report of which I published on 27 February.

Mr. Hughes: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the speeding up of the criminal justice system that will flow from his review paper will be warmly welcomed by the public, and that they will not be taken in by Opposition Members who side with all the vested interests that simply do not want to speed up criminal justice? Will not people conclude that it is the Home Secretary who is interested in speeding up criminal justice and that Labour wants only to sound as if it wants to speed it up?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The potential benefits of these proposals would lead to almost all defendants being in court the day after they are charged, compared with fewer than 20 per cent. now, about 50 per cent. of defendants being convicted the day after charge, compared with 3 per cent. now, and young offenders appearing in court within days of committing their offence, instead of the present average of 10 weeks. I have yet to hear expressions of support from the Labour party for the measures in that review.

Mr. Michael: As one who campaigned for an ending of the delays in criminal justice for many years before coming into this place, I am amazed by the Home Secretary's response. After 18 years, why has it taken an imminent general election to get the Home Secretary to admit what we have been telling him for years: that justice delayed is justice denied to victims, to offenders who need to be punished and to ordinary people whose communities have been damaged by crime under the Conservatives? Why have the Conservatives failed to cut the scandalous delays, particularly as proved by the Audit Commission, in the youth justice system?

Mr. Howard: Here we have it again. The Labour party pays lip service to the objectives, but says nothing about the way in which those objectives can be achieved. Why did the hon. Gentleman not tell us whether his party agreed or disagreed with our proposals? Why did he not tell us whether it would support their implementation? Labour Members are not prepared to tell us what their attitude to these matters is. They simply get up and offer platitude, after platitude, after platitude.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is not the worst delay in the criminal justice system the delay in catching the criminals once they have committed their offences, and before they commit the next offence? Will my right hon. and learned Friend congratulate the Burton upon Trent police, who this year have increased yet again their rate of detection and who have reduced the rate of crime by 20 per cent. in the past three years? Does he agree that the Burton police and every other police force is now better trained, better equipped, better led, better paid and better supported by the law than they have ever been in our history, and will continue to be so only when we are re-elected?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend and I am delighted to join him in congratulating the Burton police on their performance, which mirrors the performance of the police service throughout the country, which has reduced recorded crime in the past four years by the largest amount since records were first kept in 1857.

Young Offenders

11. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of crimes committed by young people. [19792]

Mr. Maclean: The best indicator we have of youth crime is the number of young people known to have been involved in offending. In 1995, 179,000 persons aged under 18 were either cautioned by the police or convicted by the courts.

Mrs. Prentice: Does not the Minister realise that young offenders commit some 7 million crimes, yet only 1.3 per cent. of them are ever prosecuted, and that half of those who are prosecuted find that their criminal charges

are dropped or that they get absolute or conditional discharges? Does he not realise that, by the time the young offenders reach court, the offence is a distant dream? Does he now accept that our policy of fast-track punishment for young offenders is the only way to solve the problem?

Mr. Maclean: If the hon. Lady is concerned about juvenile crime, she should welcome our Green Paper. All the Opposition have produced is a ragbag of incoherent soundbites and wish lists and no idea about how to make them work in practice. The Government have a carefully thought out strategic approach which goes to the root of juvenile offending. From what we have heard this afternoon, a party that thinks it can solve juvenile crime by abolishing the rule of doli incapax is not living in the real world. Perhaps the hon. Lady should take up the issue with the shadow spokesman who voted against curfew orders in 1990, voted to cut community sentences from 240 hours, voted to cut the sentence at attendance centres, and said that holding parents responsible for controlling their children's behaviour would only make matters worse. We cannot trust a word Labour says on crime.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 March. [19812]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Mullin: Will the Prime Minister confirm that he could, if he wished, without any impact on the date of the general election, extend the life of this Parliament by the few days necessary to allow Sir Gordon Downey to publish his report? If so, I suggest that as soon as he leaves here, he nips down to the palace, has a quiet word with Her Majesty and puts an end to this distasteful business once and for all.

The Prime Minister: There has already been a Privy Council to determine Prorogation, and I have no intention of changing it. Prorogation always follows within days of an election announcement. When I announced the date of the election and Prorogation, the House was not surprised—*[Laughter.]* There was no surprise about the date of Prorogation, and when I announced it there was no representation then or at any time in the past, publicly or privately, from the Labour party about changing the date—not once. It was not until the unemployment figures were leaked that this became an issue.

Sir Jim Spicer: During the campaign, I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend will be coming to the south of England and, we all hope, to Dorset. When he comes to Dorset, will he pass on to the people there and all those in the area served by Southern Electricity the good news that, as from Tuesday, they will have had an 11 per cent. cut in their electricity bills during the past nine months, which amounts to £40 to £50 off their bills? Is not that proof that privatisation works, and would it have happened if we had had a windfall tax?

The Prime Minister *rose—*

Mr. Skinner: Do not travel by train.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member for Bolsover says that I should not travel by train. I understand that the hon. Gentleman has indicated to his constituents that he may be retiring from the House now that he is 65—we shall miss him. If so, he will have plenty of time to travel by train and the fares will be lower, following privatisation, than they were before— just like water—

Mr. Prescott: There will be no trains.

The Prime Minister: The deputy leader of the Labour party says there will be no trains. As he is sponsored by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, he knows a great deal about strikes. I did not notice him offering much condemnation of strikes last summer, when they were threatened. He stands for strikes; that is his whole history. The reality is that customers are benefiting from falling prices and the improved service levels created across the board by privatisation. From memory, I think that it was the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) who once said that, after electricity privatisation, there is no doubt that "prices will rise". Since privatisation, prices have fallen.

Mr. Blair: May I remind the Prime Minister of his firm and unequivocal promise, made last October, to do all that he could to have the report of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges published? May I suggest to him two ways in which that could be done? The first is to seek a postponement of Prorogation. The second is to agree with the Labour party and other Opposition parties a one paragraph Bill to allow the Committee to sit from now until Dissolution, on 8 April. Will he co-operate and allow us to do that—to fulfil his clear and unequivocal promise to the people of this country?

The Prime Minister: As ever, the right hon. Gentleman quotes partially, but I shall deal with the substance of what he said. Of course I would have preferred to have had the matter finished. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I said that months ago. I would have liked to have had all the inquiries finished. I would have liked to have had the inquiries into the funding of the Leader of the Opposition's office and the deputy leader's office finished.

Sir Gordon Downey's report is not finished, and it has not yet gone to the Committee. When it gets to the Committee—as the right hon. Gentleman knows—that will be the start, not the conclusion, of the process. It is obviously a complex report—*[Interruption.]* It has been made clear that there are thousands of pages of evidence; it is obviously complex, and it will obviously take time to consider. Those hon. Members who may be criticised will obviously wish to make representations and give evidence. The thought that that could be done fairly and properly in a few days is improbable in the extreme. The right hon. Gentleman knows that. He also knows that,

based on what has happened on earlier occasions, parts of the substance of the report might leak in a prejudicial way before the matter is fairly concluded. That would not be in the interests of the House or of natural justice. I have no intention of changing the Prorogation date of the House.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister says that I quoted partially his comments of last October. Last October, in the "Breakfast with Frost" programme, he said:

"Well I'll tell you now, I will tell that committee I believe they should publish the report . . . I want it settled, I want it settled David."

After Frost asked him whether he hoped it was

"reported and . . . published before the next election",

he said, "Absolutely."

Mr. David Shaw: £2 million blind funds.

Mr. Blair: If the objection is based on time, may I suggest to the Prime Minister that he let the Committee sit? If it cannot finish its report for genuine time reasons, so be it. What is surely outrageous is for the Committee—

Mr. Shaw: £2 million blind funds.

Madam Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Shaw to order.

Mr. Blair: The Committee is able to sit, and the Commissioner's report will be ready on Monday. The hon. Members concerned want the report to be published. It is absolutely outrageous not to let the Committee have the time even to try. If the Prime Minister continues to stonewall, people will believe that the reason is not technicalities or can't, but won't.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is still quoting what I said selectively. I made it clear that although I wanted the report to be published speedily, and I did, it was a matter for Gordon Downey and he would have to take the time he needed to deal with the matter properly. Perhaps his task would have been easier if some people had not delayed handing over important evidence—but that was not the Government. The fact of the matter is that this needs to be dealt with impartially, not in an atmosphere in which it could be selectively leaked to damage people who may have nothing whatsoever to hide.

The right hon. Gentleman had no interest in this on Monday; he had no interest in this on Tuesday; he had an interest only when he had the unemployment figures leaked to him—to try to hide what is actually happening. This is a matter that needs dealing with fairly in the interests of the Members concerned, not in the way the right hon. Gentleman wishes to deal with it. What he wishes is to let a smear stand, not let justice be done in its own time.

Mr. Blair: Justice demands that this report be published. That is what justice demands. Any members of the public watching that interchange will conclude that the Prime Minister simply does not want it published because he fears its publication. Has not this Parliament ended as it began—*[Interruption.]* It has ended as it began, with the Government breaking their word. If the Prime Minister fails to have this report published, when everyone knows that he could, it will leave a stain on the character of his Government that will be erased only by a new Government with a fresh mandate, who will restore confidence in our public life for good.

The Prime Minister: The stain, if stain there will be, is upon a Labour Front Bench that has smeared and smeared and smeared again. The Labour leader has traded in double standards from the moment he took up office. This is the Labour leader who sells policy to the trade unions for cash—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]; who refuses to comply with the code of practice on party funding—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]; who calls for party openness but will not publish the secret funds of his own office—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]; who attacks share options but takes money from millionaires for his own party—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]; who attacks business men and asks them to fund things for him, who flew Concorde and failed to declare it—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]; who has a deputy leader who spends a weekend at a five-star hotel and does not declare it—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]; and who flies to the other side of the world to do newspaper deals and never admits to them—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] If there are any double standards, they sit there—on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. David Shaw: Game, set and match.

Madam Speaker: Order. I would like to hear the next question and the next answer.

Mr. Churchill: Before taking what I hope is only a temporary leave of the House, may I, on behalf of my Manchester constituents, thank my right hon. Friend and the Government for making the United Kingdom the best functioning economy in all of Europe, with half the levels of unemployment of France or Germany? Is it not precisely because those two countries have not had the benefit of a Thatcher-Major revolution that they are suffering from what, in Labour days, used to be known as the British disease?

The Prime Minister: Before I respond to my hon. Friend, I should like to say that I noticed when I last sat down that my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) is back in the House following his dreadful accident. My right hon. Friend will be retiring at the end of this Parliament, but he will leave behind him reforms to our procedures that have greatly improved the workings of the House. I am delighted to see him here and I wish him a speedy and full return to complete health.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) about economic conditions. We now have more jobs, better education, improving health and falling crime—that is our achievement. While the Labour party spends its time trying to disown its past, I spend my time improving our country's future.

Mr. Ashdown *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order—both sides.

Mr. Ashdown: We raised this matter on Tuesday and I am raising it again now. Can I bring the Prime Minister back to the central question? There is clearly both provision and precedent to give the House the opportunity to clear up the cash for questions scandal once and for all next week if the Prime Minister wishes it, but he does not. Sir Gordon Downey regrets that, the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges regrets it, Conservative Members who are still under a suspicion of sleaze regret it and the nation no doubt deeply resents it. Is the Prime Minister to be the only person who will use a technicality to stand in the way of truth? If he does, he should not be surprised that the country will conclude that he enters the election as he conducted his Administration—on a broken promise, on a slippery evasion and with his party mired in accusations of sleaze.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman ends as pious and pompous as he has been throughout this Parliament. If what he said were correct, why did not his member of the Committee ask for what the right hon. Member for Sedgefield asked for—for he did not? Why did not the Labour members of the Committee ask for what the right hon. Member for Sedgefield asked for—for they did not? This has been a political stunt by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield and the leader of the Liberal party and they both know that it has been a political stunt from the moment they learnt what the unemployment figures were.

Electoral Registration

3.31 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members leaving the Chamber should do so quietly and very quickly. We have business to attend to.

Mr. Barnes: I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

the standing of electoral registration arrangements for the coming general election.

This morning, electoral registration figures for constituencies in England and Wales were placed in the Commons Library. The House now holds electoral registration figures for each constituency in the United Kingdom. The total registration figures are 44.2 million—a marginal increase of less than 0.5 per cent. on last year, which is easily accounted for by the growth in the population of over 18-year-olds. The figures can be added to only by the numbers on the supplementary lists, which close today.

The figures for the 1997 general election are as bad as the figures in recent years. They show a 2 million shortfall against relevant population figures, but that 2 million shortfall should be cut by half a million to accommodate residents from overseas other than Ireland and the Commonwealth. That would mean a 1.5 million shortfall in the registers—if the registers were up to scratch.

Survey work shows that some registers are dated when they are initially published. They include people who have died, names that are just carried over from previous registers, people who have been double-counted by being on more than one register, and many who have moved and will not be able to get hold of their postal vote or use it.

When all those factors are taken into account, we see that 3 million to 4 million people are missing from the registers. They are not a random sample of society; missing names are especially likely among Commonwealth citizens, black people, those in bed-sitter land, young people and city dwellers, especially those in London and particularly inner London. Given that we now have a general election, this matter, confirmed by today's figures, should be debated before we depart for the hustings.

Madam Speaker: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman. I have, of course, to give a decision without stating the reasons for it. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and I cannot, therefore, submit the application to the House.

Points of Order

3.36 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for not having given you greater notice of the matter; I was notified only at 2.27 pm of your provisional selection. I notified your secretary immediately to say that I would try to raise the matter.

There is an amendment on the Order Paper tabled by members of the Procedure Committee of all three parties following a unanimous decision by the Committee on the naming of Standing Committees. It is a simple amendment which suggests that Standing Committees dealing with public Bills should be known as Public Bill Committees so that the name shows the meaning of the Committee.

There is hardly any need for a debate—indeed, it was at the suggestion of the Leader of the House that such an amendment was tabled. Would you, Madam Speaker, between now and the moment when the matter comes before the House, reconsider the issue? Senior Members serve for many months on Committees considering matters of no real benefit to themselves. When they come forward with a unanimous view and that view is not allowed to be tested in the House, it is immensely depressing. Members may be discouraged from serving on Committees in future.

There is no need for a debate on the matter; there is merely a decision to be made. Apparently, the only opposition is emanating from the Chairman of Ways and Means. The House should be allowed to make the decision and I hope that you, Madam Speaker, will allow that when you reconsider the matter.

Madam Speaker: I considered the matter carefully this morning. I do not give reasons for the non-selection of amendments. I appreciate very much the work that the right hon. Gentleman and his Committee have done on procedure; it is very much unsung. He has, however, hit the nail on the head himself. He said that the House should be allowed to decide the matter. Under our procedures this afternoon, the House will not be allowed to debate the matter. When it comes to changes to Standing Orders, it is absolutely right that the House has an opportunity to debate the matter. I have given a reason for my decision; it is right that I should do so because it is an issue that concerns the entire House.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I have your help? I understand that the Minister for Railways and Roads has issued a press statement relating to the widening of the M25. I complain on two counts. First, when the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), was Secretary of State for Transport, he made a statement in the House about the widening of the M25. Subsequently, Ministers reneged on that statement in the House—I do not say that provocatively—when they amended the decision.

Under the cloak of the great sweep of history taking place today, the Minister for Railways and Roads is issuing a statement, although he is not coming to the House to do so, announcing that the widening of the

M25 between junctions 12 and 15 should be increased to 10 and 12 lanes. I also believe that he will announce it by way of an answer to a parliamentary question that I asked.

When I came into the Chamber, there were no replies for me on the board, yet the press and journalists are aware of the announcement. That is wrong on two counts. First, the Minister should tell the House and the people—especially the people of Surrey—about the widening proposals and not try to sweep them through under the smokescreen of today's constitutional events. Secondly, if he is using my parliamentary question to make the announcement, I should have had the courtesy of a reply and the press should not have had it first. To be fair, Madam Speaker, I am not certain about the latter, but I suspect it.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member should not raise the matter if he is not certain about it. How can I answer a point of order on something about which he is not certain? Of course, I deprecate the fact that any Minister makes a statement by press release before letting the House know, either through an answer to a question, as the hon. Member said, or at the Dispatch Box—it is up to the Minister concerned. I can make no comment on the fact that the hon. Member suspects that the Minister is going to do something.

Mr. Mackinlay: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, it is convoluted. Go on.

Mr. Mackinlay: I did not fully elaborate on the fact that Cabinet rules are operating. The Minister of State, Scottish Office rightly referred to that in the House yesterday, when he said that he could not make any executive decisions because the general election had been called, yet that constitutional principle is being breached by the Minister for Railways and Roads this afternoon.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Am I not correct in assuming and stating to the House that, even after the date of the general election has been announced, it is in order and in accordance with the procedures of the House and Parliament for a Minister to answer parliamentary questions? I believe that that is what has happened.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is correct.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): A final appearance.

Mr. Faulds: Sadly, yes. The House will miss me. May I make as my last contribution, Madam Speaker, after 31 years of the most distinguished service, a valuable contribution to the proceedings of this august Chamber? When I first came here—

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): "Friends, Romans, countrymen".

Mr. Faulds: Shut up, you silly little boy.

When I first came here 31 years ago, the custom was never ever to thank the Speaker for catching someone's eye. Can I implore you in the next Parliament—I do trust and pray that you will be where you are now—to instruct Members not to go through that rather placatory practice of thanking you for simply doing your duty? This is a new development and it really is not a very pleasant practice.

Madam Speaker: I would not dream of agreeing to what the hon. Gentleman says.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. A report was published this morning—not the one that has already given rise to some heated exchanges—by the Select Committee on Science and Technology, on the cloning of animals from adult cells. That report raises a number of important issues and seeks to reassure the public in the context of the fears that have been expressed in the media. Part of that report referred to the funding of the Roslin institute—an important scientific institute—by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. In the report, the actions of MAFF were described as being damaging to British industry and science—

Madam Speaker: Order. Just a moment. I am very tolerant today, but the hon. Gentleman is trying me a little. He must come to his point of order and what I can do about it and not rehearse what is in the report.

Mr. Miller: I appreciate that, Madam Speaker, and sympathise with your difficulties. Given that the report describes MAFF as "cavalier and blinkered" and we have been told that some of its actions—we have been told this only informally—are to be addressed, would not it be appropriate for a Minister to come to the House to tell us what action he intends to take to address those criticisms as a matter of urgency? The public are deeply concerned about the matter.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that, regardless of what he thinks is important—no doubt the issue is important—if a Minister had intended to make a statement, it would have said so on the annunciator screen by 1 o'clock. I call Mr. Banks.

Mr. Tony Banks: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We shall all miss the wise counsels of that wonderful old thespian, my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds). Have you received a request for a statement from a Foreign Office Minister about the Portuguese police's disgraceful and brutal treatment of Manchester United supporters in Oporto last night? No one would defend riotous behaviour, but by all accounts, Manchester United supporters were set upon in the most appalling way. All British citizens, regardless of whether they are football supporters travelling abroad, are entitled to protection. Is there any way in which we can get a Minister to the House, so that we know that some form of inquiry and protection for our citizens abroad is being put in place?

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that Ministers do not request to make a statement;

[Madam Speaker]

they tell me that they are going to make a statement. I have not been informed by any Minister that a statement is being made on that matter today.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I rise not to express my disappointment at the fact that Question 2 of Prime Minister's questions, which I tabled, was not reached, but in respect of the debate on Standing Orders. Although I understand the reason why you have not selected the amendment—I am one of the signatories to it—does the way in which the motions are set out on the Order Paper mean that we shall have the opportunity of debating the main points? The Standing Orders that are being amended have not been debated, and a number of motions refer to an order of 19 March.

Madam Speaker: The House agreed yesterday that there should be no debate on those Standing Orders.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw your attention to the fact that among the Bills on today's Order Paper is the Holocaust Denial Bill, which had its First Reading on 29 January, its Second Reading without opposition on 28 February and went through Committee unamended on 12 March? Given that there has been widespread support on both sides of the House for the Bill, could you persuade the Government, even at this late stage, to ensure that it gets on to the statute book before the end of this Parliament?

Madam Speaker: I should like to think that I have some powers of persuasion, but I fear that, in relation to the Government, I have no persuasive powers at all.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you confirm that you have commented on a matter that was raised today as if it were unresolved? Sir Gordon Downey has written to make it absolutely clear that, as far as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition's office is concerned, there is no question of it being a matter of dispute. He states in his letter, which I think you have already raised in response to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw):

"I shall be advising the Committee that in my view there is no case to answer."

Surely that should not be linked with Sir Gordon Downey's great regret that his report has not been published and cannot be published during the election campaign, as the report makes clear.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. May I point out that I have subsequently written to Sir Gordon Downey, and my understanding is that the investigation into the Leader of the Opposition's office over the £2 million of blind funds is still under way, still an open issue and can be raised during the election campaign as a very valid question about the Leader of the Opposition?

Madam Speaker: It is not a matter for me if the matter has been referred. I note the point made by the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell). I have seen some correspondence in relation to that myself.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT (SCOTLAND) BILL [*MONEY*] (No. 2)

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in establishing and maintaining the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Orders of the Day

Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 1

IMPRISONMENT FOR LIFE ON FURTHER CONVICTION FOR CERTAIN OFFENCES

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 2, line 16, leave out from ("opinion") to ("may") in line 19 and insert

("that it would be in the interests of justice for it to pass a sentence other than the sentence which that subsection would require it to pass, it")

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 6 and 31.

3.49 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): The amendments should not pass unremarked, because they represent a substantial climbdown by the Government from the wholly unreasonable position that they had previously adopted. Had the Government earlier displayed the same flexibility as they have been driven to demonstrate in the past few days, we might have had a much more constructive discussion about the best way to reform the law of Scotland.

The amendments that were accepted in the House of Lords have substantially restored the discretion of the judiciary on sentences for serious crimes. Perhaps more significantly, the Government have allowed an independent tribunal for Scotland to deal with miscarriages of justice. The Government rejected such a tribunal wholly and completely, notwithstanding the powerful and trenchant terms of the Sutherland report. At the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Ayr last year, the Secretary of State for Scotland suggested dismissively that such a body for Scotland was unnecessary. Proud though we may be of the law in Scotland, we cannot assume its infallibility. In the past, the cases of Patrick Meehan and of Preece, among others, have shown that the legal system has been inadequate to deal with cases in which justice has not been properly done.

The amendments are a considerable improvement on the Government's original proposals. It is a great pity that they did not approach the matter in the constructive and consensual way that it deserves. I do not know whether the amendments will be described as driving a coach and horses through the Bill, but it is in a better state now than when it was first conceived. The Government could have had it in this condition if they had demonstrated any willingness to co-operate with the Opposition parties.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I draw your attention to Question 306 on today's Order Paper. I believe that a forged question has been put down in my name. I have discussed the matter with the Table Office, and the signature on the question looks like mine, but it is not. The terms of the question are not mine either. I take great exception to that. Perhaps it is an end-of-term prank, but if it is, I do not appreciate the joke. I suggest that we use all the forces of law and order that the Government have introduced recently and submit the question paper to DNA testing, to try to find out with whom the question originated.

Madam Speaker: I do not approve of end-of-term pranks. I shall do all I can to have investigations made, to see how this came about. You can be assured of that, Mr. Gallie.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 81 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Hedgerows

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the draft Hedgerows Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 3rd March, be approved.—[*Mr. Clappison.*]

3.59 pm

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Unlike the Minister, I shall be taking the time of the House properly to debate these regulations, which are extremely important and do not deserve to be pushed through in this way in the late afternoon. On the importance of hedgerows to our landscape, I can do no better than quote from the briefing provided by the Wildlife Trust:

"Hedgerows are a living example of our natural heritage—they contribute greatly to the quality of the landscape and are highly valuable for wildlife . . . Hedges are wildlife corridors sheltering a wealth of plant, insect and animal life. Three quarters of our native lowland mammals and birds and half our butterflies breed in hedges. The threatened dormouse and field vole nestle in their midst; along with nesting birds such as the tree sparrow and yellowhammer. They are also bountiful hunting grounds for stoats and weasels.

Laden with berries in the autumn, hedges provide rich pickings for both resident and visiting species. Hedge plants can provide nectar for butterflies and are often foodplants for their caterpillars.

Hedgerows vary regionally in species composition. The common perception of hedges in the UK is that they are generally hawthorn . . . which was planted as it was quick growing. However, hedges can be surprisingly species rich, with older ones containing more than five species in a 30 m length. A good kilometre of hedge can be home to 10 pairs of nesting birds. Beneath a hedge, the sward may harbour plants typical of ancient woodland and unimproved meadow such as bluebell, wild garlic, early purple orchid and harebell.

Since the Second World War . . . hedgerows have been removed at a much faster rate than they have been planted."

The Government promised as far back as 1990 to protect hedgerows. In 1992, they made it an election manifesto pledge. It is only now—at the eleventh hour of a dying Parliament—that they have fulfilled their promise. But they have done so pathetically.

The regulations are fundamentally flawed—a weak and timid attempt that will leave almost 80 per cent. of hedgerows unprotected. In the time it has taken this sorry Government to act on their promise, thousands of kilometres of hedgerows have been dug up and lost for ever. More than 10,800 km of hedgerow were removed between 1990 and 1993, and a further 67,500 km were classified as derelict. It is in that context that we must examine the regulations today.

We in the Labour party, like all wildlife and countryside non-governmental organisations, are amazed at the deficiencies of the regulations. They make no reference to the UK biodiversity action plan, which set targets for hedgerow conservation, as well as for several species dependent on hedgerows, such as the grey partridge and the song thrush.

Far from complementing the biodiversity action plan—as we would have expected—the regulations completely undermine it. It is an illustration of the gross inadequacy of the regulations that hedges which meet the action plan criteria set by the Government could still legally be removed under the regulations. In light of this, can the Minister—who is not prepared to speak on the regulations—tell us whether he thinks that the habitat action plan for ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows can now carry any credibility whatever in light of the regulations?

Nor do the regulations make any reference to the habitats directive, even though article 10 of the directive seeks to encourage the protection and management of linear features such as hedgerows for their value to flora and fauna.

The original proposal of four weeks for local planning authorities to determine applications for removal was heavily criticised. The Government's response is to offer six weeks, but that is still hopelessly inadequate. Owners can apply to remove a hedge at any time of the year. As the Minister knows, few data are available on the wildlife and biodiversity of most hedgerows.

Thus it is completely impossible for a local authority to carry out a meaningful wildlife survey of a hedgerow during the winter months if asked to do so. If the owners apply in winter, as they may well do, and the necessary information is not available, local authorities will be unable to make any adequate assessment that takes the biodiversity into account and hedgerows with a significant biodiversity interest will continue to be lost.

Furthermore, local planning authorities must now take into account the reasons for the removal of a hedge. That requirement was not in the original proposals, and we can conclude that it has been inserted only because the Government have succumbed to some rather heavy lobbying. It is yet another example of their willingness to act in the interests of the few instead of the interests of the majority of ordinary people who value our natural heritage.

Does the Minister agree that farmers rarely remove hedges other than for economic reasons? How do the Government expect local planning authorities to make objective and consistent judgments on the economic and non-market benefits of hedgerows? Can he define a valid economic reason for removing an environmentally valuable hedgerow?

A look at the criteria for identifying important hedgerows reveals further fundamental failings. The criteria referred to species lists originating from the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the red data books. As the Minister must know, the Act is now 16 years old. We on the Opposition Benches are extremely puzzled as to why the regulations stipulate that only species lists published before the hedgerows legislation is implemented may be taken into account. That absurdity means that updated records and new sources of information, such as the lists compiled as part of the biodiversity action plan, will not be able to be used in the evaluation process, thus making a farce of that very process.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is particularly concerned that one effect will be the exclusion of many farmland birds, including some species—yet again—that the biodiversity action plan recognises as a high priority for conservation, such as the grey partridge and the song thrush. Surely that ridiculous failing has to be corrected, and would have been if it were not for the fact that the Government are intent on rushing the regulations through this afternoon despite the flaws within them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ms Ruddock: Conservative Members are anxious to speak, and rightly so. I just hope that they will share my numerous criticisms.

Another glaring hole in the criteria is the omission of landscape value as a separately specified criterion. Although it involves some qualitative judgment, so, of course, do tree preservation orders, landscape assessments and the Department of the Environment's good practice guide to environmental appraisals.

It is a further failing of the regulations that they require local authorities to consult only parish councils. Of course they should consult parish councils, but many conservation and heritage bodies in Britain have built up great expertise during many years on local hedgerows. Why have the Government decided to exclude such groups? Surely it would be right for such bodies to be made statutory consultees.

The Minister will be aware that much wider public consultation procedures are required under other planning legislation, including the tree preservation orders, which surely bear some similarity to the regulations. If the planning process is to be truly more democratic, we need to increase the scope for public consultation.

It is a telling indictment of the low priority that the Government give to hedgerow legislation—

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will my hon. Friend give a clear undertaking that when she is sitting on the Treasury Bench she will bring forward regulations that will really work at the earliest opportunity?

Ms Ruddock: I am delighted to respond positively to my hon. Friend on that point.

I was pointing to the low priority that is signalled in the regulations by the maximum fine for illegally removing a hedgerow—just £5,000, compared with £20,000 for breaking tree protection orders.

The Government have promised to produce guidance on the regulations for local authorities, but they have given hedgerow protection such low priority, and left it so late in the day, that we shall never set eyes on it.

However, a number of conservation bodies are anxious to see on the record for this afternoon a commitment from whoever forms the next Government to consult environmental interests before producing any such guidance, especially on how local authorities should evaluate the landowner's reason for removing a hedge.

I am happy to give the House today the commitment that, if Labour forms the next Government, we shall certainly hold those consultations. Will the Minister give such a commitment? Does he accept that only in extreme circumstances should a landowner's private interest be allowed to override a hedgerow protection order made in the wider public interest?

The regulations are perhaps unique in being roundly criticised by all the major environmental groups in Britain. On Monday this week, the umbrella organisation Wildlife and Countryside Link, representing 11 leading organisations and more that 3.5 million members, wrote to the Secretary of State urging him to withdraw and redraft the regulation.

The Government have chosen to fly in the face of that expert advice by insisting on squeezing in the regulations even when they are being forced to drop key clauses from their flagship Bills to get them through before the imminent end of this discredited Parliament.

I can confirm that, should Labour form the next Government, we shall consult all the interested parties and take urgent steps to strengthen the regulations in the interests of all our people and of our biodiversity and our countryside.

4.13 pm

Sir Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): I am delighted to have this last opportunity to speak as a Member of Parliament and on the environment and countryside.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) was a little curmudgeonly in her welcome of the measure. After all, this is the first statutory instrument on hedgerows, and it is a fulfilment of our commitment in the Environment Act 1995 to take action to protect hedgerows. This is the first time that any Government of any political persuasion have introduced such a measure.

The statutory instrument should be seen in the wider context of what we have done for the environment and to promote conservation within the countryside. I am delighted to have joined the countryside stewardship scheme. It was only two or three weeks ago that, under that scheme, I planted 300 m of new hedgerow on my farm. I have a programme to plant about that amount of new hedgerow on our land in Suffolk in each of the next five years. Hundreds of farmers throughout the country have benefited from that scheme to increase hedgerows. Once a hedgerow has been planted, one cannot plough up to it: one undertakes to leave at least 6 m of good tussocky grassland on each side.

The Government have encouraged the planting of more hedgerows. It is wrong for the hon. Lady to suggest that we have not done that.

Ms Ruddock: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, despite the good efforts of people like him, who are to be applauded, there are more hedgerows disappearing than there are kilometres of hedgerows being planted?

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: I do not have the facts to hand, but in the countryside in East Anglia very few hedgerows are pulled up, and I see miles of new hedgerow. Attitudes to the countryside have changed. The Government have introduced this statutory instrument to protect older hedgerows, which are the most valuable, because they recognise that change in mood. This action was promised, and this legislation is a valuable first step. I welcome the measure, and I applaud the Government on their action.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister, when he returns to the Front Bench after the general election, to monitor carefully the way in which the statutory instrument develops. Legislation is a learning curve, and new arrangements can be improved upon, so we should monitor carefully what happens. If necessary, we should take pragmatic steps to ensure that this legislation protects the most valuable ancient hedgerows.

I join the hon. Lady in asking the Minister to consult environmental interests before producing guidance for local authorities. One of the great successes of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been to come on board with those voluntary bodies. He is widely regarded as outstanding, because he consults those bodies widely on matters affecting the countryside, and listens carefully to them.

Ms Ruddock: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for generously giving way. I acknowledge what he said about

[Ms Ruddock]

the Secretary of State. He should also acknowledge that every major conservation body in this country is opposed to the regulations in this form, and they told the Secretary of State so on Monday.

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: The important thing is to get the statutory instrument on the statute book before Parliament is dissolved. This is a step forward, because it is the first time that such legislation has been introduced. I am sure that, when my right hon. Friend is again in government as Secretary of State for the Environment, he will carry these measures forward. This is not a one-off: conservation measures have progressed throughout my 18 years in Parliament. They are now more pragmatic and more in tune with the wishes of those of us who have a great regard for the countryside, and who want to secure the environment for future generations.

4.18 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The hon. Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle) gave the game away when he said that the important thing was to get the regulations on to the statute book in order to fulfil a promise. It is one of the few promises made by the Conservatives in their 1992 manifesto of which they will be able to say, "Well, we did it"—and people will not discover until after the election that the regulations will not work.

In fact, it is worse than that. We pass regulations time after time: the Government introduce some 2,500 each year. I see a role for regulations, but only for regulations that work; regulations that do not work create the bureaucracy that so many people dislike. As far as I can see, once the farmers have worked their way through these regulations, 80 per cent. of them will be able to find a way out of them. They will be able to do exactly what they want, unhindered by the regulations. The only hindrance is the fact that, rather than protecting hedgerows, the regulations merely confront the farmers with bureaucracy.

If the Government had come up with regulations that worked, I would be praising them, but it is surely absurd to construct a hurdle for farmers that will not protect 80 per cent. of hedgerows. Far from fulfilling an election promise, the Government have fudged their way out of it, claiming to be doing something for hedgerows but, in reality, doing very little.

I shall be interested to hear from the Minister what the regulations do to maintain hedgerows. The vast majority of the hedgerows that are now disappearing are not disappearing because someone is coming along with a bulldozer and pushing them out of the way, although that may have been the case 10 or 15 years ago. The majority are disappearing because of neglect. Farmers no longer prune hedges—I believe that "brush" is the technical term—and very few hedges are laid and maintained other than by voluntary groups and conservation volunteers. In large parts of countryside, traditional hedges are growing out to form a line of straggly hawthorn trees. When that happens, nearly all the biodiversity at the bottom of the hedge disappears. The berries on the trees may be useful to some birds, but many will lose out, especially those that live on the insects in hedgerows.

The regulations do not seem to do anything to maintain hedgerows—at least those in my constituency, where some attractive hedges remain along the river valley between Denton and Brinnington. Those that are disappearing are disappearing because of neglect. The Minister should take these regulations away, and return with regulations that will protect at least 90 per cent. of hedgerows. If the Government must produce bureaucracy, they should design it to ensure that farmers do not deliberately destroy hedgerows, rather than presenting a cosmetic proposal that will merely generate bureaucracy and will make very little change to the countryside. They should include in the regulations powers to ensure that neglected hedgerows are protected, as well as hedgerows that people deliberately try to remove.

I hope that we have seen the back of the present Government, and that I shall soon see my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) at that Dispatch Box, introducing regulations that will protect hedgerows into the next century.

4.23 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): It is a great privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle), who—like me, and others who are present today—served on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill that became the Environment Act 1997. His knowledge of the countryside and the environment is unsurpassed in the House, and he will be a great loss to it.

I fear that I must be slightly ruder than my hon. Friend. What we have heard today, in the dying moments of this Parliament, is the true voice of the Labour party, and the reality of their policy on the countryside. I believe that farmers in my Northumberland constituency will have listened carefully to what was said by the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), and will have been warned of what they could face in the unlikely event of a Labour Government.

The Labour party has not changed. It is still the tool of any pressure group wanting to promote an agenda. Labour will listen to it and promise to implement its proposals. The hon. Member for Deptford has forgotten the important fact that farmers have to make a living. That means that over the years they have had to change the landscape and field structures to meet modern requirements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln was right when he said that many farmers are planting hedgerows. If the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford looked at the figures properly, instead of merely taking them from the nearest pressure group, she would see that more hedgerows are being planted and that most are lost because of road construction and housing development. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) for his understanding of the matter. I agree that one of the causes of hedgerow loss is lack of maintenance. We are not debating that, but it is a problem that we must address.

I welcome the regulations, although they will be a burden on farmers who planted the hedgerows in the first place. They will face increasing bureaucracy, and they already suffer enough from that. I do not pretend that I wholeheartedly welcome the regulations, but I accept that they are a sensible compromise between the needs of those who want total protection and those who want to see economic farming from a profitable countryside.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) who took part in debates on this issue before he joined the silent ones in the Whips Office. He brokered a good deal between the interests of farmers and those of serious conservationists who wanted hedgerow protection. The result is by no means ideal for farmers, but they will accept it and honour its principles.

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: As my hon. Friend says, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey presented, I think, two private Member's Bills on the subject, and was assiduous in promoting it.

Mr. Atkinson: I agree that my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey played an important part in formulating the regulations, which I hope will reach the statute book.

4.26 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for finding time at the end of this Parliament to debate this subject. Perhaps it is partly as a result of my question to him on Thursday, when I asked whether the regulations that were laid on 3 March could be debated before the close of this Parliament.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said that many hedges had been destroyed because of neglect by farmers. I do not accept his argument, but if what he says is true, one of the reasons for neglect is a rural economy in disarray. Because of the way in which the economy has been managed and improved over the past 18 years—progress that would be put at risk by a change of Government—the rural economy has prospered, and that has allowed farmers to take more care of the environment in which they work.

In my constituency there is ample evidence that farmers look after the countryside. In Leicestershire there are wonderful examples of the art of cutting and laying hedges. I invite the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish to come and see what is happening in a prosperous rural constituency in which farmers pay great attention to the world in which they live and work. Instead of always attacking the rural community and running down farmers, I wish that Labour Members could come to the countryside to see the good work that is going on. My farmers do not neglect their hedges. I see a Labour Member who looks as if he has been through a hedge backwards, as have his policies.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The hon. and learned Gentleman is suggesting that not everyone in the countryside shares the concerns of groups such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England, which feel that, although some farmers have, of course, done some constructive things and indeed have received grants to do so, it is a shame that this measure could not have included some of the points that have been made by very respectable groups. Those groups represent, in some cases, farming and rural interests and rural communities, which want this measure to be properly done, rather than being rushed through with gaps in it, as at present.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman displays yet again, and unfailingly, the Labour party's attitude towards any form of positive improvement of the countryside. I wish that the public would realise precisely what they are in for if they sleep-walk into a Labour Government.

I reiterate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle), whose departure from the House is much to be regretted, on the benefits of the countryside stewardship scheme, which has allowed an increasing number of hedges to be planted and to be maintained in the past few years. The countryside is not to be viewed as something in aspic, destined always to remain the same.

To take another example from East Anglia, in south-west Norfolk, quite near Thetford, the part that I come from, there used not to be a hedge between our house and Ely cathedral 250 years ago. That position has completely changed as a result of farmers' need and desire to plant hedges, so the myth and the lies put about by the Labour party are much to be regretted, and will, I hope, be dealt with roundly.

I praise the co-operation of the Government with those interested in the countryside environment. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) was unable to understand the need for central and local government to work with parish councils and with the farming community. That is the best way in which to achieve the best results.

May I ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether farmers will be required to pay a fee to accompany their applications, if they should make one? If so, what is the likely level of those fees?

That is all I wish to say. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for bringing forward this measure for discussion and I trust that, before 1 June, when it comes into effect, proper and adequate consultations will be held with all interested parties.

4.31 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am grateful to catch your eye in this short debate; I will be extremely brief, as I know that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House wishes to get on to other business.

Before I say anything further, I declare my interest as a farmer and as a member of the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and other associated countryside bodies.

I too pay sincere tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) because it was he who promoted a private Member's Bill—

Mr. Bennett: Who wrecked it?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: At that time, I was not convinced of the need. I am sorry for the need to bring these regulations before the House because a small minority of farmers acted totally irresponsibly. Having said that, all responsible people in the countryside want hedges to be maintained.

With the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who is heckling me from a sedentary position, I sat through many hours on the Environment Bill. We have fulfilled our commitment in the Bill to introduce these regulations. Having passed that primary legislation, we are now able to make these order-making

[Mr. Clifton–Brown]

powers. Indeed, the Labour party, which has been making such a fuss this afternoon, will now find it much easier to amend the regulations, if it wishes to, if they do not work in practice. I want them to work.

The Labour party is a single-issue pressure group party. It forgets that these hedgerows would not be there at all if it were not for the responsible farmers and landowners who planted them during the enclosures and afterwards, because they wanted country sports such as hunting and shooting to prosper. It is in hunting and shooting areas that we find the best hedges.

Mr. Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the vast majority of hedgerows were planted as a result of Acts of Parliament and in relation to getting permission for enclosures, and that Parliament laid down a condition that, if the enclosures were to take place, proper hedges were to be planted and maintained? It may be that bringing prosecutions under those old Acts of Parliament will be more effective than doing so under the regulations, but will he also admit that he was the one who wrecked the Bill of the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), and that it was a little hard on him?

Mr. Clifton–Brown: I do not accept that one iota. I tried to improve the Bill, but it was not possible to improve it to the standard that I thought was necessary. The hon. Gentleman made a good point about the enclosure legislation, and it is true that many Acts of Parliament required the planting of hedgerows. However, considerably more hedgerows have been planted since, and that is what I want to talk about.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle) rightly pointed out that he has an admirable record of planting hedges. I, too, have planted a net gain of over a mile of hedges. I plant at least 100 m of hedges a year and have done so for the past 15 years, almost without exception.

Responsible landowners want to see hedges maintained. It is my impression that farmers today are planting as much hedgerow as they are removing, and I believe that they are managing them better. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) said, in Leicestershire and Gloucestershire there is far more cutting and laying of hedges today than there was five years ago, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, with the amount of rambling he does, will have seen that.

I make one plea to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. I hope that he will be able to encourage local authorities, if necessary through guidance notes, to implement the regulations with a sensible light touch. Some local authorities will implement them in a sensible way but, as with tree preservation orders, some local authorities will implement them in an overbearing, burdensome, bureaucratic and misunderstanding manner. I hope that he will be able to control those local authorities which do not implement them in the spirit that has been laid down today.

I would welcome the inclusion of economic interests. That is an important part of the regulations and is not supposed to drive a coach and horses through them. However, it is sensible that, if there is proper economic consideration, where employment and agricultural businesses are important, that should be able to be taken into account.

I commend my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, because it is his commitment that has brought this issue before the House today, despite some opposition, and I welcome the regulations.

4.36 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I, too, declare an interest as a landowner and as one who has planted considerable lengths of new hedgerows and revitalised old hedgerows.

Tributes have been paid in the House to the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), and I am sure that they are well deserved. However, I make no secret of the fact that I was the Member of Parliament who objected to my hon. Friend's private Member's Bill. It is worth reminding the House why I did so.

It was the vogue a year or two ago to draw the Government's attention to the fact that they were over-regulating. That is a feature that has already been mentioned in this short debate. As I was at pains to explain to my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey at the time, I saw his Bill as yet another piece of legislation that would add to the regulations and give more powers to local authorities and their officials, who, unlike farmers and landowners, probably have little or no understanding of the practical difficulties, problems and considerations of the countryside.

I regret that we are here again introducing regulatory legislation which gives another little rule book to local authority officials. It cuts across the spirit of much that those of us in the countryside want to do.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) was critical of the fact that certain hedgerows were not being maintained. I am sure that that is the case in certain parts of the country and it may be more prevalent in some parts than in others. However, only last weekend, as I was driving in the countryside in the west of my constituency and in Wales, I remarked on the fact that I have scarcely ever seen so many hedges being layered in the traditional method.

It is important to put these things into perspective and to recognise that, with or without legislation, a great deal of good work is going on in the countryside by those who have traditionally maintained the countryside in the way that it exists now and which is so widely admired and attracts people to it. We cannot get away from the fact that that is being done by the countrymen.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Time is of the essence in many such matters. Although people want to keep important hedgerows, there will be commercial considerations, such as when someone buys a particular property at a particular time of year. If a local authority does not acknowledge receipt of a farmer's notice within 42 days, the farmer tries again. How will we know whether the notice has been received? The local authority may sit on a notice for a month or so before acknowledging receipt.

Mr. Gill: I cannot answer that question. However, my hon. Friend makes his own point in his own inimitable

way, and I am sure that the Minister will have noted his comments. We hark back to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who said that the matter now depends on how the regulations are imposed. It is to be hoped that they will be imposed with sensible and considerate appreciation of the problems faced by landowners and farmers.

Although I have conceded that much good work is being done, with hedges being layered and tendered in the traditional manner, in many instances the effect of the impending legislation has been to bulldoze hedgerows out of existence. That would not have occurred had no legislation been considered, and it is regrettable.

I shall not detain the House any longer, because I sense that Front Benchers are anxious to move on to other business. However, I did not want to miss this opportunity to say that I regard the measure as a retrograde step. It will provide local authority officials with a new Bible, which many of them will interpret in the most draconian manner, against the better instincts and judgment of landowners and farmers.

4.40 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I should like to take a moment to reiterate some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) on the regulations. We welcome passage of the regulations, and the protection that will be offered for the first time to hedgerows in the United Kingdom—unless one takes into account the case of Filey, an interesting test case of enclosure legislation which is not mentioned in the regulations.

I should also like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who has been a great campaigner on hedgerow protection. When I was first elected as a Member of Parliament, in 1987, one of the first issues in which I became involved was to support his—at that time—private Member's Bill to introduce hedgerow protection. The then Prime Minister made some promises, which were broken. Today, it is interesting to see some former wreckers of hedgerow protection on the Conservative Benches. They have suddenly turned into supporters of protection. It is always most pleasing to welcome the sinner repented.

I am sorry that the regulations could not have been passed with unanimous support—the support not only of landowners and farmers, but of countryside, conservation and green groups. That support has not been won, as the Minister knows. It is a shame that the regulations are being debated in the dying hours of this Parliament, because, like many hon. Members on both sides of the House, I think that some issues have not been addressed.

One such issue, as my hon. Friend the Member for Deptford said, is biodiversity and the way in which hedgerows are assessed. Apart from hedgerows' conservation value, there must be some sophisticated assessment of such matters as green corridors. Much work is being done, especially on protecting small and endangered mammals, and that work will be undermined unless there are links between different types of habitat.

Hedgerows are one very important link. Some good habitats may be protected, but they may be surrounded by agricultural land and not linked into other areas that provide feeding grounds and breeding areas. That issue has not been dealt with, and nor has the issue of time. Conservation groups' concerns have not been dealt with.

Although some groups feel so strongly about the regulations that they believe that we should oppose them, we feel that they are better than nothing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Deptford said, a future Labour Government will revisit the regulations. We will consult all the countryside and conservation groups—including landowners and farmers—to strengthen the regulations and to make them more workable, and we will try to reach the consensus that the Government have failed to achieve.

4.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I welcome that qualified welcome from the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley).

I was slightly surprised by the attitude of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock): she seemed to be disappointed that we have introduced the regulations, although we were recently pressed to do so, not least in an Adjournment debate sponsored by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). We were pressed to introduce the regulations to prevent some landowners from pre-empting regulations.

Very recently, we were pressed also by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), an Opposition Environment spokesman, to introduce regulations to safeguard hedgerows. My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle) described the hon. Lady's welcome for the regulations as "curmudgeonly", although I think that that impression has partly been put right.

I do not want to be unkind, but I think that the hon. Member for Deptford got it wrong when she spoke about biodiversity and suggested that the regulations contain the sum total of our biodiversity action plans. Biodiversity and protection of wildlife are important features of the regulations, but they do not contain the sum total of our plans. She knows the way in which we have fulfilled our commitments under the Rio summit and the biodiversity action plans that we have already introduced. Many, if not all, of the species she mentioned—the grey partridge, the song thrush and the dormouse—are afforded protection within the framework of our biodiversity plans.

The hon. Member for Deptford was wrong on that point, and she was wrong on other points. Not least, she was wrong when she suggested that we have rushed into the regulations; others have said that we have taken too long. To fulfil our obligation of protecting important hedgerows, detailed analysis and research, and a great deal of consultation, have been required.

The commitment is to protect important hedgerows, which are hedgerows for which no replanting could be a substitute, and which are vulnerable to being removed. I should like to tell the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who takes an interest in the subject, that protection is not the same as maintenance of hedgerows. Maintaining hedgerows and planting new ones is promoted under the countryside stewardship scheme and by other assistance provided to farmers. The regulations are to protect important hedgerows.

It is important first to define what is an "important hedgerow", and we took some time and trouble to do so. As the hon. Member for Deptford knows,

[Mr. James Clappison]

we commissioned work from the Agricultural Development Advisory Service, which produced a report. Last year, we circulated that report for consultation. We certainly did not rush through the consultation process, during which we received more than 500 responses. We also listened to what we were told during consultation, and made changes to ADAS's proposals.

We have, for example, increased from four to six weeks the time afforded to local planning authorities to give or refuse consent to the removal of a hedgerow notified to them. We have also required authorities to consult parish councils. We regard that as important, because, as organs of local democracy, it is important that parish councils should have a say in the matter. That reform also fits in with other reforms that we have made affecting parish councils.

When possible, we have also tried to simplify the criteria. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, that, although it is necessary to protect the important hedgerows, it is important to keep matters as simple as possible. That is why there may be problems with some of the suggestions of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe. It is important that the regulations are not so complicated as to be unworkable.

During the consultation process, we listened to what we were told about landscape. I heard the criticisms by the hon. Member for Deptford in this debate, and she will know that ADAS discovered in its investigation that landscape is a difficult issue.

However, we feel that the issue is addressed by our definition of "important hedgerows", and that many hedgerows that qualify as important, particularly under the historic and wildlife interest headings, will contribute to the landscape. After consultation, we also provided a new criterion, which recognises the important contribution to the landscape made by hedgerows along rights of way. That additional criterion will increase the number of hedgerows likely to be protected by regulations.

In our attempts to protect "important hedgerows"—as we have defined them—it has been necessary to strike a balance between bodies representing environmental and conservation interests and those representing farming and landowning interests. There is an inherent conflict, and some of that tension has been evident in our debate. We think that we have gone a long way towards getting the balance right.

Having said that, we appreciate that many farmers make a constructive contribution towards the preservation of the countryside, especially through the planting of hedgerows. We heard some excellent examples of that from my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle), who has made a great contribution to the environment in his time in the House and will no doubt continue to do so, not only through the planting of hedgerows on his land, about which he told the House, but in many other ways. I am sure that everyone wishes him well in his important endeavours in that regard.

I am happy to be able to report that the most recent research conducted by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology shows that, contrary to what the hon. Member for Deptford said, there is a net balance in favour of the planting of hedgerows over their removal, which I am sure the House will welcome. That has no doubt been substantially assisted by the countryside stewardship scheme, another successful scheme launched by the Government to protect the countryside.

On the issue of punishment, the hon. Member for Deptford needs to study the regulations a little more carefully. Contrary to what she suggested was the maximum fine for transgressing the regulations, it is the maximum only for someone tried in a magistrates court on summary trial. The regulations also include provisions for trial on indictment in the Crown court, where someone who transgressed the regulations and was found guilty of an offence would face an unlimited fine. Far from being weak, that is a strong punishment, which signals our disapproval of people who break the law in this regard.

In addition, the regulations make provision for the replanting of hedgerows to be required. People who think that they can remove hedgerows and get away with simply paying a fine have another think coming, because they will be required to replant the hedgerows. The punishment is therefore more than adequate.

The hon. Member for Deptford also mentioned the circumstances in which local authorities could take account of the reasons given for wishing to remove an important hedge and still allow its removal. We were mindful of the fact that the ability to make representations and to have them heard is a central element of the business-friendly enforcement procedure promoted by the Government.

The wording of the relevant paragraph in the draft regulations is necessarily broad. It is impossible to anticipate and make provision for every eventuality, but the regulations place a requirement on the local planning authority to issue a hedgerow retention notice unless satisfied that the reasons given justify the removal of an important hedgerow. The presumption is therefore in favour of protecting and retaining important hedgerows. As the criteria defining importance have been tightly drawn, strong reasons will be needed to satisfy a local authority that an important hedgerow should be removed.

Each case will have to be considered on its merits, but I envisage that a local planning authority might consider that the removal of an important hedgerow was justified where there were overriding arguments of public safety—for example, to make way for essential improvements to a local road which was an accident black spot, where there was no other solution to the problem. Utilities might also have strong practical or even environmental grounds for needing to remove a small section of a hedge rather than reroute a cable across an even more sensitive area.

Cases involving personal financial loss are unlikely of themselves to be sufficient to justify the grubbing out of an important hedgerow. Factors that might, however, weigh with the local authority include the effects of a hedgerow on operational requirements and whether the impact could be mitigated by other means—for example, where a new road has cut through a field, leaving a portion too small to farm. However, there can be little doubt that the impact on a business would have to be extremely serious before a local authority would begin to consider allowing the removal of an important hedgerow.

A change of ownership of land and subsequent rationalisation of holdings would certainly not be enough. The register of retention notices held by the local authority would inform potential buyers of any existing restrictions.

Mr. Morley: I should like the Minister to clarify one point, although it may be difficult at this stage. If there is a dispute between a landowner and the local authority over any economic impact, the landowner presumably has recourse to the courts. If so, will guidelines be issued to give local authorities some idea of the limits to which they can go in their definitions?

Mr. Clappison: There is a right of appeal under the regulations, and we shall, of course, be giving guidance to local authorities. I hope that I have made clear the background against which we approach the matter and the principles that we think are important.

Mr. Marlow: What proportion of hedgerows does my hon. Friend estimate can be defined as important? If a farm that has been inefficiently farmed changes hands, it might be good in agricultural terms to remove some hedgerows to make it more efficient. What proportion of hedgerows are potentially blighted by the regulations?

Mr. Clappison: I hesitate to disagree with my hon. Friend, but I would perhaps take issue with his use of the word "blighted". However, perhaps I can assist him. We have tried to define important hedgerows. The research carried out by ADAS, which necessarily took a broad-brush approach, as it was trying to project the situation across the whole country, found that, according to the criteria in the regulations, about 20 per cent. of hedgerows would be defined as important and thus protected.

The register of retention notices held by the local authority would inform potential buyers of any existing restrictions; or, if none had been issued, the criteria are so framed as to enable owners to undertake their own evaluations and reach broadly the same conclusion as the experts. It will be a case of caveat emptor, or buyer beware. As I said, the guidance that will be issued to local authorities before the regulations come into effect will provide the opportunity to clarify such points.

I join those who have already paid tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), who is in his usual silent mode. The tributes he has received are well deserved as a result of the private Member's Bill that he promoted. I must also pay tribute to the Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton), who takes a great interest in the environment, and is anxious to do what is necessary to protect important hedgerows.

The regulations deserve a broad welcome.

Mr. Garnier: I asked my hon. Friend whether there would be a cost to the applicant. If he cannot reply now, will he do so in writing?

Mr. Clappison: I can tell my hon. and learned Friend that the answer is no—no fees will be payable.

Opposition Members talked about the priority that they would accord to the protection of hedgerows. I must gently remind them, without being too partisan, that Labour's recent draft manifesto contained no mention of biodiversity, despite all the boasts from Opposition Members about the extent to which it would be a priority—*[Interruption.]* There was a mention of a free vote on fox hunting, but that is not my idea of biodiversity. When it comes to the crunch, biodiversity does not seem to have been given very great priority in Labour's literature; nor does the environment as a whole. We give priority to the environment, and the regulations are a practical example of our commitment to it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Hedgerows Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 3rd March, be approved.

Public Entertainment Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I have to acquaint the House that a message has been brought from the Lords as follows. The Lords have agreed to the Public Entertainment Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill with amendments, to which the Lords desire the concurrence of the House. Copies of the Lords amendments are available. Under the Order of the House of 19 March, no debate is possible.

Motion made, and Question put,

That the amendments made by the Lords to the Public Entertainment Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill be considered forthwith.—*[Mr. Legg.]*

Question agreed to.

Lords amendments accordingly considered.

Lords amendments Nos. 1 to 34 agreed to.

TAX SIMPLIFICATION BILLS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 March],

That—

(1) Standing Order (Tax simplification bills) below be made;

(2) Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of bills) be amended, in line 2, after 'Bill', by inserting 'or a tax simplification bill'; and

(3) Standing Order No. 64 (Committee of whole House on bill) be amended, in line 7, at the end, by adding 'or unless the committee is discharged in pursuance of paragraph (8) of Standing Order (Tax simplification bills)'.

Tax Simplification Bills

(1) In this order 'a tax simplification bill' means a bill which has been presented, or brought in upon an order of the House, by a Minister of the Crown and which has been ordered to be proceeded with as such a bill.

(2) A motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown at the commencement of public business, that a specified bill be so proceeded with, and the question thereon shall be put forthwith.

(3) A tax simplification bill shall, upon the making of an order under paragraph (2) above, stand referred to a second reading committee unless the House otherwise orders.

(4) A motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown at the commencement of public business, that a tax simplification bill shall no longer stand referred to a second reading committee, and the question thereon shall be put forthwith.

(5) The provisions of paragraphs (3) to (6) of Standing Order No. 90 (Second reading committees) shall apply to any bill referred to a second reading committee under paragraph (3) above.

(6) A tax simplification bill shall, upon its being read a second time, stand committed to the Joint Committee on Tax Simplification Bills.

(7) A bill which has been reported from the said Joint Committee shall stand re-committed to a committee of the whole House unless the House otherwise orders.

(8) If a motion that the committee of the whole House be discharged from considering a tax simplification bill is made by a Minister of the Crown immediately after the order of the day has been read for the House to resolve itself into a committee on the bill, the motion shall not require notice and the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed; and if such question is agreed to the bill shall be ordered to be read the third time.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Question agreed to.

ALL-PARTY AND PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 March],

That this House approves the proposed written undertaking set out in the Annex to the First Report from the Administration Committee of Session 1995–96, on All-Party and Parliamentary Groups (HC 494), with the substitution for paragraph (i) of the following paragraph:

'(i) the group's membership is open to all Members of the House, and its aim and constitution are parliamentary in character; with the exception of those groups receiving funding from Her Majesty's Government, all groups cease to exist two calendar months after the first meeting of the new Parliament after a General Election unless re-registered within that period.'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Question agreed to.

Standing Orders (Revision)

5 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, on the next motion. Before I go into my point of order, I draw the House's attention to the fact that your constituency is disappearing at the next election, and that it is therefore possible that you will not be with us in the next Parliament. I think that all hon. Members will wish to pay tribute to the wise guidance and excellent service that you have given the House. I should like that recorded so that we can all agree, even if it is on a point of order.

Turning to my point of order. As Deputy Speaker, you will know from Madam Speaker's provisional selection was that she might be minded not to call the amendment in my name and those of leading members of all parties on the Select Committee on Procedure. The argument was that it might be necessary to have a debate on the subject. We are passing the more important aspects of the Select Committee's recommendations without a debate, but not this minor matter, which had unanimous support on the Committee, including the support of a member of the Chairmen's Panel. It is a simple matter of whether a name should be changed.

As the original selection was only provisional, would you consider, in view of the good nature of the House as we come to the end of this Parliament, that it might be worth allowing a Division on the matter—there can be no debate—so that the House can be seen to be willing to modernise itself and not stay in subfusc, with names that have no relevance to what Committees are doing? If you decided that it would be right to make that alteration to the provisional selection, I should be most grateful.

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I should like to convey to you and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) the fact that the members of the Chairmen's Panel were certainly not in favour of the recommendation. I should regret it being debated at this late hour.

Sir Peter Emery: There cannot be a debate. I asked for a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about me, which are much appreciated. None the less, I fear that I shall have to disappoint him on his main point. I know the mind of Madam Speaker, who has decided that the amendment shall not be taken. There is no debate, and I have to put the Question forthwith. I have no doubt that there will be further opportunities in another Parliament for the kind of debate that the right hon. Gentleman wants.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I associate myself briefly and warmly with the remarks that have been made about you. I merely observe that, while I regret my right hon. Friend's frustration, I fear that the atmosphere of good will in the House might have disappeared quite rapidly if you had agreed to what he asked, because my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) and the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) had come here to make trouble if the amendment was debated.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I should be very remiss, as someone who has enjoyed your friendship for many years, if I did not say that you will be very much missed in the House. It would be wrong if it appeared that only one side of the House would miss you—I know that that is not the case. Nevertheless, I am sorry to have to tell you that the Leader of the House might be right in saying that I came here to cause a certain amount of trouble.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I can scarcely believe such a thing possible of the hon. Lady.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I should like to identify in personal terms and on behalf of the Opposition with the thanks for your sterling service in the Chair. We shall all miss you, but I am sure that this will not be the last that we hear of you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank all hon. Members who have given me such kind remarks to remember as I come to the end of my period of service in the House, which has been almost 27 years—longer than a life sentence.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 March],

That the repeals of, and Amendments to, the Standing Orders of this House relating to Public Business, and the new Standing Order, recommended by the Select Committee on Procedure in its First Report (HC 95), as set out in Appendices I (Recommendations: Revision) and III (Proposed re-ordering of select committee Standing Orders) thereto, be made, with effect from the first day of the new Parliament, with the following additions namely—

(a) Standing Order No. 94F (Scottish Grand Committee (delegated legislation)), line 16, leave out 'member of the government' and insert 'Minister of the Crown'; line 20 and line 37, leave out 'notwithstanding the expiration of the time for opposed business' and insert 'at any hour, though opposed'; and

(b) Standing Order No. 126 (Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration), line 5, leave out 'Commissioner for Administration' and insert 'Ombudsman';

and subject to the following modifications to the recommendations set out in Appendix I, namely—

(1) recommendation 23, leave out lines 5 and 6 and insert 'No. 98G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)) and No. 99H (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings))".';

(2) recommendation 24(a), line 8, after 'business)),', insert 'Standing Order No. 99A (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (composition and business)),'; and

(3) recommendation 27, line 5, after 'Crown";', insert 'line 16 and'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Special Grant Report (No. 27) (Community Care Special Grants for 1997–98) (HC 360), which was laid before this House on 5th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Madam Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the questions on the deregulation orders.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14A(1) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

PUBLIC HEALTH ACTS

That the draft Deregulation (Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 3rd March, be approved.

CASINOS AND BINGO CLUBS

That the draft Deregulation (Casinos and Bingo Clubs: Debit Cards) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 3rd March, be approved.

FOOTBALL POOLS

That the draft Deregulation (Football Pools) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 17th March, be approved.

BETTING AND BINGO ADVERTISING

That the draft Deregulation (Betting and Bingo Advertising etc.) Order, which was laid before this House on 11th March, be approved.

NON-FOSSIL FUEL

That the draft Deregulation (Non-Fossil Fuel) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 17th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

STRUCTURAL FUNDS AND COHESION POLICY

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 1138296 on the structural funds, and 1261496 on cohesion policy; welcomes the Government's continued efforts to simplify and improve the effectiveness of the funds within the United Kingdom and throughout the European Union; and supports the Government's view that the reform of the funds for the period beyond 1999 needs to ensure that the funds are fair, transparent and efficient, and needs to enable the likely enlargement of the European Union in an affordable and durable manner.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Green Belt Land

5.5 pm

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of residents of the constituency of Uxbridge who are opposed to the plans of Hillingdon council to transfer land at the rear of Granville road, Hillingdon from green belt status and to permit development. The petition states:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House refuse any such proposal from the London Borough of Hillingdon to remove the said land from the Metropolitan Green Belt following the public local inquiry which commences on 28 May.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray &c.

The second petition is signed by more than 15,000 of my constituents, representing the 40 local and national organisations that comprise the Hillingdon House Farm Action Committee. They oppose the proposed development of green belt land at Hillingdon House farm by Warner Brothers, to construct a theme park and film studio complex.

The petition says:

Wherefore we your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House do urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to use his powers to prevent the proposed theme park and film studio development on Green Belt land at Hillingdon House Farm, Uxbridge, and to retain the site as open space for the benefit of local people.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

Athletics

5.7 pm

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of the Save Athletics at Crystal Palace campaign, which was brought to me and to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) and the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins). It contains 12,000 signatures collected by athletes from all over the United Kingdom who are concerned about the threat to athletics at Crystal Palace. It says:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House support the retention and further development of indoor and outdoor facilities for athletics at Crystal Palace National Sports Centre.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I must inform that House that certain matters still have to be transacted that cannot be transacted at this moment. It is therefore in my mind to suspend the sitting for a short while. Before I do so, I must make it clear that this in no way infringes the rights of the hon. Gentleman who has the Adjournment, or any hon. Member with another petition.

5.9 pm

Sitting suspended.

6 pm

On resuming—

PETITION

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): It is my honour to hand in a petition from the citizens of Newcastle upon Tyne concerning the jobseeker's allowance. The petitioners extend to the House the normal courtesies of this occasion and go on to say:

that the introduction of the jobseekers allowance has been disastrous for the unemployed people of the United Kingdom where one in five households of working age have no work, the worst record of the major economies.

And wherefore your petitioners pray that the jobseekers allowance should be abolished, and be replaced by a fairer system that recognises that unemployed people have a right to be treated with dignity and not coerced into low paid, temporary or part-time work and your petitioners in duty bound will ever pray etc.

The petition is signed by Councillor Gerard Nugent, Councillor William Dodds, Councillor Sheila Spencer, Mr. Fred Copley and some other 1,000 citizens of Newcastle upon Tyne.

To lie upon the Table.

Child Support Agency

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

6.1 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): This debate is about the Child Support Agency and the manner in which it has provided its services, which inflict massive injustices on families throughout the United Kingdom. It is the last Adjournment debate of this Government and it is appropriate that it deals with an issue that is causing so much trouble for so many families. Hon. Members on both sides are constantly being charged by constituents to take action to help families who are caught up in the inefficient way in which cases are dealt with by the CSA.

My complaint about the CSA is not new, but it is not without good cause. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was the Prime Minister who, in 1990, first suggested that an agency dealing with child support should be set up. In April 1993, the CSA began to operate. Many hon. Members have registered their complaints over the past four years about the way in which the CSA has treated many of their constituents. Since 1993, I have had cause to write to Ministers requesting investigations into many cases in my constituency, although assurances have been given that efficiency in dealing with cases will improve.

The CSA came into operation in April 1993 and there was then uproar throughout the country about its operation. Families were split up and it has been alleged that many people committed suicide because of the severity with which the CSA then operated.

In November 1993, I presented a petition to the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), who was then the Minister responsible for the CSA, charging him to investigate certain issues that had been raised by constituents about the administration of the CSA. Assurances were given then that the CSA would be as efficient as Parliament intended it to be. During the debates that we had on the Child Support Bill, which introduced the CSA, we demanded efficiency. When I received the Minister's reply saying that the CSA would be as efficient as Parliament intended it to be, I took his words in good faith.

On 2 December 1993, however, my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) secured an Adjournment debate in which he registered concerns about the work of the CSA. During that debate, assurances were given that the CSA would be more efficient. On 6 December 1993, the Minister told me that no changes were to be made to the powers of the CSA. There was a move away from trying to improve the CSA at that time.

On 15 December 1994, there was a debate on the CSA in which the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) stated:

"In some 25 years as a Member of Parliament, I do not think that I have ever before ventured into a debate on social affairs . . . we have created a monstrous bureaucracy which pours misery on misery and the many unfortunate people who have already gone through the mental, physical and financial trauma of divorce now have to deal with this ghastly organisation as well. As a supporter of the Government, I have never been so ashamed as when I have had to defend the CSA and what it has got up to in the past two years.

My immediate reaction is that the assessment formula is wrong and unfair. Until, with the wisdom of experience and other countries and the two inquiries by the Select Committee, a more reasonable

[Mr. William O'Brien]

and equitable and less complex formula can be devised, there will be no substantive improvement in the management or operations of the CSA or its handling of cases."—[*Official Report*, 15 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 1096.]

There we have someone who has been a Member of the House for a considerable time outlining his concern about how the CSA, after two years in operation, was affecting his constituents. I am witnessing problems similar to those expressed by the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare.

In July 1994, there was an Opposition debate calling for improvements in the work of the CSA and an end to the injustices brought about by it. During that debate, assurances were again given by the Minister that the CSA would improve its performance. On 23 December 1994, the Minister sent a letter to Members assuring us that there would be improvements to the CSA. He said:

"the CSA can and will resume taking on all eligible cases and give them prompt and efficient service."

I shall demonstrate tonight that there is a lack of efficiency in the CSA.

On 20 March 1995, we debated on Second Reading the Child Support Bill, which was designed to make changes to the original CSA legislation. Again, the Secretary of State gave assurances that there would be prompt and efficient service. He said:

"the main purpose of the Bill is to improve the system of child support so that it has greater acceptability and works better, to streamline the operations and to encourage greater compliance. That means that the problems that we have seen which we all acknowledge and regret, will be less frequent in future than they were in the past and will gradually disappear as the situation improves."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. 22.]

There has been a history of assurances and promises, but I have not witnessed any change in the number of cases that I have had to pursue in my constituency.

Many written and oral questions have been tabled to Ministers, by hon. Members on both sides of the House, expressing serious concern about the way in which the CSA is operating. One such case is that of a constituent, Ms B, who has two daughters and whose husband left her in February 1996. She informed the CSA straight away, but has received no response to her application and no answers to her letters. I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security for responding to my letter of 17 March, when I sent him details of that case. In his reply, he said:

"I regret that as yet, no assessment of child support has been made in this case. This is disappointing, in view of the fact that people in"

Ms B's

"position are exactly those we introduced the arrangements to help."

Also, a letter dated 5 March from the agency to me states:

"The Agency's Belfast Centre tell me that on 28 March 1996 an application for child support maintenance was received from"

Ms B

"and on 19 April a maintenance enquiry form was sent to"—

her partner—

"Regrettably, no further action was taken on the case until 20 February 1997".

That means that, for a full 12 months, no action was taken, and that is a recent case.

I also felt the need to write to the Minister about another constituent, Mr. B, who travels 24 miles per day to his employment. He applied for a travel allowance, but that was denied to him because the CSA claimed that he was travelling only 14 miles to and from work. When I inquired about that, I found that it was because the agency has a broad-brush approach. Any broad-brush approach that changes an actual mileage of 24 to 14 is unfair and is not in the best interests of the people we represent.

The Minister advised me that my constituent would be contacted, but in view of the exchange of correspondence between the CSA and myself, I should have thought that it would have been courteous of the officer dealing with the case to let me have a response to the point raised with the Minister. My file is not yet complete. I have received assurances from the Minister and been told that the CSA is dealing with the matter, but have received no response from the CSA. I hope that that sort of thing will not be allowed to continue and that I shall receive some notification of the action that has been taken on that case.

On 5 March, I wrote to the Minister about the case of Mrs. A, who has been pursuing her claim for maintenance through the CSA, which keeps requiring information that she has supplied on more than one occasion. The agency keeps sending the same form, which is frustrating for the claimant and demonstrates that it is either using delaying tactics and is delaying finding out why my constituent is not receiving maintenance, or is requesting the same information over and over again, because it is totally inefficient.

Those cases are current. I am talking about correspondence of 5 March this year. On 13 February, I had cause to write to the chief executive of the CSA, Miss Chant, requesting information on a constituent who had regularly been making maintenance payments through his bank—through a banker's order—but who received a letter early in February advising him that a deduction from earnings order had been issued to his employer. The payments were being made, but because of the way in which the various offices of the CSA operate, his employer received the order, which was embarrassing for my constituent. The fact that that letter was sent to him when he was making the payments merits investigation. The ombudsman investigates only cases involving compensation, but I think that my constituent should be considered for compensation.

Another constituent, Mr. F, ceased work because of ill health and is now on a pension. Although he notified the CSA, he is still being charged the same level of maintenance as when he was working. As the maintenance amounts to more than 50 per cent. of his pension, one can understand his concern. That matter has been referred to the ombudsman.

I could describe numerous cases. These matters should be investigated. I have here a letter dated 14 March—this week—from the CSA stating that Mr. H

"is concerned that despite making regular payments of child maintenance a deduction-from-earnings order has been served on his employer . . . On 28 November 1996, the Centre asked"

Mr. H

"to contact them to make an agreement to pay regular child maintenance plus an amount towards the arrears which have accrued. This he did . . . on 4 December".

On 3 February, Mr. H was advised that he had made no payments. On the following day, the agency wrote to tell him that it had received the payments, but that they had

not been credited to his account. That is a recent case—these are not historic matters. I ask that the issue be investigated.

Finally, *The Times* today contains an article about the CSA and a report of the Select Committee on Social Security. It says that there has been a problem with the backlog of cases and that

"the figures in a report by the Social Security Select Committee showed that only about a third of lone parents on income support and family credit had received an assessment."

It is not creditable if only one out of three people who are looking for assistance are getting it from the CSA. The article continues:

"The MPs praise the agency for a 'significant improvement' in performance since the agency started work in 1993. The committee has previously described its administrative performance in its first 18 months as 'dire'".

That is the base from which the report comes—the Committee thought that the CSA would fold and that it was in a dire situation. Although the report may have been creditable at this stage, it shows that the agency has not fulfilled Parliament's expectations on efficiency.

I draw the attention of the Minister to another report, published on 19 March—48 hours ago—by the parliamentary ombudsman. It says:

"In his annual report published today the new Parliamentary Commissioner (Ombudsman), Mr. Michael Buckley, said that the number of complaints referred by Members of Parliament in 1996 was 1,920, a rise of 12.5 per cent. from the previous year . . .

Almost half of the 1,920 new complaints concerned the Department of Social Security and its agencies and over half of these referred to the Child Support Agency".

A quarter of all complaints referred to the ombudsman concerned the CSA. The report continued:

"Despite the measures taken by CSA to improve performance there has been no reduction in the number of complaints against the Agency referred by Members of Parliament . . . The issue of financial compensation arose in a large number of cases, particularly CSA cases, on which reports were issued in 1996 . . . The Ombudsman obtained compensation for many of those whose cases he investigated. In his report he stresses the importance of fairness and consistency and says that the principle of redress should apply not only to those whose complaints he investigates but also to the 'vastly larger number of aggrieved who take up their concerns either direct or through their Members of Parliament.'"

In other words, the ombudsman is saying that when payments have been made, but an attachment of earnings order has been imposed, the persons to whom I referred should be compensated because of the problems generated and the unfairness applied by the CSA.

I therefore consider that, far from the CSA improving efficiency and bringing forward measures to support claimants, we are witnessing many people suffering because of the CSA's inefficiency. I am totally disillusioned with the CSA. It has had sufficient time to honour all the promises and assurances, but has failed to do so. If that is the CSA's record, I consider it a failure. I suggest that if the Minister—perhaps it is not for the present Under-Secretary, but for a Labour Minister—cannot improve the situation so that people get satisfaction, we should return to letting the courts decide maintenance.

6.21 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) has given a vivid account of the problems that arise from the Child Support Agency. On this final day of Parliament, he has done a service to the House in securing this Adjournment debate to talk about the problem in general. Such matters arise in Question Time, but in this debate he has been able to refer to the CSA's basic inadequacies—and there are many.

It would be fair to say that in many constituencies, including that of my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, many surgeries concern this one subject. If we had been asked in 1991, when the Child Support Act was introduced, whether that would happen, we would have said that we had never heard such rubbish. We have always been used to dealing with housing and social security matters, which form a great proportion of our postbags—but then came the CSA. We were told that it would resolve the problem; it was better than having the matters dealt with in the courts; and, what is more, it would provide women in particular with money that they had not had before. The fact that stares us in the face—my hon. Friend referred to it happening in his area—is that we are being inundated with complaints.

It is true that, when Members of Parliament write to the CSA in Belfast, the case might be pushed to the top of the queue temporarily, but it is also true that a hell of a lot of cases never get anywhere near that when people do not approach their Member of Parliament. If, as my hon. Friend said, so many cases concerning the CSA are being referred to the ombudsman, it is time that we asked ourselves: is this Act working well? Initially, many people said that the problems were just teething troubles; there was a big backlog, but everything would be sorted out in two or perhaps three years. My hon. Friend is saying that, after five years, the system is not working.

I do not agree with the Social Security Committee either. I think that it has glossed over the matter. When the few Members of Parliament who serve on that Committee give the impression that somehow the matter is being resolved, I do not accept it, because I am still having to deal with the same number of cases in my constituency—probably more—as I did when the CSA was set up. We must look at the matter afresh.

I have never seen so many people lobbying Parliament on one issue over five years as I have on the CSA. A lobby on the CSA came to the House only a few weeks ago. Last year, there were several. I went outside the House of Commons one day and said to the lobbyists, "What are you lobbying for?" I always see whether anybody is lobbying and usually try to join them and help them along the way. Those people said, "We've come to lobby on the CSA." I said, "I met them last week." They said, "But we are 'Police against the CSA'." There were 250 people in a line.

The idea of the CSA might have sounded good at the beginning—and obviously did—but after five years, it is obviously not working. Over the past two or three years, some of us have called for it to be scrapped. The House has heard the case put by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton. He approached the matter in a reasonable, moderate way, and has come to the conclusion, like me, that it is time to take a fresh look. I shall be with him when the next Labour Government get into power on 2 May, to try to find a better method. He says that we should return to the courts—that might be necessary. Somebody said that the CSA would save the Treasury

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

a lot of money. I would like to know how much, because it has certainly cost a hell of a lot in administration over the past five years.

The question is not one of a few odd cases in a constituency up in Yorkshire. We are saying that the problem is widespread, that it is pretty clear that Belfast is not getting on top of it and that it is time to take a completely fresh look. We should not leave the Social Security Committee to make a few humdrum remarks. If after five years the Act is not working, it is time that we had a fresh one to replace it.

6.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): I congratulate the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on securing the last Adjournment debate of the Parliament. It is a particular pleasure for me to make the final speech of the Parliament because on 6 May 1992 I had the somewhat dubious privilege of making the second speech of the new Parliament when I seconded the Loyal Address to Her Majesty. I recognise the concerns that were expressed by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I pay a special tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe), who has taken a great interest in improving the Child Support Agency on behalf of his constituents over the two years that I have been the Minister with responsibility for it, and has brought a number of cases to me which we have together been able to resolve.

I should like to deal with the three individual cases about which the hon. Member for Normanton expressed concern and on which he was kind enough to advise me before the debate. He also mentioned another case about which I do not have details, but if he would let me have further details, I shall undertake to give him additional information on it. My officials will get back to him tomorrow on any outstanding questions.

The hon. Member for Normanton has written to me about one of his constituents, Mr. H, who was concerned that the broad-brush allowance in the formula for travel-to-work costs would not meet his needs. We recognise that, although the formula is correct in the vast majority of cases, there will be a small number of cases where limited discretion should be allowed. For those reasons, we introduced the departure scheme, which can cover travel-to-work costs in certain limited circumstances. Mr. H has since made an application for a departure. His application is being dealt with. It is currently at contest stage, and the papers have gone to the parent with care. She has until 27 March to respond.

In the second case—that of Miss B, who is a parent with care—there has been an inexcusable delay of seven months in assessing her maintenance. That was in part due to the large volume of applications at the CSA centre. We have, as hon. Members will know, addressed problems of high workloads by simplifying the rules governing the scheme, and I intend those changes to ensure that the poor standard of service suffered by Miss B is a thing of the past. When the agency has obtained details of the absent parent's current circumstances, all action required to complete a maintenance settlement will proceed. I have specifically asked the agency to ensure that that, and all other action on Miss B's case, is treated as a priority.

The third case that the hon. Member for Normanton raised was the case of Ms A, a parent with care and involving two absent parents. The problems in that case centre around the large amount of information that is required to ensure a fair outcome. One of the absent parents has not been co-operative. That has caused difficulties in enforcing maintenance which were compounded by mistakes made by the agency. The agency has now imposed an interim maintenance assessment on the unco-operative absent parent and enforcement action is being taken, but maintenance has yet to be paid. For the other child in the case, the next step in the application is for the relevant notification to be issued to the Inland Revenue to obtain the absent parent's employment details, if applicable. Following that, the case will be fully investigated with regard to the possible imposition of an interim maintenance assessment or completion of a full maintenance assessment.

I wish to apologise for the delays in the agency's handling of the cases. They are now being treated as urgent. Obviously, the agency's primary concern is for the children in each case. In the cases mentioned, the agency is working towards fair maintenance assessments and will continue to do so.

I shall move on from specific cases to the general comments that were made by the hon. Members for Normanton and for Bolsover. Many of their fears are now being addressed and resolved. It is a truism to say that the agency had a difficult start. The Social Security Select Committee described its introduction as the biggest social change for 40 years.The sheer scale of the change was not adequately appreciated on either side of the House.

At the end of the first year, work was outstanding on 550,000 cases. Only £15 million had been collected or arranged for direct payment in the first year. However, in 1994, the agency's second year, maintenance collected and arranged exceeded £187 million—a more than twelvefold increase. In 1995, that figure almost doubled to £301 million, and in the present year the figure has increased again and looks likely to be almost £400 million. The agency now collects and arranges as much each fortnight as it did in the whole of its first year of operations. Four child support agency centres each collected £4 million in January alone. Within three years, I estimate that the agency will be collecting £800 million a year, three quarters of which will go to the parents with care.

The House may wish to reflect on the scale of the improvement in the lives of children which will result from the huge increase in the flow of child maintenance, to which they are rightly and fully entitled. The improvements reflect a steadily increasing number of active cases with a maintenance assessment—up to 345,000 in March 1995, and to 460,000 in March 1996. By November 1996, the agency had more than 545,000 live cases.

As hon. Members will know, the agency has had to deal with a continual backlog. That backlog must be cleared by April 1999, when the new computer system will start operating. I have therefore given instructions that the situation should be closely monitored month by month, over the next 24 months, to ensure that the eradication of the backlog is accomplished. I and the senior management of the CSA have good reason to be confident that the full eradication of the backlog will be achieved in the next 24 months.

There has been a similar improvement in the accuracy of assessments. By March 1996, 79 per cent. of assessments checked were correct to the last penny. This year, the agency expects to meet its target of 85 per cent. of assessments being correct. That level of accuracy compares well with benefit assessments—for example, for income support—which are generally less complex. The agency has been effective in combating fraud and containing social security expenditure. It has consistently saved the taxpayer nearly three times as much as it costs, which answers a specific question by the hon. Member for Bolsover. Between April 1993—when the agency was launched—and March 1996, the agency achieved nearly £1.4 billion in benefit savings. Net operating costs for the period were around £500 million. In the current year, through 31 December 1996, savings of more than £354 million have been recorded, against net operating costs of £146 million.

Mr. William O'Brien: I appreciate the information that the Minister has given. The ombudsman has awarded compensation in more than 80 cases. Will that compensation come out of the savings, or is there another fund from which compensation is paid?

Mr. Mitchell: I will come to the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised about the ombudsman. I overhauled the system of compensation at the end of last year, and we now have a clearly established new system that relates specifically to the CSA and the cases that the hon. Gentleman mentioned in his speech.

As well as collecting maintenance that offsets benefit expenditure, the agency discourages abuse of the benefits system. In 1994–95, more than 60,000 parents with care withdrew their benefit claims once the agency began taking action. Overall since the agency started its operation, it is estimated that more than £644 million has been saved by that means alone.

Other tangible improvements in the performance of the CSA continue. The agency's increased emphasis on maintenance collection entails a strong and increasingly effective commitment to enforcement action when maintenance is not paid. As for payments of maintenance to parents with care, the improvements are clear. Some 98 per cent. of payments were passed on within 10 working days. In cases with difficulties in ensuring regular payments, deductions from earnings orders are now implemented quickly in all appropriate cases. More than 47,000 were issued between April 1996 and the end of January 1997.

I wish to record my appreciation, and that of all the Ministers in the Department of Social Security, to the Social Security Select Committee for the advice that it has offered on improvements to child support. The Committee has paid close attention to the policy and the operation of the scheme since its introduction, and has produced five helpful reports on the subject since April 1993. I am grateful to the Committee for its constant support for a properly functioning child support system and its determination to identify impediments to the effective operation of the agency. Both the hon. Gentlemen who contributed were somewhat grudging in their support for the Social Security Select Committee.

Mr. Skinner: It was worse than that.

Mr. Mitchell: I was being generous. The Select Committee is an all-party Committee, and we value what it says. I fully agree with the Committee's report, which was published yesterday and which states:

"the Committee was very encouraged that after a poor start, the Child Support Agency was showing a much more acceptable level of service . . . The figures . . . indicate that in the past two years there has been a substantial improvement in the Agency's performance. Whereas the Agency was heading for disaster in 1993/94, there is now no danger that this could occur. We are pleased that the Child Support Agency is on a sure footing and expect that the gains in performance will continue."

That was the judgment of the all-party Social Security Select Committee which underlines the bipartisan approach to child support that now exists between the Government and the official Opposition. I agree with the Select Committee's comments, and I pay tribute to its consistency.

Many Members of the House, from both sides, have shown great patience and support during the agency's most difficult periods, when inaccuracies and mistakes tried the patience of many hon. Members and their constituents. While inaccuracies have yet to be eliminated, the improvement is there for all to see, as is our commitment further to improve the service for the agency's clients until it is fully acceptable. The emphasis on the continuing need for further improvement in service is clear from the agency's targets for the next financial year, which we announced on Tuesday.

The agency will be required to collect and arrange £500 million in maintenance, to achieve an accuracy level of 85 per cent. over the whole year and to clear at least 525,000 maintenance assessments while bearing down on work outstanding.

For all those changes and improvements, the House owes a particular debt of gratitude to Ann Chant, the chief executive, who will depart shortly to work on Business in the Community. She has done a superb job in turning around the fortunes of the Child Support Agency. I am particularly grateful to her for agreeing to stay on as chief executive for longer than she intended originally. She is an outstanding civil servant, and deserves all the praise that has rightly been heaped upon her by the Social Security Select Committee, Ministers and many others who have worked with her during her time as chief executive.

I turn now to several policy considerations. I appreciate the concern that has been expressed about the complexity of the system: a great deal of information is required in order to assess child maintenance. I acknowledge the fact that simplification of the system has been a key factor in improving the process and getting maintenance flowing. Progress has been made in resolving the difficulties experienced in establishing housing costs and wages. If the agency can continue to simplify and streamline its procedures, and can get it right, the way forward will be easier. Policy changes have also played their part. To this end, we have always made it clear that we shall listen to—and, where possible, act upon—any constructive suggestions for change that come from both sides of the House.

While I have had the honour of being responsible for the agency, I have made some 140 changes to the way in which it operates. The Child Support Act 1995 and the

[Mr. Mitchell]

regulations introduced in April 1995 added to the process of positive change. Those changes were based, in part, on suggestions by the Social Security Select Committee. However, they went further in some respects. The Act was supported by both sides of the House with good reason: it was a careful and prudent balancing act. The Government took into account the interests of the children, their parents and the taxpayer. The interests of the children were central to the proposals for change that were accepted by the House.

The Government's intention was simple: remain true to the key principles behind child support, but learn the lessons of experience. As a result, four main changes were introduced in 1995 which built upon earlier improvements. First, we introduced the 30 per cent. rule. That meant that no absent parent would be assessed under the formula to pay more than 30 per cent. of his or her net income in current maintenance payments. Even absent parents whose payments are in arrears would usually pay no more than 33 per cent. Secondly, we introduced a degree of flexibility into the formula, and I shall return to that point later.

Thirdly, the Government recognised that capital or property settlements made before child support was introduced might have been intended to offset regular child maintenance payments. That was not always properly reflected in the child support assessment. We introduced regulations to make allowance for a broad recognition of those property and capital settlements, and made provisions in the Act for more detailed allowances. On the same basis—I refer directly to the first case that the hon. Member for Normanton raised—we also recognised high travel-to-work costs of the minority of parents who travel long distances to work.

It had become clear that the agency experienced particular problems in collecting maintenance from self-employed absent parents. That is not a new problem: the courts experienced similar difficulties. Some absent parents have sought to exploit that difficulty in a bid to sidestep their legitimate responsibilities towards their children. I am pleased to say that we were able to make important changes that were designed specifically to address problems in that area. We introduced a new power that allows the agency to enter liability orders in the county court register of debt judgments. The threat of such an entry will be an incentive to secure absent parents' compliance—especially in the case of the self-employed, who generally rely on credit to conduct their business. I am pleased to tell the House that those powers are being used in appropriate cases. On Monday, I visited the Hastings Child Support Agency centre, and staff told me that results for the latest quarter show that a substantial proportion of those who are warned that they may face action subsequently comply.

As I said earlier, a crucial part of the 1995 improvements package was the introduction of a degree of flexibility into the maintenance assessment formula. The Government remain committed to using a formula to determine maintenance. A formula is successful and fair in the majority of cases, and it provides the best means of establishing a fair and consistent maintenance liability. However, experience has shown that a small proportion of cases were not being dealt with fairly by a formula. That is why I have introduced some discretion to "depart" from the basic formula in special circumstances. The change will allow flexibility where fairness demands it. It was successfully piloted in the summer of 1996, and introduced nationally in December. Through the introduction of the departures system, we have addressed one of the biggest criticisms of the child support system. In doing so, we have gone rather further than the changes suggested by the Social Security Select Committee in its report.

Parents with care and absent parents can apply for a departure from the formula assessment. For example, an absent parent may face genuine hardship if a maintenance assessment fails adequately to reflect special expenses. Such costs include those incurred in maintaining contact with children or in meeting the needs of step-children in a current family. The discretion to "depart" from the formula will help a small but important number of cases in which people might otherwise face hardship. Conversely, a parent with care may have grounds to consider the maintenance assessment to be unrealistically low. It may be that an absent parent appears to be living a life style that is simply not commensurate with his declared income. In that case, the parent with care can apply for a departure order.

More recently, we have tackled the problem of parents with care who claim benefits but who are unwilling to permit action to recover maintenance from the absent parent. In the light of clear evidence that such reluctance can mean that benefit is being claimed fraudulently, we have increased the level and duration of the benefit penalty that applies when the parent with care has no genuine reason for her failure to co-operate. As well as being an effective way of tackling fraud, this underpins the principle that both parents must honour responsibilities for their children whenever they can afford to do so.

Those improvements are reflected in a substantial fall in the amount of correspondence that I receive from hon. Members: down by one third in 1996 compared with 1995. While there has been a modest fall in correspondence about individual cases, complaints about the policy have fallen dramatically by more than 50 per cent: from 1,520 in 1995 to only 723 in 1996. Those absent parent groups who campaigned so loudly against the child support scheme can no longer claim legitimate grievance. It is time for the small minority of outside groups who oppose the agency to acknowledge that times have changed. I hope that all hon. Members will acknowledge and reinforce the message that absent parents have a responsibility to support their children when they can afford to do so.

I am afraid that a small number of men continue to believe that they should not be responsible for supporting their children and can shuffle off their liability on to their neighbour: the taxpayer. Such people cloak in moral indignation what is a simple disinclination to pay up for their kids. Increasingly, society rightly regards such behaviour with deep distaste and contempt. I am sure that the process will continue to grow. Children have a right to be supported by their own parents whenever and wherever that can occur. While the House cannot legislate for the affection and concern that all parents owe their children, it can legislate—and has done so—for proper and fair levels of child support.

I thank the hon. Gentleman once again for the opportunity to review the operation of the Child Support Agency and the changes that we have made to improve the operation of the child support scheme. The current system has experienced problems, not all of which will disappear overnight. Recent changes address both the functioning and the fairness of the system. Not all the improvements that I have sought are in place yet, and it will take time for the effect of the changes to feed through.

Nevertheless, we are continuing to look for ways of making the system function more effectively. The hon. Member for Normanton referred to the ombudsman. Next month, the agency's independent case examiner will begin her work of handling the concerns of clients whose cases have not been handled as well as they expected. The child maintenance bonus scheme—an important back-to-work measure which provides cash help for parents with care returning to work—will begin operation.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): May anyone approach that officer, or can she be approached only via a Member of Parliament?

Mr. Mitchell: I reassure my hon. Friend that she may be approached by anyone. The Government are committed to seeing parents with care receiving levels of maintenance that adequately reflect both the children's needs and the absent parents' ability to pay. We are at last seeing more maintenance being paid to more parents with care than ever before. I am sure that many hon. Members will agree that that represents a considerable achievement for an agency that many were willing to write off less than two years ago.

I look forward to returning to this Dispatch Box after the Queen's Speech on 14 May, and after the Conservative party has won the general election. I look forward to continuing the important work in the area of child support when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister forms his next Government on 2 May.

As the last Minister to speak during this Parliament from the Treasury Bench and from the Dispatch Box, I will follow in the tradition established by the final speaker in the last Parliament in 1992—my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory)—in quoting Suetonius, who accurately reflects the outstanding economic achievements secured by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. He wrote:

"Urbem excoluit adeo, ut iure sit gloriatus marmoream se relinquere, quam latericiam accepisset."

For those Opposition Members who may find it helpful, this translates as:

"He so improved the city that he justly asserted he had found it brick and left it marble."

6.50 pm

Sitting suspended.

8 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Earlier today I drew Madam Speaker's attention to the fact that there had been an announcement on the widening of the M25. She addressed that point of order. My point of order this evening—I apologise for troubling you—relates to the fact that the Cabinet Secretary has published some Cabinet rules on the conduct of Ministers after the general election has been announced.

I was bewildered as to how a decision could be announced in a parliamentary answer by the Minister for Railways and Roads, the hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). I spoke to the permanent secretary at the Department of Transport, who said, "Ah. The decision was taken on 13 March."

I appeal to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about this total abuse and flagrant disregard of the rules laid down by the Cabinet Secretary, who is the custodian of the independence of the civil service. The fact that that can be done is nonsense and an outrage. Can you help? The decision was taken today, not on 13 March. Somebody should be brought to account before the House for that abuse.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Thankfully, I am not responsible for anything that the Cabinet Secretary does.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 21 March 1997

The House met at Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Message to attend the Lords Commissioners:

The House went;—and, having returned:

Royal Assent

11.39 am

Madam Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that the House has been to the House of Peers, where a Commission under the Great Seal was read, authorising the Royal Assent to the following Acts and a Measure:

Appropriation Act 1997

Building Societies Act 1997

Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997

Contract (Scotland) Act 1997

Scottish Legal Services Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Act 1997

Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Act 1997

Welsh Development Agency Act 1997

Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Act 1997

Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Act 1997

Protection from Harassment Act 1997

Building Societies (Distributions) Act 1997

Police (Health and Safety) Act 1997

Crime (Sentences) Act 1997

Education Act 1997

Police (Insurance of Voluntary Assistants) Act 1997

National Health Service (Primary Care) Act 1997

Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act 1997

Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Act 1997

Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse) Act 1997

Police Act 1997

Sex Offenders Act 1997

Police and Firemen's Pensions Act 1997

Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Act 1997

Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997

Birds (Registration Charges) Act 1997

Pensions Measure 1997

Prorogation

Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech

Madam Speaker: I have further to acquaint the House that the Lord High Chancellor, one of the Lords Commissioners, delivered Her Majesty's most gracious speech to both Houses of Parliament, in pursuance of Her Majesty's Command. For greater accuracy I have obtained a copy, and also directed that the terms of the speech be printed in the Journal of this House. Copies are being made available in the Vote Office.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I hesitate to call this a point of order, Madam Speaker, and I am not sure whether it is in order, but I hope that you will allow me to express our appreciation of the way in which you have conducted our affairs as Speaker. On a personal note, having been Leader of the House throughout this Parliament—not always an easy task—may I express my appreciation of the courtesy and support that you have extended to me?

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I end this Session on a note of agreement with the Leader of the House? As Speaker, you have been an example to us of the way in which we should conduct ourselves in the House and we and the people outside in particular appreciate that. On a personal note, I thank the Leader of the House, who has always acted in the best interests of the House.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): On behalf of the minority parties, Madam Speaker, may I thank you both for your kindness and for your protection of the minority parties in the House. We are very grateful.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The Duke of Edinburgh and I were very pleased to receive His Excellency the President of Israel on a State Visit in February. We remember with great pleasure our State Visit to Thailand in October.

My Government continued to provide for the defence of the United Kingdom, the Dependent Territories and our allies, and for the protection of international peace and stability.

My Government have continued to support the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and welcomed its decision in December to hold a Summit meeting in Madrid in July this year at which decisions will be taken on the adaptation and enlargement of the Alliance. My Government have supported the work of the Alliance to develop a new partnership with Russia.

In the European Union, my Government have promoted policies aimed at greater competitiveness. They have participated in meetings of the Intergovernmental Conference and on Economic and Monetary Union.

My Government continued strongly to support enlargement of the European Union and the necessary reform of EU policies. They have continued to promote transatlantic relations, both bilaterally and through the Union.

In November, my Government published a White Paper on "Free Trade and Foreign Policy", which calls for global free trade by 2020. The first Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation, which took place in December 1996, made good progress towards this goal.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, my Government have continued to play a leading role in consolidating peace. They held a conference in London in December 1996 to set a framework for peace implementation in 1997, and have continued to contribute substantially to the country's economic and social regeneration. They are also maintaining 5,000 Service men and women in former Yugoslavia, as part of the NATO-led military stabilisation force.

In the interests of the people of Hong Kong, my Government continued to work for a successful transfer of sovereignty to China on 30 June this year.

My Government have continued to support the work of the United Nations Secretary-General's mission of good offices in the search for a settlement on the divided island of Cyprus.

In the Middle East, my Government worked for and welcomed the agreement between Israel and the Palestinians on redeployment in Hebron, and were closely involved in international efforts to reduce tensions and support the implementation of that and earlier agreements.

My Government launched two campaigns for the promotion of trade and investment, one in respect of Central and Eastern Europe and one in respect of South East Asia. They also held a successful conference in February to help strengthen trade, investment and bilateral links with Latin America.

A large and effective development assistance programme was maintained, aimed at promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty and suffering in the poorer parts of the world. My Government continued to play a full part in promoting democracy and the rule of law throughout Africa and tackling the grave problems of the Great Lakes Region.

Support continued for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia in their transition to democratic market economies, through the Know How Fund and with our European partners.

My Government continued to play an active part in the Commonwealth and to prepare for a successful Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, to be held in October in Edinburgh.

My Government played a full part in supporting the work of the United Nations and its peacekeeping operations, and participated actively in the debate on the reform of the organisation.

My Government have maintained the fight against terrorism in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. They have pursued a comprehensive strategy to combat drug misuse, by tackling the supply of narcotic drugs at home and abroad and pursuing measures to reduce demand.

Members of the House of Commons

I thank you for the provision you have made for the honour and dignity of the Crown and for the public service.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government have pursued economic policies which have brought about sustained growth in output, rising living standards and falling unemployment, while keeping inflation at its lowest levels for nearly 50 years. Public expenditure has been kept under firm control, income tax has been reduced and measures have been taken to ensure that the public sector borrowing requirement continues to fall.

My Government have continued to promote the nation's competitiveness, following up the policies and initiatives set out in the Third Competitiveness White Paper published in June, and to encourage fewer, better and simpler regulations to reduce unnecessary burdens on business. Over 1,000 regulations have now been repealed or amended.

In Northern Ireland, my Government have continued to work towards a political settlement, through talks open to all elected political parties that demonstrate a commitment to peaceful and democratic methods. Renewed terrorist activity has been dealt with vigorously by the security forces. My Government have maintained close co-operation with the Irish Government. An Act has been passed to provide a framework for the decommissioning of arms.

Legislation was passed to improve discipline and raise standards in education.

An Act has been passed to support the fight against organised crime. Legislation has also been enacted to reform the sentencing and supervision of serious, dangerous and persistent offenders so as to provide greater protection for the public. An Act has been passed to strengthen controls on the ownership of firearms.

Measures have been enacted to impose a requirement on convicted sex offenders to register changes of address with the police and to give our courts jurisdiction over sex offences committed against children abroad. Legislation has also been passed to provide protection through the criminal and civil law to victims of harassment.

My Government have set a framework for environmental action with new strategies for air quality, water resources, recycling and urban regeneration. With their European partners, they have secured agreement to targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Legislation was enacted to improve maritime safety and strengthen powers to protect the United Kingdom coastline from pollution from merchant shipping. An Act has been passed to authorise the construction and operation of a high speed rail link between London and the Channel Tunnel.

An Act has been passed to improve and develop primary health care services. Legislation has been passed

which will reduce social security fraud and improve the scheme to recover benefits from compensation payments.

An Act has been passed to enable reform of the procedures of the civil courts.

Legislation has been enacted to implement proposals to strengthen the role of parish and community councils, to provide rate relief for small village shops and to remove Crown exemption from non domestic rates.

For Scotland an Act has been passed to make changes in criminal justice to improve public protection. Other Scottish measures which have been enacted include legislation to enable the transfer of publicly owned crofting estates to crofting trusts.

Other important measures have been enacted, including measures of law reform.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may attend you. The Commission was also for proroguing this present Parliament, and the Lord Chancellor said:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, by virtue of Her Majesty's Commission which has been now read, we do, in Her Majesty's name and in obedience to Her Majesty's commands, prorogue this Parliament to Tuesday the fifteenth day of this instant April to be then here holden and this Parliament is accordingly prorogued to the fifteenth day of this instant April.

End of the Fifth Session (opened on 23 October 1996) of the Fifty-First Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in the Forty-Sixth Year of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 March 1997

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Millennium Commission Awards

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the awards from the Millennium Commission announced this week and also the applications refused, broken down by region. [14819]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Schools Renewal Challenge Fund (Sheffield)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the Sheffield schools which have received funds from the Government schools renewal challenge fund. [18264]

Mrs. Gillan: We have made the following allocations to Sheffield local education authority under the schools renewal challenge fund:

Waltheof school (£1,251,000)

Earl Marshall school/Owler Brook nursery infant school (£96,000)

Reorganisation of special educational need provision (involving Firth park secondary school, Angram bank primary school and Ecclesfield secondary school) (£150,000).

Additionally, we have recently issued Sheffield with supplementary credit approvals for the following two schools:

Silverdale school (£65,000)

King Ecgbert secondary school (£210,000).

Jobmatch Scheme

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *265*, what is her estimate of the number of people who would benefit from an extension of the jobmatch scheme to *(a)* all people unemployed for two years or more and *(b)* those aged over 50 years unemployed for two years or more. [18980]

Mr. Forth: In January 1997, the number of people who had been unemployed for at least two years was just over 390,000, of whom some 90,000 were over the age of 50. Our experience of the jobmatch pilots has suggested that up to 10 per cent. would take advantage of the jobmatch programme. However, that is not necessarily an accurate guide to likely take-up among particular groups, such as people over 50.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of bills to her Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18811]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* I refer to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *506–07*. Any additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pupil Statements

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will place in rank order the number and percentage of school pupils who are *(a)* statemented and *(b)* awaiting statementing in each local education authority in England. [19304]

Mrs. Gillan: The following table shows the number of school pupils with statements, and this number expressed as a percentage of total school pupils, attending school in each local education authority in January 1996. Figures are taken from returns to the Department in the annual schools census. For any particular LEA, they will include pupils with statements placed by other LEAs, and exclude such pupils placed by the LEA in other LEA areas. Information on numbers of pupils awaiting statements is not collected centrally.

Pupils with statements in schools by Local Education Authority area in England—January 1996

LEA	*Number*	*Percentage*
Doncaster	2,470	4.59
St. Helens	1,399	4.52
Cornwall	3,113	4.19
Wigan	2,112	4.12
Cumbria	3,222	4.00
Norfolk	4,368	3.83
Shropshire	2,662	3.76
Wandsworth	1,288	3.68
Lancashire	8,472	3.57
Greenwich	1,391	3.56
Islington	887	3.52
Hammersmith	703	3.52
Devon	5,497	3.46
East Sussex	3,619	3.46
Derbyshire	5,360	3.42
Tower Hamlets	1,252	3.41
Sunderland	1,785	3.39
Kirklees	2,244	3.35
Suffolk	3,473	3.31
Camden	955	3.28
Bury	1,041	3.27
Lincolnshire	3,180	3.25
Buckinghamshire	3,703	3.24
Durham	3,264	3.22
Leeds	3,896	3.20
Cheshire	5,354	3.19
Rotherham	1,463	3.18
Knowsley	963	3.18
Waltham	1,117	3.11
Surrey	5,156	3.10
Avon	4,817	3.08

Pupils with statements in schools by Local Education Authority area in England—January 1996

LEA	Number	Percentage
North Tyneside	1,015	3.05
Wirral	1,808	3.03
Isle of Wight	594	3.03
Stockport	1,464	3.02
Hampshire	7,454	3.01
Lewisham	1,090	3.01
Bromley	1,426	3.00
Kent	7,844	2.98
Barnsley	1,054	2.98
Hillingdon	1,207	2.96
Somerset	2,234	2.92
Lambeth	835	2.90
Hackney	865	2.90
Sefton	1,495	2.86
Berkshire	3,849	2.86
Liverpool	2,494	2.85
West Sussex	3,129	2.84
Hereford and Worcester	3,110	2.78
Hounslow	1,007	2.78
Leicestershire	4,291	2.78
Gloucestershire	2,481	2.77
Bedfordshire	2,736	2.76
Staffordshire	4,864	2.75
Cambridgeshire	3,060	2.74
Walsall	1,369	2.70
Tameside	1,048	2.70
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,260	2.69
Sutton	763	2.68
Northumberland	1,416	2.67
Hertfordshire	4,881	2.67
Havering	971	2.67
Southwark	1,029	2.65
South Tyneside	713	2.63
Wiltshire	2,463	2.63
Merton	708	2.57
Cleveland	2,744	2.56
Wakefield	1,458	2.54
Newham	1,121	2.51
Bolton	1,234	2.48
Dorset	2,477	2.46
Warwickshire	2,006	2.45
Harrow	810	2.44
Wolverhampton	1,089	2.39
Haringey	821	2.39
Kingston upon Thames	551	2.39
Sheffield	1,848	2.38
North Yorkshire	2,787	2.37
Birmingham	4,475	2.37
Northamptonshire	2,561	2.36
Manchester	1,798	2.33
Brent	892	2.30
Cladedale	821	2.30
Bexley	857	2.27
Essex	5,536	2.27
Barking	630	2.26
Oxfordshire	2,157	2.25
Humberside	3,352	2.22
Bradford	2,076	2.19
Coventry	1,152	2.16
Trafford	795	2.06
Gateshead	653	2.00
Solihull	775	1.98
Enfield	904	1.97
Dudley	971	1.93
Barnet	972	1.90
Ealing	876	1.83
Sandwell	961	1.80
Richmond upon Thames	482	1.80
Redbridge	718	1.75
Westminster	403	1.75
Salford	668	1.67
Croydon	905	1.65
Isle of Scilly	4	1.51
Oldham	628	1.42
Kensington and Chelsea	258	1.23
Nottinghamshire	2,011	1.18
Corporation of London	2	0.11
England	227,324	2.80

LEAs (Capital Borrowing Allocation)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the capital borrowing allocation to *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* Buckinghamshire for (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1996–97. [19302]

Mrs. Gillan: The following table shows the education annual capital guidelines and supplementary credit approvals we have allocated to Lancashire and Buckinghamshire local education authorities in 1997–98 and 1996–97.

All figures in £'000s

	1997–98	1996–97
Lancashire		
Annual Capital Guidelines	5,225	8,166
Supplementary Credit Approvals	826	1,224
Total	6,051	9,390
Buckinghamshire		
Annual Capital Guidelines	4,235	10,140
Supplementary Credit Approvals	251	593
Total	4,486	10,733

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list by decile the household income of parents of students in the assisted places scheme for the most recent year for which figures are available. [19303]

Mrs. Gillan: The information is not readily available in the form requested. The following table gives figures, by decile and in bands to the nearest £250, relating to the relevant incomes of parents of pupils receiving help under the assisted places scheme in England in academic year 1995–96. Over 43 per cent. of assisted pupils in that year received a free place because their parents' income fell below the threshold of £9,572 for full fee remission.

Assisted Places Scheme: Academic Year 1995–96

Decile	Relevant incomes of assisted pupils' parents (£ per year)
Lowest	less than £250
Second	Between £251 and £3,500
Third	Between £3,501 and £6,000
Fourth	Between £6,001 and £8,250
Fifth	Between £8,251 and £10,500
Sixth	Between £10,501 and £12,750

Assisted Places Scheme: Academic Year 1995–96

Decile	*Relevant incomes of assisted pupils' parents (£ per year)*
Seventh	Between £12,751 and £15,250
Eighth	Between £15,251 and £17,750
Ninth	Between £17,751 and £21,000
Highest	Over £21,001

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many school pupils had places under the assisted places scheme in *(a)* Burnley, *(b)* Pendle, *(c)* Rossendale, *(d)* Hyndburn, *(e)* Ribble Valley and *(f)* Blackburn in each year since 1992; and what was the total value of the payments made. [19580]

Mrs. Gillan: There are no schools participating in the assisted places schemes in the Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale, Hyndburn or Ribble Valley constituencies. The information requested is given in the following table in respect of the three participating schools in Blackburn:

Assisted Places Scheme in the Blackburn constituency

Academic Year	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School				
Number of assisted pupils	260	261	267	270
Cost of places £000s	£726	£803	£832	£848
Stonyhurst College				
Number of assisted pupils	35	34	37	37
Cost of places £000s	£161	£174	£215	£215
Westholme School				
Number of assisted places	20	25	30	37
Cost of places £000s	£59	£75	£98	£125
Total number of places	315	320	334	344
Total cost £000s	£946	£1,052	£1,145	£1,188

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the new registered nursery education inspectors under the voucher scheme are also providers of pre-school education. [19012]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Schools Renewal Challenge Fund

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total sum made available for each schools renewal challenge fund round to date; and if she will list those projects successful in each round and the sums allocated to them. [19035]

Mrs. Gillan: The total allocated in the first tranche of the schools renewal challenge fund was £29.5 million with a further £15.117 million in the second tranche.

Details of individual allocations are in our press notices of 23 July 1996 and 5 February 1997, which are in the Library.

Free School Meals

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the total percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in each local education authority in England in each of the last two years for which figures are available, indicating separately the percentages for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools. [19557]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Number and percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in maintained primary and secondary schools in local education authority areas in England.

Position as at January in each year

	1995				*1996*			
	primary		*secondary*		*primary*		*secondary*	
	number	*percentage*	*number*	*percentage*	*number*	*percentage*	*number*	*percentage*
Corporation of London	119	54	0	0	116	54	0	0
Camden	4,808	43	2,857	27	4,950	44	3,088	28
Greenwich	8,376	39	5,209	37	8,596	40	5,397	40
Hackney	9,729	54	4,938	66	10,195	56	4,884	66
Hammersmith and Fulham	4,514	48	2,269	38	4,493	47	2,096	35
Islington	7,796	49	4,081	55	8,129	50	4,330	57
Kensington and Chelsea	2,797	44	1,290	41	2,960	45	1,364	43
Lambeth	8,941	47	3,460	53	8,907	47	3,366	52
Lewisham	8,103	38	4,400	40	8,284	38	4,668	43
Southwark	10,911	48	5,209	57	10,921	48	5,147	56
Tower Hamlets	13,240	60	8,110	66	14,534	65	8,369	66
Wandsworth	6,360	36	3,190	35	6,359	35	3,346	36
Westminster	4,462	47	3,335	44	4,347	45	3,237	42
Barking and Dagenham	4,465	26	2,144	22	4,707	27	2,485	25
Barnet	4,330	18	2,844	15	5,119	21	3,112	16
Bexley	3,431	16	1,769	12	3,662	17	1,979	13
Brent	6,806	30	3,651	28	6,862	30	3,655	27
Bromley	4,099	18	2,426	14	4,395	18	2,683	15
Croydon	7,355	26	3,128	21	7,783	26	3,350	22
Ealing	7,038	27	4,491	32	6,576	24	4,143	29
Enfield	5,315	22	3,744	21	5,682	22	4,058	22
Haringey	7,945	39	4,073	42	8,668	41	4,404	44
Harrow	2,177	11	1,211	14	2,273	11	1,462	17
Havering	3,055	15	1,657	11	3,115	15	1,815	12

Number and percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in maintained primary and secondary schools in local education authority areas in England.

Position as at January in each year

	1995				1996			
	primary		secondary		primary		secondary	
	number	percentage	number	percentage	number	percentage	number	percentage
Hillingdon	2,582	12	2,040	14	2,727	12	2,186	15
Hounslow	5,040	26	3,282	22	5,216	26	3,414	23
Kingston-upon-Thames	957	9	763	10	933	8	820	10
Merton	3,425	22	1,501	20	3,468	22	1,567	21
Newham	10,238	37	6,390	43	10,835	39	6,653	44
Redbridge	3,726	19	2,698	17	3,921	19	2,932	18
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,544	13	1,315	17	1,582	13	1,382	18
Sutton	1,899	14	982	8	2,067	14	1,125	9
Waltham Forest	6,915	33	4,247	36	6,764	32	4,277	36
Birmingham	40,536	37	23,158	35	41,521	38	24,308	37
Coventry	7,921	26	4,646	24	7,312	24	4,447	23
Dudley	5,494	18	3,044	17	5,631	18	3,144	17
Sandwell	9,447	29	4,872	26	9,203	28	4,755	25
Solihull	3,427	17	1,688	12	3,520	16	1,808	13
Walsall	7,621	27	4,844	24	7,364	26	4,730	24
Wolverhampton	7,049	27	4,097	25	7,013	27	3,994	25
Knowsley	9,268	46	5,005	53	9,054	45	5,176	55
Liverpool	20,983	42	12,636	41	21,345	42	13,216	42
St. Helens	4,299	24	2,121	18	5,573	31	2,665	23
Sefton	6,816	24	4,290	22	6,978	25	4,450	23
Wirral	9,829	31	5,754	27	9,948	31	6,066	27
Bolton	6,131	22	2,926	17	6,463	23	3,011	17
Bury	3,214	18	1,508	14	3,297	18	1,497	14
Manchester	22,394	48	9,858	45	22,218	47	10,006	45
Oldham	6,894	28	3,945	24	7,067	28	4,028	24
Rochdale	6,781	31	3,885	29	7,149	32	3,851	29
Salford	8,279	35	3,264	27	8,526	36	3,422	29
Stockport	4,680	18	2,529	16	4,817	18	2,689	17
Tameside	5,809	25	2,819	20	5,884	25	3,165	23
Trafford	4,091	19	2,578	21	4,137	19	2,775	22
Wigan	6,297	21	3,557	18	6,033	20	3,600	18
Barnsley	5,939	27	3,022	23	5,783	26	2,922	22
Doncaster	8,130	28	5,533	24	8,520	28	4,862	23
Rotherham	6,341	25	3,614	19	6,426	25	3,617	19
Sheffield	12,536	28	6,771	25	13,105	29	6,766	25
Bradford	11,108	27	14,489	31	11,131	26	14,221	31
Calderdale	4,526	22	2,429	18	4,363	21	2,561	19
Kirklees	8,823	23	4,738	19	9,135	24	4,922	19
Leeds	15,183	22	8,451	19	16,457	23	8,694	20
Wakefield	6,376	20	3,690	18	6,564	21	3,578	18
Gateshead	5,399	29	3,108	26	5,254	28	2,924	25
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	9,091	40	4,794	28	9,042	40	4,753	27
North Tyneside	4,236	25	2,709	19	4,179	25	2,726	19
South Tyneside	6,002	37	2,681	27	6,163	38	2,721	28
Sunderland	9,019	30	5,416	28	8,866	29	4,375	23
Isles of Scilly	17	11	38	40	11	7	9	10
Avon	16,638	20	7,850	14	16,920	20	8,116	15
Bedfordshire	9,196	21	7,692	17	9,387	21	7,686	17
Berkshire	8,909	14	4,176	9	8,960	14	4,357	9
Buckinghamshire	5,568	9	3,381	9	5,706	9	3,710	10
Cambridge	10,003	17	5,562	13	9,944	16	5,738	14
Cheshire	15,254	17	7,923	12	15,917	17	8,390	13
Cleveland	20,094	31	10,515	28	19,302	29	10,385	28
Cornwall	7,893	19	4,631	16	8,587	21	5,267	18
Cumbria	7,427	17	3,691	12	7,965	18	3,983	12
Derbyshire	16,114	19	8,400	14	16,253	18	8,509	15
Devon	16,706	20	8,114	13	16,885	20	8,241	13
Dorset	4,297	9	4,268	10	4,663	10	4,324	10
Durham	14,217	25	7,647	20	13,599	24	7,080	19
East Sussex	11,152	21	6,069	17	11,878	22	6,274	18
Essex	23,219	18	12,497	13	23,562	18	12,783	13
Gloucester	6,661	15	3,325	10	6,556	14	3,434	10
Hampshire	21,687	16	9,358	11	21,639	16	9,475	11
Hereford and Worcester	5,517	11	4,735	10	5,264	10	4,903	10
Hertfordshire	12,139	14	6,788	10	12,595	14	6,845	10
Humberside	19,207	22	10,044	18	19,479	22	10,432	18
Isle of Wight	1,782	24	2,065	19	1,803	24	2,053	19
Kent	25,034	19	14,668	14	25,440	19	15,123	15

Number and percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in maintained primary and secondary schools in local education authority areas in England.

Position as at January in each year

	1995				1996			
	primary		secondary		primary		secondary	
	number	percentage	number	percentage	number	percentage	number	percentage
Lancashire	32,095	24	17,232	20	32,182	24	17,439	20
Leicester	14,271	18	7,747	13	14,508	18	7,900	13
Lincolnshire	4,213	8	3,941	10	4,565	9	4,052	10
Norfolk	11,100	17	4,339	11	11,188	17	4,561	11
North Yorkshire	7,159	12	3,454	8	7,512	12	3,799	8
Northamptonshire	6,705	13	5,811	13	6,960	13	6,050	13
Northumberland	4,071	19	3,957	13	3,988	18	4,206	14
Nottinghamshire	23,264	25	13,462	21	23,801	25	13,364	20
Oxfordshire	5,273	12	3,394	9	5,301	12	3,392	9
Shropshire	6,605	18	3,507	14	6,457	17	3,376	13
Somerset	4,756	13	2,963	11	4,734	13	2,965	10
Staffordshire	18,513	20	9,550	14	18,668	19	9,730	14
Suffolk	7,379	16	6,001	12	7,746	17	6,445	13
Surrey	8,380	11	3,905	8	8,531	11	3,969	8
Warwickshire	6,316	14	2,251	9	6,146	13	2,166	8
West Sussex	8,035	15	3,709	9	8,244	15	3,566	9
Wiltshire	7,164	15	3,605	10	7,248	14	3,566	10
England	956,497	22	539,438	18	974,281	22	550,902	18

Bradfield House School, Cullompton

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answers of 5 March, *Official Report,* columns *631–32,* if Bradfield House school, Cullompton, has agreed to comply with its statutory requirements regarding its recent Office for Standards in Education report under sections 20 and 21 of the School Inspections Act 1996. [19637]

Mr. Robin Squire: In response to my officials' letter dated 3 March warning the school that non-compliance would result in legal action, the Department has received written confirmation from the school that it will distribute the Ofsted report and produce an action plan in accordance with these statutory requirements.

PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister how many of his answers to parliamentary questions in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19337]

The Prime Minister: Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the number of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for my office to calculate the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Parliamentary Finances

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the reasons why he will not refer the subject of party finances to the committee chaired by Lord Nolan; and if he will make a statement. [19358]

The Prime Minister: The Home Affairs Select Committee has already considered the question of party funding.

Engagements

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Prime Minister what official engagements he undertook in Ayrshire on 28 February. [19405]

The Prime Minister: None.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his office is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18928]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* For these purposes, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. In 1996, the Cabinet Office let one PFI project—the provision of the Government's metropolitan telephone service, involving capital expenditure of £1.25 million in each of the years covered by table 5.5 of the Red Book. The figures for this project have been included in the totals given in the Red Book, but were not given a separate entry in table 5.5 where figures are shown to the nearest £10 million.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Anti-personnel Land Mines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries have (i) discontinued and (ii) stated their intention to discontinue the use of anti-personnel land mines by their own forces. [18725]

Mr. David Davis: Comprehensive information on this is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, based on information

supplied by the International Committee of the Red Cross, we believe that 24 countries have discontinued the use of anti-personnel land mines by their own forces and a further 29 countries, including the UK, have stated their intention to do so when certain conditions are met.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on *(a)* the recent shelling of Tamil border villages in Vavuriya and Mannar districts by the Sri Lankan armed forces and *(b)* the flight of Tamil civilians from these areas; and if he will urge the Sri Lankan Government to cease the offensive and withdraw Sri Lankan forces from Tamil areas. [18868]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have called on both sides to make every effort to avoid injuries to civilians during the current conflict. We understand that there were no civilian casualties during the Sri Lankan Government's most recent offensive. When I visited a camp for displaced Tamils in Northern Sri Lanka last year, I was granted uninhibited access to the inhabitants. The conditions were rudimentary but the inhabitants appeared clean, well fed and generally content. I was impressed by the valuable part British aid was playing in the Sri Lankan Government's continuing work to provide humanitarian supplies to those displaced by the conflict. We continue to support the Government's efforts to bring about a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will take steps to facilitate talks between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Government of Sri Lanka by establishing modalities for such talks. [18871]

Dr. Fox: We have offered to facilitate talks, provided both sides agree. This offer remains on the table.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Sri Lankan President and Foreign Minister in regard to *(a)* the lifting of the restrictions presently placed on journalists travelling to the Tamil northern and eastern provinces, *(b)* the removal of the embargo on food and medicines on the Tamil people and *(c)* violations of the human rights of Tamil people by the army and security forces; and if he will consider the withdrawal of aid to the Government of Sri Lanka. [18869]

Dr. Fox: We regularly take opportunities to urge the Sri Lankan Government to maintain their commitment to press freedom; to continue to provide humanitarian supplies to those displaced by the conflict; and to give the highest priority to human rights issues, ensuring that violators are prosecuted. The British aid programme to Sri Lanka is for the benefit of all communities. A significant proportion supports people affected by the civil conflict.

Disarmament

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government expect to ratify the additional protocols to the Geneva conventions. [19219]

Mr. David Davis: We intend to ratify the additional protocols as soon as we can.

MacBride Principles

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who instructed the UK assistant consul at New York to request an invitation to the celebration marking the 10th anniversary of the passing of the MacBride principles in New York; if the assistant consul attended the function; and if he will make a statement. [17958]

Mr. Rifkind: No-one instructed the consul—information, Northern Ireland—in New York to request an invitation. The consul attended the event in order to hear the views of the main speakers.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who instructed the UK consul in Seattle to write to members of the state legislature of Washington concerning the response of British companies if Washington state enacted legislation incorporating the MacBride principles; in how many US states the MacBride principles have been enacted; how many British companies have refused to invest because of the enactment of the MacBride principles; if he will list such companies and the relevant states; and if he will make a statement. [17957]

Mr. Rifkind: It is the long-standing policy of the Government to oppose the enactment of US federal and state legislation based on the MacBride principles, because such legislation is (*a*) unnecessary—the requirements of the 1989 Fair Employment Act being much more stringent and precise—and (*b*) a potential deterrent to trade and investment with Northern Ireland. All Northern Ireland political parties represented at Westminster are opposed to MacBride legislation. Macbride principles have been enacted in 15 states. We are not aware that such legislation has yet affected the operations of British companies in the United States, but remain concerned at its potential to damage trade and investment in either direction.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Whitemoor Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many tapes were recorded by each of the staff present in the emergency control room at HMP Whitemoor on the evening of 9 September 1994; and when each of these tapes were made available to *(a)* the police, *(b)* the Woodcock inquiry and *(c)* other investigative bodies. [16866]

Miss Widdecombe: Three video recorders were in operation in the emergency control room at Her Majesty's prison Whitemoor on the evening of 9 September 1994. The Cambridgeshire constabulary took possession of the

three video tapes from those recorders on 9 and 10 September in the course of their investigation of the escape. The Woodcock inquiry was given access to the video tapes at the outset of its work at Whitemoor and was subsequently provided with a copy of them. The video tapes have not been made available to any other investigative body.

Telephone Interception

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued on the methods of listening to telephone calls made on mobile and cordless telephones which are classified as interceptions under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 following the definition of the interception of a telephone call in the Court of Appeal in R *v.* Ahmed (29 March 1994) and the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords in R *v.* Effik (1994). [18949]

Mr. Howard: My Department issued no such guidance in the light of those judgments.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what protection exists for citizens in respect of listening to telephone calls made on mobile and cordless telephones by a method falling outside that covered by the Interception of Communications Act 1985; and what assessment he has made of the compatibility of such protection with the Government's obligations under the provisions of articles 8 and 13 of the European convention on human rights. [18950]

Mr. Howard: Section 5 of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 makes it an offence to use wireless telegraphy intending to obtain information as to the contents, sender or addressee of any message or to disclose any such information except in certain specified circumstances.

I am satisfied that the Government's obligations under articles 8 and 13 of the European convention on human rights are met in respect of the interception of communications.

Polling Stations (Disabled Access)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the amount of grant in respect of access for disabled people to polling stations; and if he will make a statement. [19228]

Mr. Sackville: We encourage acting returning officers to apply to the Home Office for grants towards the cost of providing temporary ramps, where they cannot use as polling places buildings which afford easy access for the disabled. Grants are also available for specially adapted polling screens for use by the disabled. Funds for grants of this kind are not capped. Total expenditure on such grants since the last general election now stands at £175,400 compared with £17,948 at the 1992 general election.

Commission for Racial Equality

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he made to the Parliamentary Commissioner for external appointments regarding recent appointments and re-appointments to the Commission for Racial Equality. [19312]

Mr. Kirkhope: We made contact with the Commissioner for Public Appointments to clarify the acceptability of a reappointment which I considered desirable.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will require appointees or re-appointees to the Commission for Racial Equality to declare their political affiliation. [19313]

Mr. Kirkhope: We will follow the Commissioner for Public Appointments' guidance on appointments to executive non-departmental public bodies and national health service bodies which states that records should be kept

"of the political activities of candidates for appointment in so far as they are a matter of public record".

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if appointments and re-appointments to the Commission for Racial Equality are made in accordance with the Nolan rules for appointments to public bodies. [19311]

Mr. Kirkhope: Yes.

Extradition

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extradition requests to and from the United Kingdom remain outstanding from each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [19024]

Mr. Kirkhope: My right hon. and learned Friend is responsible for extraditions to and from England and Wales and from Northern Ireland. The information in the first table relates to such cases.

Year	*Outstanding requests to the United Kingdom*	*Outstanding requests from the United Kingdom*
1987	0	1
1988	0	1
1989	1	1
1990	2	3
1991	5	2
1992	9	3
1993	6	2
1994	24	6
1995	38	13
1996	60	32

The table includes all requests which have not been brought to a conclusion. This may be because the request is under active consideration by the Home Office or the courts; because further documentation has been requested; or the individual concerned may be in prison for a domestic offence, in which case extradition action is suspended until he or she is released.

Extradition between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland takes place under the Backing of Warrants (Republic of Ireland) Act 1965 and the corresponding legislation in the Republic of Ireland. My right hon. and learned Friend is responsible where the case involves seeking the return of a fugitive who has been convicted by a court in England or Wales, while my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is responsible where the case involves seeking the return of a person accused of an offence in England, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Since 1992, the earliest year from which figures are available, the total number of extradition requests outstanding from the United Kingdom to the Republic of Ireland is as follows:

1992: 0

1993: 3

1994: 4

1995: 17

1996: 15.

Figures for requests made by the Republic of Ireland to the United Kingdom are not available centrally.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extradition requests the United Kingdom *(a)* made and *(b)* received in the last year for which figures are available; how many were successful; if he will list the figures (i) by country and (ii) in total; and if he will make a statement. [19028]

Mr. Kirkhope: My right hon. and learned Friend is responsible for extraditions to and from England and Wales and from Northern Ireland. The information in the table relates to such cases. The figures refer to extradition requests made and those received during 1996.

In addition to the figures in the table, a further 15 persons were returned to countries other than the Republic of Ireland in the course of 1996 from requests made in previous years. A further nine persons were returned to the United Kingdom in the course of 1996 from countries other than the Republic of Ireland from requests made in previous years.

Five of the requests made by the United Kingdom were withdrawn. Twenty-two of the requests made to the United Kingdom were withdrawn, and in two cases the fugitives concerned were discharged.

Country	*Number of requests made by the United Kingdom*	*Requests where fugitive returned to United Kingdom*	*Number of requests received by United Kingdom*	*Requests where fugitive returned to requesting country*
Australia	3	—	—	—
Austria	1	—	1	—
Bangladesh	—	—	1	—
Belgium	1	—	7	1
Botswana	—	—	1	—
Bulgaria	—	—	2	—
Canada	2	—	3	—
Croatia	—	—	1	1
Cyprus	—	—	1	—
Denmark	—	—	2	—
Egypt	—	—	1	—
France	3	1	9	1
Germany	4	—	17	3
Gibraltar	—	—	1	—
Greece	—	—	1	—
India	—	—	1	1
Israel	1	—	—	—
Italy	1	1	7	—
Lithuania	—	—	1	—
Netherlands	5	—	9	6
Norway	1	—	1	1
Portugal	—	—	6	1
Seychelles	—	—	1	—
South Africa	2	—	2	—
Spain	15	2	4	—
Sweden	—	—	2	1
Switzerland	1	—	4	—
Trinidad and Tobago	—	—	1	—
Turkey	2	—	4	—
Uganda	—	—	1	—
United Arab Emirates	—	—	3	—
United States of America	2	—	21	4
Total	44	4	116	20

Extradition between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland takes place under the Backing of Warrants (Republic of Ireland) Act 1965 and the corresponding legislation in the Republic of Ireland. My right hon. and learned Friend is responsible where the case involves seeking the return of a fugitive who has been convicted by a court in England or Wales, while my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is responsible where the case involves seeking the return of a person accused of an offence in England, and Wales or Northern Ireland.

The United Kingdom made 24 extradition requests to the Republic of Ireland in 1996. The defendant was returned to the United Kingdom in eight of those cases. An order for return was made in a further four cases but appeals are outstanding.

In addition, five persons were returned in the course of 1996 from requests made in previous years.

Figures for extradition requests made by the Republic of Ireland to the United Kingdom are not available centrally.

Rehabilitation of Prostitutes

Mr. Lamont: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was Her Majesty's Government's policy on the proposed EU pilot scheme for the rehabilitation of prostitutes; and what is the current status of these proposals. [18087]

Mr. Burt: I have been asked to reply.

In January 1996, the European Commission announced that it would grant funding to 86 projects—including a pilot scheme for prostitutes in Austria. The aims of the projects were similar to those covered by an earlier Commission proposal for a programme to combat social exclusion. The proposal was blocked by the UK and Germany in the Council, on the grounds of subsidiarity and value for money.

The Government are opposed to the Commission's action, which has been taken without an adequate legal base. The Government have therefore challenged the expenditure in the European Court of Justice. We await the date of the oral hearing.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Sri Lanka

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the scope, nature and extent of the aid *(a)* which has been made available to the Government of Sri Lanka during the past five years and *(b)* which is currently being made available. [18870]

Dr. Liam Fox: The ODA has provided more than £42 million to Sri Lanka during the past five years.

Our assistance helps to tackle national environmental problems; improve the quality of education, particularly at primary level; promote good government; and alleviate poverty. It has included a significant programme assisting internally displaced people of all ethnic origins who are affected by the civil conflict, which is channelled through Oxfam and Save the Children Fund. Last month, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development approved a new £4 million phase of this programme. Support has also been provided through the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

In the current financial year, we expect to spend around £6 million.

Aid Projects

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, columns *541–42*, what percentage of the United Kingdom's *(a)* development assistance and *(b)* national overseas development budget has been spent in each of the last five years and is planned to be spent in the forthcoming year on basic social services; and if he will make a statement. [19352]

Dr. Liam Fox: Assistance to poor people, including the provision of basic social services, is a key element in the ODA's efforts to help recipient countries in the fight against poverty. Levels of bilateral assistance in this area over the last five years are estimated as follows:

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
(a) Gross public expenditure					
Percentage of spend on Basic Social Services (BSS)	10	9	10	9	9
Percentage of spend on BSS, including all Emergency Aid	18	17	21	22	17
(b) ODA programmes					
Percentage of spend on BSS	11	11	11	11	11
Percentage of spend on BSS, including all Emergency Aid	20	20	23	27	21

The figures quoted are percentages of the UK bilateral programme which accounts for about half of total UK development assistance. Recipient countries also benefit from the UK's substantial contributions to the multilateral agencies.

Angola

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contingency plans have been made to curtail the planned phased withdrawal of the United Nations Angola verification mission III from Angola should the provisions of the Lusaka protocol not be met before August. [19119]

Dr. Liam Fox: In his report of 7 February, the United Nations Secretary-General stated that the pace of the planned withdrawal of UNAVEM III should take into account the situation on the ground. He will keep the Security Council informed of any developments that may affect the withdrawal schedule.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government are making to UNITA in Angola to abide by the provisions of the Lusaka protocol. [19118]

Dr. Fox: My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker spoke to Dr. Savimbi during her visit to Angola in January and urged UNITA to fulfil without delay its remaining obligations under the Lusaka protocol. She continues to do so. Our ambassador in Angola takes every opportunity with senior members of UNITA to encourage full compliance. Representations also continue to be made at official level in London.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the estimated number of UNITA personnel in Angola outside the UN quartering areas. [19117]

Dr. Fox: On 13 December, the UN Secretary-General's special representative in Angola declared, subject to certain reservations, that all UNITA's military tasks, including the quartering of troops, had been completed. As at 5 March, 26,513 personnel were registered as absent or deserted from the quartering areas.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on reports that personnel of UNITA of Angola are operating in support of Government forces within Zaire. [19120]

Dr. Fox: We are aware of these reports. If they are true, we deplore such UNITA involvement. We condemn any action which exacerbates the conflict in Zaire. We are warning both UNITA and the Government of Angola that military involvement in Zaire would not be in their, or anyone else's, interests.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what external finance limit has been set for the current financial year for the Commonwealth Development Corporation. [19686]

Dr. Liam Fox: The external finance limit for CDC for 1996–97 is being increased by £1,400,000 from £15,000,000 to £16,400,000. The change allows for the take-up of an entitlement under end-year flexibility arrangements and a temporary increase in borrowing by the CDC. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TREASURY

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* and *(b)* have attended indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16572]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Ministers attend Scottish Grand Committee meetings as part of their normal parliamentary duties and officials do so as part of their normal departmental duties. Expenditure falling to my Department has been limited to travelling costs. I attended the Scottish Grand Committee meeting on 19 February 1996 in Aberdeen and had officials in attendance as necessary.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking that the activities of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise do not hamper *(a)* the work of the Environmental Trust and *(b)* the operation of the landfill tax. [18571]

Mr. Oppenheim: Landfill tax is under the care and management of the commissioners of Customs and Excise. On 16 October 1996, they approved the Environmental Trust Scheme Regulatory Body Ltd., Entrust, under regulation 35 of the Landfill Tax Regulations 1996 (S.I. 1996 No. 1527), to act as the regulatory body for environmental bodies.

It would not be appropriate for me to interfere in the way the commissioners discharge their responsibility. If the hon. Member is concerned about a specific difficulty, he might care to write to the chairman of Customs and Excise, or myself, about it.

Chancery Bank

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the monitoring by the Bank of England of Chancery bank's dealings before its voluntary liquidation; and if he will make a statement. [18703]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Banking Act 1987 places statutory responsibility for banking supervision directly on to the Bank of England. The Treasury is not responsible for making or monitoring supervisory decisions.

Secretaries of State (Annual Reports)

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on how many occasions in the last three years a Secretary of State has failed to lay an annual report Parliament, in accordance with his or her statutory duty; and what action has been taken on each occasion; [19242]

(2) what is the maximum length of time which should elapse between the laying of annual reports before Parliament by a Secretary of State under a statutory duty; [19241]

(3) what exemptions apply to the statutory requirement of Secretaries of State to lay an annual report before Parliament. [19240]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Departmental reports for all the major Departments have been laid annually before Parliament in a timely manner since their inception in 1991. However, these reports are not laid under statute. If the hon. Member has other kinds of annual reports in mind, perhaps he would identify them.

European Funding

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the net transfer of European funds to Wales in each of the last five years. [17874]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* Because the data used to determine the United Kingdom's own resources contributions are collated for the UK as a whole, it would be possible to estimate only disaggregated net transfers of European funds to Wales at disproportionate cost. Furthermore, receipts from the Community which benefit Wales, but which do not pass through the Welsh Office, are not collected by the Government on a territorial basis, so that the total of Community receipts benefiting Wales is also not readily available. Welsh Office receipts, as published in the last departmental report of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's smaller Departments (Cm. 3217), from the Community for the five-year period 1991–92 to 1995–96, are set out in the following table.

£ million

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
EAGGF (guidance)	11	9	9	7	9
ERDF	57	44	50	53	53
ESF	0	0	13	10	12
Other receipts	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Total for Welsh Office	68	53	72	70	74

[1] Signifies existence of receipts of less than £0.5 million.

Self-Assessment Tax System

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters of complaint he has received so far in 1997 from taxpayers concerning *(a)* the self-assessment system and *(b)* inaccurate tax demands arising under the system. [17851]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* In 1997, I have received *(a)* 11 letters expressing concern about the self-assessment system and *(b)* two letters of complaint concerning inaccurate tax demands arising under the system.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce a VAT reclaim cap on repayment traders; what form this will take; and if he will make a statement. [18501]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* Drafts of the regulations introducing a three-year cap on repayment traders to parallel the measure in force for payment traders are well in hand, and they will be laid before the House as soon as possible.

Petrol and Diesel Oil (Tax)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the tax payable on a gallon of each grade of *(a)* petrol and *(b)* diesel oil in each of the last five financial years and the current financial year; and what percentage of the retail price the tax represented in each year. [18517]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The information requested is given in the following table.

Financial year	*Tax (duty + VAT)*	*Percentage of price*
Leaded petrol (4 star)		
1991–92	151.52	67
1992–93	161.56	69
1993–94	180.27	72
1994–95	194.04	74
1995–96	209.66	77
1996–97[1]	221.45	78
Derv		
1991–92	129.60	65
1992–93	135.50	65
1993–94	152.15	67
1994–95	167.00	70
1995–96	184.20	74
1996–97[1]	196.93	74
Unleaded petrol		
1991–92	133.19	64
1992–93	138.70	65
1993–94	155.00	68
1994–95	168.44	71
1995–96	183.78	75
1996–97[1]	196.31	75
Super unleaded petrol		
1996–97[1]	219.65	74

[1] To December of 1996.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of bills to his Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18809]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* In the current financial year to date, the Treasury has paid 96.8 per cent. of its bills within contractual conditions. These normally require payment within 30 days of the receipt of the invoice. Bills in dispute constitute the great majority of the remaining 3.2 per cent.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will review the answering of parliamentary questions, with particular reference to blocking answers and disproportionate costs. [17788]

Mr. Freeman: The Government recently reviewed the answering of parliamentary questions as part of their consideration of the Public Service Committee's second report, Session 1995–96 on "Ministerial Accountability and Responsibility". In their response (HC 67), the Government reaffirmed their commitment to openness in all their dealings with Parliament, and published new "Guidance to officials on drafting answers to Parliamentary Questions".

Information that is available to the Government will be withheld only when disclosure would not be in the public interest, this being decided in accordance with relevant statute and the Government's code of practice on access to government information. Where information has to be withheld, the Government are further committed to providing the House with the reason in each case.

The advisory limit, above which Ministers may decide to decline to provide an answer on grounds of disproportionate cost, remains £450, the level set in February 1993.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of his answers to parliamentary questions in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19335]

Mr. Freeman: Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large number of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for my Department systematically to calculate the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Ministerial Visit (Scotland)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *588*, what method of transport he used in carrying out his official duties in Scotland on 31 January; and how much this transport cost. [19422]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I flew to Glasgow to carry out my official duties in Scotland on 31 January. The cost to official funds was £130.50, as half the cost of my return air ticket was met by Conservative central office. I used the official car of the Under Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) between Glasgow airport and the venue for the launch of the White Paper. The transport for my political engagements was provided by Conservative central office.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *588*, if he will list the official engagements which he undertook in Scotland on 31 January in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minster; and what specific duties he undertook in this capacity in Troon. [19423]

The Deputy Prime Minister: In my capacity as Deputy Prime Minister, I joined my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on 31 January to launch the White Paper on education and skills development in Scotland. I undertook no official duties in my capacity as Deputy Prime Minister in Troon.

Deregulation

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made on the deregulation initiative over the last two years. [19731]

Mr. Freeman: Since passing the Deregulation and Contracting Act 1994, we have made considerable progress in removing unnecessary burdens on business including:

- repealing or simplifying more than 1,000 regulations, more than 500 in the past year—examples include:
  - 44 deregulation orders submitted to Parliament benefiting business and charities by over £100 million a year. This includes amendment to the Trustee Investment Act which will benefit charities by up to £40 million a year
  - 500,000 of the smallest companies no longer need to have their accounts audited
  - over 100 sets of out of date health and safety requirements are being amended or repealed
- abolishing or simplifying 148 business licences
- commitment to reduce the burden of Government surveys by 25 per cent. by 2000 saving business £17.5 million a year.
- Introduced business-friendly enforcement procedures giving business new rights when enforcement action is taken against them in key areas such as health and safety and the environment.
- 125 local authorities have undertaken to establish local business partnerships to promote co-operation between local business and local regulatory authorities
- new regulation subject to an analysis of benefits and compliance costs. Ministers must certify they have read a compliance cost assessment and risk assessment and are satisfied that benefits justify the costs and for regulations implementing EC legislation that they have applied the European law checklist to prevent unnecessary gold plating and double banking.
- Direct Access Government launched as a pilot one-stop shop service eon the Internet for accessing regulatory information and forms
- in Europe, the simpler legislation for the internal market initiative has produced concrete proposals for improvements in certain areas including trade statistics and construction products.

TRANSPORT

London Underground (Privatisation)

16. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about the future of London Transport. [17768]

Sir George Young: Following my recent statement to the House, a wide range of views have been expressed about the Government's proposals to privatise London Underground.

20. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to privatise the London Underground. [17772]

25. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future ownership of London Underground. [17777]

Sir George Young: I announced to the House on 25 February, *Official Report*, columns 149–52, that the Government intend to privatise the London Underground. Privatisation will enable the Underground's infrastructure to be modernised as soon as possible, while capping fares

and safeguarding the aspects of the present system which passengers value, such as travelcard, safety and service levels. We are now developing our proposals and aim to publish a White Paper in the summer.

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from *(a)* members of the public and *(b)* organisations on his proposals to privatise the London underground network. [18273]

Mr. Bowis: We have received a number of representations from members of the public and organisations on our proposals to privatise London Underground.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further proposals he has for the improvement of London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [18014]

Mr. Bowis: The Government believe that, while great strides have been made by the underground's management and staff in recent years, the best way to improve the London Underground is to privatise it. Privatisation will enable the Underground's infrastructure to be modernised as soon as possible, while capping fares and safeguarding the aspects of the present system which passengers value, such as travelcard, safety and service levels.

Eversholt and Porterbrook Leasing

17. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the valuation at the time of the Government's sale of *(a)* Eversholt and *(b)* Porterbrook Leasing. [17769]

Mr. Watts: The values of these companies were determined by sale to the highest bidders in an open competitive bidding process.

Government Investment

18. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the level of Government investment in *(a)* road and *(b)* airport infrastructure over the last four years. [17770]

Sir George Young: Since 1993–94, my Department has invested, in England, over £7.2 billion of public money in the national roads network and around £3.6 billion in local authority roads. Investment in airport infrastructure is very largely from the private sector.

Charter Flights

19. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will investigate the reliability and punctuality of charter flight companies on long-haul flights. [17771]

Mr. Bowis: Reliability and punctuality are matters for the airlines themselves. My Department publishes quarterly reports on the punctuality of flights at UK airports. All UK airlines must attain the high standards of safety required by the Civil Aviation Authority.

27. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to persuade companies running charter flights to improve their punctuality. [17779]

Mr. Bowis: Punctuality is a matter for the airlines themselves. My Department publishes quarterly reports on the punctuality of flights at UK airports.

Road and Bridge Maintenance

21. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has received from the Highways Agency on the backlog in road and bridge maintenance. [17773]

Mr. Watts: In 1991, the Department told the Public Accounts Committee that its aim was to reduce the proportion of the trunk road network with less than zero residual life to the economic minimum of 7 to 8 per cent. by 2000. The most recent national road maintenance condition survey shows that only 3.9 per cent. of motorways and 7.3 per cent. of other trunk roads have less than zero residual life.

A5

22. **Mr. Brian David Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the withdrawal of the A5 Weeford to Fazeley road improvement scheme. [17774]

Mr. Watts: The A5 improvement between Weeford and Fazeley was a scheme in the longer-term programme withdrawn in November 1996 because it could not be taken forward in a reasonable time scale.

Air Pollution

23. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the contribution made by transport to air pollution in British cities. [17775]

Sir George Young: Both my Department and the Department of the Environment have commissioned several studies on this subject. The findings of these studies are summarised in section 3 of the Green Paper, "Transport: The Way Forward", published in April of last year, and in the United Kingdom national air quality strategy, which will be published soon by the Department of the Environment. A new study, commissioned by the Department of the Environment, which focuses on 10 cities and large urban areas in the UK, is now under way.

Rail Investment

24. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Railtrack's railway investment since privatisation. [17776]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) earlier today.

London, Tilbury, Southend Line

26. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many persons per week use the LTS line to Fenchurch Street station; and how passenger numbers have changed since privatisation. [17778]

Mr. Watts: Weekly figures are not available. A count in November 1996 showed that 27,300 passengers travelled into Fenchurch Street on a weekday, which was an increase of 1 per cent. over the year before.

Sea Empress Disaster

28. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of the cost of the Sea Empress disaster which may be claimed from the international oil pollution compensation fund. [17780]

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 24 February, *Official Report*, columns *49–50*.

Road Links (East Sussex)

29. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to improve road links in East Sussex. [17781]

Mr. Watts: We are supporting a number of road proposals in East Sussex, at an estimated cost of £205 million. These include three schemes to improve the A27 between Lewes and Polegate; and A27 Southerham to Beddingham improvement; the A27 Selmeston bypass and the A27 Wilmington bypass, at an estimated cost of £53 million collectively. In addition, there is the A27 Polegate bypass which is included in The Weald and Downland design, build, finance and operate project and has an estimated cost of £17.8 million.

Bypasses for Bexhill and Hastings are also included in this DBFO project. These are, with their estimated costs; the A259 Bexhill and Hastings western bypass, £68.2 million; the A259 Hastings eastern bypass, £20.6 million; and the A259 Pevensey to Bexhill improvement at £9.6 million. The programme achieves a balance between promoting economic development in East Sussex and protecting the area's environment.

Railtrack (Property Sales)

30. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the proceeds of property sales by Railtrack. [17782]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack's annual report and accounts 1995–96 stated that profits on property disposals in 1995–96 amounted to £11 million.

High-speed Rail Links

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into high-speed rail links in the United Kingdom. [17764]

Mr. Watts: The Great Western main line between London, Bristol, Cardiff and the east coast main line are existing high-speed lines. Two further high speed routes have been evaluated and implementation is programmed. They are the channel tunnel rail link and the west coast main line modernisation and upgrade. A development study for the Great Western line from Bristol to Penzance is under way.

Bus Passenger Journeys

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the change in the number of bus passenger journeys outside London made since 1985–86. [17767]

Mr. Watts: I refer to my reply to the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) on 31 January, *Official Report*, column *391*.

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department established its Internet site; what representations he has received and what data he has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19148]

Mr. Bowis: The site started on 3 June 1996. It has received 163,000 visits. The response has been very favourable in the UK and abroad. Visitors may e-mail their comments, questions or proposals direct to dedicated inquiry points in my Department. The magazine "NetUser" recently gave the site a four star rating. The site is being redesigned to improve ease of use and to increase the information available.

Dial-a-ride Services (London)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the operation of dial-a-ride services in London; and if he will make a statement. [19217]

Mr. Bowis: We have received a number of representations about London dial-a-ride.

Rail Departure Information Boards

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make representations to Railtrack to prevent railway station departure boards being used as general advertising space. [19099]

Mr. Watts: This is entirely a matter for the company.

Train Leasing Companies

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what redress is available to his Department in respect of external financial advice leading to under-pricing in the sale of train leasing companies; and if he will make a statement. [19034]

Mr. Watts: The rolling stock leasing companies were not under-priced. Prices in these very successful sales reflected the best bids received in open competition amongst a wide range of parties.

Coastguard Officers (Scotland)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many coastguard officers were employed in *(a)* the former Grampian region, *(b)* Highlands and Islands and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in each year between 1987 and 1997. [19071]

Mr. John Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Andrew Welsh, dated 10 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of Coastguard Officers in (a) the former Grampian Region, (b) Highlands and Islands and (c) Scotland as a whole in each year between 1987 and 1997.

	(a)	(b)	(c)
1990	29	48	139
1991	31	48	140
1992	28	50	141
1993	27	50	140
1994	28	50	137
1995	29	51	134
1996	34	61	177
1997	35	66	180.5

Staffing figures broken down in this way are not available prior to 1990.

M25 Works

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what factors led him to conclude that the proposed dual 4 widening of the M25 between junctions 10 to 12 is no longer required. [19582]

Mr. Watts: The M25 between junctions 10 and 12 is already dual 4 lane standard. Proposals to widen this section of the motorway to more than dual 4 lanes were withdrawn from the roads programme in the 1995 review because the environmental impact was not considered acceptable in relation to the benefits.

Emergency Towing Vessels

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements are being made for the provision of emergency towing vessels next winter. [19844]

Mr. Bowis: Emergency towing vessels have been stationed, on a trial basis, in the Minches and Dover strait for the last three winter periods and in the south-west approaches this winter, following recommendations by Lord Donaldson and the emergency towing study team.

A report of the first two year's trials has been published. Further analysis of the trials is to be undertaken so that the benefits of the provision of such Government-funded vessels can be fully assessed. Meanwhile, the three vessels will be re-engaged to provide emergency cover the next winter in the same areas.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19347]

Mr. Bowis: This question could be answered only at disproportionate cost

Jubilee Line Extension

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of the in-service date of the Jubilee Line extension. [19617]

Mr. Bowis: The opening of the various sections of the Jubilee line extension is a matter for London Underground Ltd. I await advice from it on this.

Driving Instruction

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column, *566–67*, concerning research into the teaching of learner drivers, what previous research his Department has undertaken into the matters referred to in the answer. [19425]

Mr. Bowis: The Department commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory to carry out a study of learner and novice drivers in 1988. This study considered methods used in learning to drive by 30,000 drivers who took their driving test on four selected dates. Learning methods were considered in relation to performance in the driving test and it was found that those drivers who had practised with a friend or relation while learning to drive had a higher pass rate in the driving test. This finding takes no account of variations in driving ability and confidence, and the university of Surrey research is following this up. Three research reports have been published and the final report will be published in the spring.

In 1992, a study entitled "The Accident Liability of Novice Drivers" was commissioned. The study, carried out by St. George's hospital medical school, sought to identify factors associated with novice driver accidents which could help predict those drivers most likely to be accident involved after passing the driving test. Consideration of learning methods was only a small element of this study, but driving instructors were asked to rate a sample of their pupils. Instructors rated learner drivers who had relatively more practice with friends or relations as safer, more responsive to instruction, and more likely to pass the driving test. This research is now complete.

National Air Traffic Service

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the current position in regard to the privatisation of the National Air Traffic Service; [19000]

(2) what discussions he has had regarding the privatisation of parts of the work of the Civil Aviation Authority. [19001]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* It remains the Government's intention to bring forward legislation to privatise the National Air Traffic Services early in the next Parliament. My officials are developing detailed proposals in consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority, Government Departments, representatives of NATS's staff and aviation organisations representing both commercial and private interests.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Onshore Petroleum Licences

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when oil and gas companies will have a further opportunity to apply for onshore petroleum licences. [19701]

Mr. Page: I am pleased to announce that an eighth landward licensing round will open shortly for licences to explore onshore areas of the United Kingdom for oil and gas reserves. This round follows the award of licences in March last year under the seventh round. It is being launched now in response to demand from companies for new licences to meet a growing interest in using methane venting from disused coal mines, as well as to explore for conventional oil and natural gas resources.

A formal notice inviting applications for petroleum exploration and development licences under the Petroleum (Production) (Landward Areas) Regulations 1995 will appear in due course in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. This will set the closing date for receipt of applications as 90 days after the notice is published. Licence awards will be announced as soon as possible after all applications have been thoroughly assessed.

The notice will invite applications for all unlicensed acreage above the high water mark. Any exploration and development activity under a licence would need planning permission from the local planning authority in the usual way.

Areas below the high water mark are not included in the eighth round invitation, but may be offered in future when those which include, or are close to, sites designated as European sites have been subject to environmental assessment in accordance with the Conservation (Natural Habitats and etc) Regulations 1994.

Roslin Institute

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what directions he has given in respect of *(a)* the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and *(b)* the Roslin Institute since the inception of the Roslin Institute; and if he will place copies of these directions in the Library. [18882]

Mr. Ian Taylor: No specific directions have been given. A number of more general announcements have impinged upon the BBSRC and Roslin, including the annual announcements of the allocation of the science budget and the recent announcement of the outcome of the prior options reviews. These are all recorded in the *Official Journal*.

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much public money has been provided to the Roslin Institute in each year since its inception. [18964]

Mr. Taylor: The Roslin Institute was established on 1 April 1993 as a result of the restructuring of the former Institute of Animal Physiology and Genetics Research. It was constituted under the royal charter of the Agricultural and Food Research Council, which subsequently became the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. On 1 April 1995, the Roslin Institute was reconstituted as a company limited by guarantee and was recognised as a Scottish charity.

BBSRC Institutes

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff were employed by each of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council-owned institutes in 1994–95. [18883]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Staff in post on 1 April 1995 at institutes sponsored by the BBSRC were:

Institute of Animal Health: 527

Babraham Institute: 368

Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research: 395

Institute of Arable Crops Research: 790

John Innes Centre: 460

Institute of Food Research: 475

Roslin Institute: 264

Silsoe Research Institute: 254.

Mirror Group Newspapers Flotation

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he appointed inspectors into the flotation of Mirror Group Newspapers; how much has been spent by the inspectors in fees and expenses; what is the total cost to date of the inquiry carried out by the inspectors; and when he expects to receive their report. [18943]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The inspectors were appointed on 8 June 1992. The total cost of the inspection to date amounts to £7,011,947 including fees and expenses.

It is not possible to forecast the timing of the completion of an inquiry of this kind.

Accountants Joint Disciplinary Scheme

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the efficiency and effectiveness of the accountants joint disciplinary scheme; and what plans he has to introduce a statutory scheme for investigating complaints concerning firms of accountants. [18942]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The joint disciplinary scheme is operated jointly by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants to investigate cases of public concern involving their members. The bodies are currently reviewing how the scheme should operate in the future.

The JDS has an important public interest role and I am taking a close interest in the current review. I have no plans to introduce a statutory scheme.

EC Framework V Programme

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the European Commission working paper on the framework V programme. [19227]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government are pleased to see the Commission taking a radical look at the fundamentals of the fifth framework programme FP5 and we endorse its aim to deliver a more goal-directed and concentrated programme. The Government welcome the concept of key actions, which is close to the approach of targeting effort on defined goals set out in the UK position paper. The key action approach could yield a framework programme that is better focused and genuinely strategic. The Government remain concerned, however, that the Commission envisages a possible large part of the framework being devoted to general, generic and basic research activities beyond those driven by the defined key

actions. This would, in the Government's view, undermine, potentially significantly, the impact that can be achieved.

The Government also have a number of concerns about the underlying principles and the proposed programme and structure described in the Commission working paper. In particular, the Government do not consider that three large programmes devoted to thematic research and development will allow coherent day to day management by the Commission, or effective oversight by member states. More needs also to be done by the Commission to give the users of research a stronger voice in defining and managing the programme at a strategic level.

The Government will convey their views to the Commission at the earliest opportunity and continue to work closely with other member states in order to influence future proposals for the fifth framework programme.

Research and Development

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total number of companies with research and development operations in each United Kingdom region. [19356]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Information is not available centrally in the form requested. The head offices of the 5,135 companies with research and development operation in the UK identified by the Office for National Statistics *ONS* in 1995 annual research and development business survey were distributed across the regions as follows:

Region	*Number of companies*
North-East	188
North-West	459
Merseyside	60
Yorkshire and Humberside	406
East Midlands	394
West Midlands	572
South-West	397
Eastern	554
London	451
South East	958
Wales	230
Scotland	286
Northern Ireland	180
Total UK	5,135

For some firms, the research and development operation may be conducted in one or more regions other than that containing the headquarters. The ONS therefore asks companies to provide regional apportionments of research and development expenditure and employment, and the 1995 figures for these are given in table 17 of "Research and Development in UK Business: Business Monitor MA14 1995" (HMSO, 27 January 1997), copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Intellectual Property Royalties

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total amount of royalties accruing from intellectual property in each sector of the United Kingdom economy in each of the last 10 years. [19257]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The total amount of royalties accruing from intellectual property is not collected.

The amount of royalties identified as accruing to the UK from overseas for 1986 to 1995 is set out in table 1.

The amount of royalties accruing to each sector from overseas for 1994 and 1995 is set out in table 2. Sectoral data for earlier years are not available on a consistent basis.

Table 1: UK's overseas earnings from royalties

	£ million
1986	845
1987	997
1988	1,132
1989	1,303
1990	1,420
1991	1,583
1992	2,148
1993	2,415
1994	2,952
1995	3,339

Note:
Excludes film/tv, financial, consultancy, transport and education sectors.
Source:
ONS.

Table 2: UK's overseas earnings from royalties by sector

Firms primarily engaged in:	*1994 £ million*	*1995 £ million*
Metal manufacturing	7	6
Chemical manufacturing	1,074	1,344
Mechanical engineering	84	86
Electrical engineering	21	9
Transport equipment	16	4
Food, drink and tobacco	70	78
Miscellaneous manufacturing	305	319
Printing, publishing, performers and other recreation	516	666
Computing services	355	334
Other industries	505	493
Total	2,952	3,339

Note:
Totals may differ from the sum of components due to rounding.
Source:
ONS.

Electrical Goods Industry (Inquiry)

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will instigate an inquiry into the unauthorised disclosure of information from within the Monopolies and Merger Commission in respect of the MMC inquiry into the electrical goods industry; [19569]

(2) what representations he has received from those employed in the electrical goods supply industry concerning the proposed inquiry by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission into the electrical goods industry; and if he will make a statement. [19573]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Representations were received in connection with the making of the references by the Director General of Fair Trading in 1995. The Secretary of State did not exercise his powers under section 50(6) of the Fair Trading Act 1973 to veto the references.

Representations have also been received concerning the conduct of the inquiry, and a possible leak of information about its progress: these are matters for the chairman of the MMC. I understand that the chairman is satisfied that there is no evidence to suggest that any member of the commission or its staff is responsible for leaking information about this inquiry.

Representations to the MMC about possible findings have in a few cases been copied to the DTI. It is not appropriate for Ministers to comment on matters under consideration by the MMC. Any representations should be made to the MMC, so that they may be considered before it reports to Ministers.

Dreamtell Ltd.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the activities of Dreamtell Ltd. of Forest gate, Corby. [18400]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I wrote to my hon. Friend about this matter on 4 March. I have placed a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Titan Business Club

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the latest position regarding the Titan Business Club. [19070]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Following inquiries by officials of my Department, petitions were presented to the High Court of Justice to wind up SHV Senator Hanseatische Verwaltungsgesellschaft mbH, Titan Business Club and Titan Marketing Gesellschaft. All three entities were wound up by the court on 14 August 1996. Following further inquiries by officials of my Department, a petition was presented to the court to wind up Titan International LLC and on 9 August the official receiver was appointed provisional liquidator of the company. Titan International LLC lodged a notice of appeal, but has recently withdrawn it. A date for the hearing of the petition has not yet been fixed.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what analysis his Department has made of the employment consequences of a national minimum wage, on the basis of the 1995 new earnings survey; when such analysis was carried out; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [19427]

Mr. John M. Taylor: In December 1995, my officials calculated that a national minimum wage set at £4 an hour could result in the loss of 1 million jobs, assuming half restoration of pay differentials.

The methodology used to calculate this effect was set out in the note placed in the Library of the House on 2 February 1990.

Utilities (Pre-payment Meters)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the number of households with two pre-payment meters for basic utilities. [19615]

Mr. Page: The information requested is not available.

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when his Department established its Internet site; what representations he has received and what data he has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19145]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Department of Trade and Industry, which was one of the first Departments to go on the Internet, established its site on 14 June 1995 with approximately 100 pages. The site is growing fast and currently stands at over 2,000 pages. It includes a wide range of information about the Department and its activities.

In the next few days, the Department will be enhancing its Internet presence with a new design and improved navigation around the site, following consultation, on the Internet, with its users.

Records are kept about the number of accesses to the pages within the DTI site which currently stand at 180,000 hits per month, which equates to approximately 50,000 pages served.

There are hypertext links to other web sites.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, columns *723–24*, on which dates he will be writing to potential lenders; and if he will list those to whom he is writing. [19308]

Mr. Page: Letters to potential lenders were sent out on 6 March, with a deadline of 11 April for applications.

It is not appropriate to list potential lenders since interest in lending under the scheme is commercially confidential to the firms concerned.

WALES

Rural Residents (Buses)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of rural residents who live more than half a mile from a bus route; and if he will make a statement. [18403]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Reliable information is not available separately for Wales. However, information from the national travel survey indicates that about 12 per cent. of rural residents in Great Britain live further than 13 minutes walking time from a bus stop, which equates to about half a mile in distance.

Llanelli Town Centre (Redevelopment)

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much financial assistance has been provided to date by *(a)* the Welsh Office and *(b)* the Welsh Development Agency towards the re-development of Llanelli town centre. [18509]

Mr. Hague: Between 1 April 1992 and 31 March 1996, the Welsh Office's urban programme and its successor, the strategic development scheme, contributed around £2.3 million towards the redevelopment of Llanelli town centre.

As part of the gradual delegation of responsibility to local authorities for administering SDS resources, £480,000 was allocated to Carmarthenshire county council in 1996–97 and £617,244 will be available in 1997–98 to approve new projects; it is for the council to determine whether its priorities for this assistance should include Llanelli town centre.

Information on financial assistance provided by the WDA is an operational matter for the agency. I have asked the acting chief executive to write to the right hon. Member with details. I shall arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library of the House.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Expenditure)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his Department's total estimated expenditure on agriculture, fisheries and food in Wales in the current financial year; and how much of this expenditure was funded by payments made from the European Union. [18616]

Mr. Hague: Total estimated expenditure by my Department on agriculture, fisheries and food in Wales in 1996–97 is £268.550 million. This includes expenditure on beef marketing payments schemes and the BSE-related top-up payments to beef special premium and suckler cow premium schemes made by my Department but excludes expenditure by the Intervention Board executive agency on other BSE schemes. The total receipts from the European Union relating to agriculture, fisheries and food are expected to be £228.324 million, of which £6.559 million relates to expenditure in the previous calendar year.

Non-NHS Health Care Providers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure by *(a)* district health authorities, *(b)* fundholders and *(c)* NHS trusts on purchasing health care from non-NHS providers in 1995–96 in Wales. [18802]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is as follows:

	1995–96 £000
District health authorities	22,802
GP fundholders[1]	2,264
NHS trusts	4,110

Note:
[1] Information is not held centrally in respect of individual GP fundholding practices, but their expenditure is shown on an aggregated basis in the annual accounts of the family health services authorities which pay for healthcare purchases on their behalf.
Source:
Financial returns of district health authorities and NHS trusts, and the audited annual accounts from family health services authorities.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the development of NHS trusts in Wales. [19910]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are currently 30 NHS trusts in Wales.

My right hon. Friend and I have received a joint application from the Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS trusts to dissolve and create a new single trusts from April 1997. Public consultation on this application ended on 17 February 1997.

Taking full account of the many representations received, and of the individual merits of bringing the two trusts together, we have decided to approve the merger. The two existing trusts will both be dissolved on 1 April 1997 and immediately re-established as a single trust, Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS trust.

NHS Staff

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list (1) by health authority area and (2) health authority, trust or equivalent body the number of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* health visitors, *(e)* administration and clerical staff and *(f)* managers in (i) 1990, (ii) 1992, (iii) 1994, (iv) 1995 and (v) 1996. [18897]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 10 December 1996, columns *168–72*, by my right hon. Friend. Information for 1996 is given in the following table. Information for nurses, midwives and health visitors is not available separately, and the total of nursing and midwifery staff is therefore shown.

Staff in post as at 30 September 1996 (Whole time equivalent numbers)

Organisation,	*Doctors*[2]	*Nursing and midwifery staff,*	*Administrative and clerical,*	*Managers*
Bro Taf				
Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust	74	1,179	353	42
East Glamorgan NHS Trust	138	707	289	29
Llandough Hospital and Community NHS Trust	142	933	379	78
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance NHS Trust[3]	—	—	59	41
North Glamorgan NHS Trust	137	1,069	350	45
Rhondda Healthcare NHS Trust	44	713	193	27
S and E Wales Ambulance NHS Trust[4]	—	—	62	39
UHW Healthcare NHS Trust	505	2,072	936	93
University Dental Hospital NHS Trust	1	7	52	2

Staff in post as at 30 September 1996 (Whole time equivalent numbers)

Organisation[1]	*Doctors*[2]	*Nursing and midwifery staff*[3]	*Administrative and clerical*[4]	*Managers*
Velindre NHS Trust	14	102	111	18
Bro Taf Health Authority	17	7	269	92
Total	1,072	6,789	3,053	506
Dyfed Powys				
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	110	607	242	23
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust	51	389	142	29
Derwen NHS Trust	29	458	121	13
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS Trust	71	527	146	19
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	100	701	268	17
Powys Healthcare NHS Trust	42	944	208	17
Dyfed Powys Health Authority	6	—	147	57
Total	409	3,626	1,274	175
Gwent				
Glan Hafren NHS Trust	304	1,882	651	77
Gwent Community Health NHS Trust	50	1,183	312	64
Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust	108	725	210	19
Gwent Health Authority	9	4	127	35
Total	471	3,794	1,300	195
Morgannwg				
Bridgend and District NHS Trust	161	1,748	407	46
Glan-y-Mor NHS Trust	126	1,430	414	36
Morriston Hospital NHS Trust	192	1,172	359	33
Swansea NHS Trust	138	855	276	24
West Wales Ambulance NHS Trust[7]	—	—	102	15
Morgannwg Health Authority	9	5	130	32
Total	626	5,210	1,688	186
North Wales				
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust	51	1,446	340	56
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS Trust	165	932	360	34
Gwynedd Community Health NHS Trust	42	1,148	278	28
Gwynedd Hospitals NHS Trust	197	854	292	8
North Wales Ambulance NHS Trust	—	—	54	12
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust	153	921	298	28
North Wales Health Authority	10	10	163	68
Total	618	5,311	1,785	234
Welsh Health Common Services Authority[8]	4	76	700	113

[1] Organisations are listed under the name they had at 30 September 1996.
[2] Provisional. Working in the hospital, community or public health service but excluding general medical practitioners.
[3] Excluding pre-registration learners.
[4] Including managers.
[5] Covering the former Mid Glamorgan area.
[6] Covering the former areas of South Glamorgan, Gwent and Powys.
[7] Covering the former areas of West Glamorgan and East Dyfed.
[8] Includes staff employed in Health Promotion Wales.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NHS clerical, administrative and management staff there were in each year since 1989. [18900]

Mr. Jones: The information is given in the following table:

	Total directly employed NHS administrative and clerical staff[1]
September 1989	7,667
September 1990	8,185
September 1991	8,865
September 1992	9,498
September 1993	10,082
September 1994	9,905
September 1995	9,875
September 1996	9,799

[1] Whole-time equivalents. Includes managers. Excludes GP support staff.

Nurses

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the hospital and community health services nurses who are *(a)* qualified, *(b)* unqualified,

(c) midwives, *(d)* learner staff and *(e)* Project 2000 students, as whole-time equivalents, employed in each year since 1991. [18898]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is given in the following table. Details for midwifery staff are included in the figures and are not available separately.

Nursing and midwifery staff

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Qualified[1]	17,633	17,763	17,650	16,565	16,647
Unqualified	7,019	7,355	7,222	6,616	6,636
Education staff	376	333	263	238	63
Not known[3]	22	104	288	1,802	1,382
Learners[4]	2,934	1,970	1,033	144	7
Project 2000 students[5]	100	1,078	1,871	1,969	1,951

[1] Whole-time equivalents as at 30 September. Staff on local pay scales for whom no details of grade are available centrally are included as grade not known—this may affect the comparability of figures for other groups over time. Figures for 1996 are not shown because of a substantial increase in the number of nurses for whom these details are not available centrally.
[2] Grades C and above.
[3] Staff on local pay scales for whom no details of grade are available centrally.
[4] Pre-registration learners. Excludes Project 2000 students.
[5] Numbers at April. Figures supplied by Education Purchasing Unit, WHCSA.

NHS Employees' Pay

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the NHS salaries and wages costs for *(a)* general and senior managers, *(b)* nurses and midwives and *(c)* administrative and clerical staff in each financial year from 1988–89 to 1993–94. [18899]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is as follows:

£000

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
General and senior managers	1,781	6,567	9,543	19,432	20,919	30,836
Nurses and midwives[1]	318,797	338,151	364,519	402,501	425,736	421,737
Administrative and clerical staff[2]	61,337	66,747	77,430	79,134	96,059	110,832

Notes:
[1] Information on salaries and wages cost for family health services authorities are not held centrally, and figures for nurses and midwives cannot be disaggregated from administrative and clerical costs.
[2] These figures exclude the costs of GPs' administrative staff as the information was not separately collected.
Sources:
Financial returns and annual accounts of district health authorities, NHS trusts, family health services authorities, the Health Promotion Authority for Wales and the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Barry Community Hospital

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what representations he has had from the director of Welsh Health Estates concerning additional funding for major roof and boiler remedial works at the new Barry community hospital; [19331]

(2) if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, *(c)* Beard Dove as successor body to the authority's estate care branch, *(d)* Bro Taf health authority, *(e)* Llanlough Hospital Trust and *(f)* Sir Robert McAlpine for defects at Barry community hospital; [19332]

(3) on what previous occasions his Department has subrogated the claim for remedial works on a hospital pending resolution of the claim for damages arising from defective design or workmanship in design and build hospital contracts in circumstances similar to those applying at Barry community hospital. [19333]

Mr. Hague: There are issues relating to contractual liability which have to be resolved and I cannot comment on the responsibilities of specific bodies for the defects. No request has been received for additional funding and there has not been a similar case since this was the first hospital commissioned through a design and build contract.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19349]

Mr. Hague: Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large numbers of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for my Department systematically to calculate the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales where the Welsh TECs' surplus on working capital will be spent in the coming financial year; what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of TECs developing such a surplus; and if he will make a statement. [19025]

Mr. Hague: TECs may generate surplus on the services which they deliver on behalf of the Welsh Office. TECs are able to do so where they can achieve efficiency savings with service providers. Their ability to generate surplus, acts as an incentive to the pursuit of such savings.

TECs need to generate surplus in order to help cover their overheads and to maintain reserves at levels which are at least sufficient to cover their fixed capital and working capital needs. Reserves are primarily a matter for the directors of TECs to determine, since they have a duty to ensure that prudent levels are maintained.

However, TECs are expected to reinvest any reserves which accumulate in excess of those essential needs on activities or projects which are of potential benefit to the communities which they serve. TECs are required to set out their plans for the expenditure of such reserves in their annual business plans, which are subject to approval by my Department. Additionally, planned expenditure on major projects—currently £150,000 or more—requires specific prior approval for each project and is subject to more detailed scrutiny. My Department monitors both the use of reserves and the in-year generation of surpluses as the year progresses, in order to ensure that planned expenditure proceeds and that any accumulation of reserves is matched by expenditure plans for the following year.

TECs are currently preparing their final business plans for 1997–98. However, on the evidence of their earlier draft documents, their plans for the reinvestment of reserves next year are likely to cover a wide variety of schemes including child care facilities, initiatives aimed at young people who are not in training, education or employment, the "Bargaining for Skills Initiative"—partnership between Wales Trades Union Congress and Welsh TECs—adaptations for training disabled people, health and safety awareness for employers and employees, enhanced career guidance in schools, the "Meister Technician Initiative", support for modern communication technologies in schools, graduate employment opportunities, training support for inward investment.

Incomes and Taxes

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average income per family of four in *(a)* the county of Powys and *(b)* Wales for the last five years for which figures are available; what proportion of that income was spent on tax including VAT and national insurance payments; and if he will make a statement. [19026]

Mr. Hague: The information available centrally does not provide reliable estimates at this level of detail.

Local Government Expenditure

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each Welsh county's expenditure per secondary school pupil for each of the last five years for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [19032]

Mr. Hague: Information on local authority net current expenditure on secondary education per pupil is given in the following table.

Net funding per pupil in LEA maintained secondary schools at cash prices[1]

Financial Year	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95*
Clwyd	1,923	2,146	2,287	2,133	2,206
Dyfed	1,891	2,026	2,191	2,106	2,274
Gwent	1,991	2,194	2,293	2,320	2,303
Gwynedd	1,989	2,266	2,429	2,410	2,398
Mid Glamorgan	1,903	2,293	2,355	2,228	2,249
Powys	1,813	1,935	2,158	2,254	2,291
South Glamorgan	1,887	2,064	2,162	2,116	2,123
West Glamorgan	2,168	2,392	2,515	2,383	2,340
Wales	1,951	2,186	2,304	2,246	2,264

[1] Figures from 1991–92 onwards include local management of schools balances. Expenditure on school meals and transport are excluded.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussion his Department has had with general practitioners within the Dyfed Powys health authority area on the role of community hospitals in the development of primary health care. [19235]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My officials have held no recent discussions on this matter with representatives of GPs in the Dyfed Powys health authority area.

Dyfed Powys Health Authority

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the effect of the financial deficit of the former Powys health authority on the current and future financial circumstances of the Dyfed Powys health authority. [19239]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The allocation of funds to the newly constituted Dyfed Powys health authority was based on the population of the new authority. Any over-commitments by the former authorities have to be managed within the resources allocated. This is the responsibility of the new authority.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed closure of eight community hospitals in the Dyfed Powys health authority area. [19233]

Mr. Jones: None. My right hon. Friend awaits the outcome of the authority's public consultation, which is due to end on 30 April.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the financial position of each of the eight NHS trusts in the Dyfed Powys health authority area at the end of the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [19237]

Mr. Jones: There are six NHS trusts which provide hospital and community health care and whose main commissioner is Dyfed Powys health authority. In addition, services provided by the West Wales ambulance trust and South and East Wales ambulance trust are also used by the authority. The financial position for future years is dependent on contracting arrangements between the trusts and the health authority and therefore figures for 1997–98 or 1998–99 are unavailable. The forecast outturn position estimated by each NHS trust for 1996–97 is as follows:

Trust	*Latest forecast £ million surplus (deficit)*
Carmarthen	(0.270)
Ceredigion	(0.150)
Derwen	0.040
Llanelli	0.000
Pembroke	0.026
Powys	0.098
West Wales ambulance trust	0.172
South-east Wales ambulance trust	(0.326)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings his Department has had with the Dyfed Powys health authority to discuss its current consultative strategy document. [19236]

Mr. Jones: My officials have had a number of meetings with representatives of the Dyfed Powys health authority, at some of which the authority's consultative strategy document was discussed.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the Dyfed Powys health authority on its funding needs over the next five years. [19238]

Mr. Jones: My right hon. Friend and I have had no formal representations about the authority's funding needs for the next five years. Officials are in touch with the authority about the cash position in the current year and will continue to monitor the position.

Health Authorities (Funding Formula)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will bring forward proposals to change the funding formula for health authorities to take greater account of rurality. [19234]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As announced by my right hon. Friend on 6 March, *Official Report*, column 727, a review of the formula used to distribute resources among health authorities will commence this year. The review will consider the existing methodology and whether it would be appropriate to change the balance of existing factors or to build new factors into the formula.

Pembrokeshire Islands

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what recent discussions have taken place with the European Commission about delays in reaching a decision on the designation of the Pembrokeshire islands special area of conservation; and if he will make a statement; [19524]

(2) what factors he assesses may delay the decision on the proposed designation of the Pembrokeshire islands as a special area of conservation; [19520]

(3) when he will make a decision on the proposed designation of the Pembrokeshire islands as a special area of conservation; [19522]

(4) on what date the consultation process concluded in respect of the proposed designation of the Pembrokeshire islands as a special area of conservation under the habitats directive; [19521]

(5) if he will list those areas designated special areas of conservation under the habitats directive indicating for each the dates on which *(a)* the consultation periods ended and *(b)* the areas were designated. [19523]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The consultation period for marine sites ended on 22 June 1996, although discussions are continuing in respect of a number of sites across the UK where outstanding issues remain. To date, 36 Welsh sites listed as follows have been submitted to the European Commission as candidate special areas of conservation, although none has yet been designated. Having received many representations, both for and against the proposed designation of the Pembrokeshire islands site, my right hon. Friend, in common with

practice elsewhere in the UK, is still considering the relevant issues raised. The Commission has been informed of the latest position.

Berwyn
Burry inlet: dunes
Burry inlet: saltmarsh
Cardigan Bay
Coed Y Cerrig
Coedydd a Cheunant Rheidol
Coedydd Derw Meirion
Coleg Clynllifon
Cors Caron
Cors Fochno
Corsydd Mon
Crymlyn bog
Cwm Cadlan
Drostre bank
Elenydd
Eryri
Glannau Mon: Twyni
Glannau Mon: Cors Heli
Glannau Ynys Gybi
Great Orme's
Kenfig
Limestone Sea Cliffs of S W Wales
Llangorse lake
Fenn's, Whixhall, Bettisfield, Wem and Cadney mosses
Gower commons
Pembrokeshire bat sites
Penllyn a'r Sarnau
Preseli
Rhinog
Rhos Goch
Rhos Llawr Cwrt
St. David's
Tanat and Vyrynwy bat sites
Wye Valley woodlands
Wye Valley bat sites
Usk Valley bat sites.

Research Councils (Commissions)

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many commissions his Department placed with the Agriculture and Food Research Council and the Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council in each year from 1979 to the present; how many such commissions he expects to place in 1997; and what the value was of the commissions in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [19369]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of his answers to parliamentary questions in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19334]

Mr. Streeter: Where the cost of answering a parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large numbers of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for my Department systematically to calculate the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Tackling Drugs Together

39. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has to review the Government's strategy, "Tackling Drugs Together". [17792]

Mr. Newton: Progress in implementing "Tackling Drugs Together" is subject to regular review by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on the misuse of drugs, which I chair. Most of the tasks for 1997–98, the third and final year of the current strategy, are specific reviews of the effectiveness of key departmental actions and strategies. An independent evaluation of the work of the 105 drug action teams across England is also due to report shortly. The Government will assess the strategy's development beyond 1997–98 in the light of this work, and will consult widely in doing so.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

European Legislation

40. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will review the procedures for consideration of EU legislation and expenditure. [17793]

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Select Committee on European Legislation published a report in July 1996 on the scrutiny of European business, which is currently being considered by the Select Committee on Procedure. The Government will look at recommendations for improving the scrutiny procedures in the light of the Procedure Committee's report.

Back Benchers

41. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will review the amount of time available to Back Benchers to raise matters of concern to their constituents. [17794]

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 10 February, *Official Report*, column 28.

Easter Recess

42. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what has been the average length of the Easter recess during the last 10 years. [17795]

Mr. Newton: The average length of the Easter adjournment during the last 10 years is 12.7 days. There was no Easter adjournment in 1992 because the House dissolved for the general election of that year.

Voting Procedures

43. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to bring forward measures to change voting procedures; and if he will make a statement. [17796]

Mr. Newton: I have no such plans; but my hon. Friend may wish to draw any concerns or suggestions he may have to the attention of the Procedure Committee.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Rendering Industry

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide details of any financial support given to the rendering industry in Government grant or European aid in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996, indicating the amounts given to each rendering company. [18494]

Mr. Baldry: In 1996, 18 rendering companies received about £66 million of temporary financial assistance under the rendering industry support scheme 1996. Payment have been based on loss of income from meat and bonemeal and tallow by comparison with 1995–96, with adjustments to take broad account of renderers' actual levels of throughput and costs in 1996–97. This support forms part of our package of measures designed to maintain essential links in the meat supply and disposal chain in the aftermath of the BSE crisis.

Details of any other UK or EU funded grants or financial assistance which may have been paid to rendering companies are not held centrally.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18923]

Mr. Boswell: The financial provision in the Ministry's entry for 1999–00 in table 5.5 of the Red Book is an outline estimate of non-PFI procurement only, which will be subject to revision when PFI tenders have been received.

It relates to two projects:

(a) Whitehall HQ Building (Accommodation)

(b) Sea-Going Research Vessel Services.

BSE

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the number of cases of BSE of each year of age in each year from 1988 to 1996; and what is the number of cases in which the age is not available in each of these years. [18202]

Mrs. Browning: The following table shows the number of confirmed cases of BSE in Great Britain of each year of age from 1988 to 1996 by age and year of clinical onset as at 3 March 1997:

Age	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
2	25	43	81	64	38	18	13	12	4
3	419	805	2,055	4,150	1,653	1,016	456	479	232
4	1,229	2,681	4,860	10,062	15,181	5,887	3,374	1,765	1,267
5	855	2,539	4,098	6,358	12,603	15,167	5,863	3,342	1,410
6	256	1,043	2,017	2,691	4,700	7,876	8,085	3,083	1,368
7	76	240	600	985	1,369	2,078	3,182	3,035	988
8	23	72	143	264	490	636	823	1,068	802
9	9	20	47	96	170	252	290	335	271
10	6	10	20	35	40	102	127	124	75
11+	2	9	14	27	43	41	70	78	65
Unknown	240	312	704	1,129	858	697	628	489	266
Total	3,140	7,775	14,609	25,861	37,146	33,770	22,911	13,810	6,748

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of bovine infective units of BSE needed to infect a mouse by intra-cerebral injection. [18201]

Mrs. Browning: Titres of infectivity are measures of the concentration of the infectious agent in a particular tissue based upon mortality rates in animals inoculated with different amounts of the tissue. The unit of expression of the concentration of infectivity in a given tissue is therefore relative to the animal species used for the assay. Titres of infectivity also vary from case to case, between tissues and with stage of incubation.

An experiment to compare the relative infectivity of bovine brain to mice and cattle by intracerebral inoculation is in progress.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for the use of the chemiluminescent tests for the identification of cattle with BSE; and if he will make a statement. [18034]

Mrs. Browning: The test referred to is an ELISA—enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay—test carried out on tissue collected post mortem. The test is reported to be able to distinguish between BSE affected and unaffected cattle which have been slaughtered as suspects, but many more samples will need to be tested comparability before

it can be shown to be as accurate as the histopathological test currently used to diagnose BSE. We have no plans to substitute this test for our current method of diagnosis.

There is no information available to determine whether this test is capable of identifying cattle infected with BSE but not yet showing clinical signs of disease and as far as is known tissues from such cattle have not been examined.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has evaluated in respect of the involvement of environmental factors in the transmissive, infective or pathological processes of BSE. [18177]

Mrs. Browning: There is no scientific evidence to suggest that environmental factors play a part in the epidemiology and pathogenesis of BSE. It is however recognised that periods of severe weather have given rise to an increase in the short-term report rate. This appears to be related to a general effect of stress bringing on the manifestation of the early symptoms of BSE in cattle.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* evaluated and *(b)* commissioned in respect of the infective agent from (i) scrapie and (ii) BSE remaining in hay mites. [18135]

Mrs. Browning: The following is a list of scrapie evaluated and non-evaluated research.

Project code	*Project title*	*Start date*	*End date*
Evaluated scrapie projects			
OC9038	Investigation of the role of the embryo in maternal transmission of scrapie in sheep	01/07/92	30/06/95
SE1402	Transmission of BSE and natural scrapie into sheep and goats by intracerebral and oral routes [became SE1418]	01/04/90	31/03/95
SE1403	Strain typing of BSE pathogens in mice, and comparison with strains from natural sheep scrapie [became SE1415]	01/04/91	31/03/95
SE1404	Susceptibility of BSE and scrapie isolates to laboratory facsimiles of rendering practices [became SE1421]	01/04/90	31/03/95
SE1407	Analysis of nucleic acid and differences between control and scrapie/BSE infected animals	01/04/90	31/03/94
SE1410	Sheep PrP Gene studies	01/04/92	31/03/93
SE1701	Studies of natural and experimental spongiform encephalopathies related to diagnosis	01/04/92	31/03/94
SE1706	Identification of BSE and scrapie infected animals by the detection of a urinary metabolite	01/04/92	31/03/95
SE1709	Sensitivity of scrapie-associated fibrils from different breeds of sheep to proteinase K digestion	01/07/92	31/03/94
SE1710	TSE fibril immunolabelling studies	01/07/92	31/03/94
SE1712	Production of sera suitable for the development of immunodiagnostic tests for transmissible spongiform	01/04/92	31/12/93
SE1715	Molecular characterisation of a single stranded (SS) DNA observed in scrapie infected hamster and mouse brain	01/08/93	31/07/94
SE1716	Studies of PrP gene of species naturally and experimentally infected with transmissible spongiform encephalopathies	01/04/92	31/03/95
SE1717	Significance of PrP and putative anti-PrP genes on susceptibility to transmission of spongiform encephalopathies	01/04/92	31/03/94
SE1722	The molecular nature of the agents of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies	01/10/94	30/09/95
SE1808	Transmissibility of BSE and natural scrapie to marmoset by stereotoxic intracerebral inoculation of brain homogenate	01/04/92	31/03/93
SE1813	Transmissibility of scrapie to pigs by oral exposure to brain homogenate [became SE1822]	01/04/93	31/03/95
SE1908	Ultrastructural morphological and immunocytochemical studies of transmissible degenerative encephalopathies	01/04/93	31/03/96
SE1916	Morphometric evaluation of Scrapied mice	01/05/94	31/08/95
Non evaluated scrapie projects			
OC9425	An investigation of scrapie infectivity and PrP genotype in clinically normal cast ewes from infected flocks	01/04/95	31/03/99
SE0213	An epidemiological study of sheep scrapie to determine means of natural transmission	01/04/95	31/03/98
SE0217	Cattle and sheep products audit trail	24/06/96	23/12/96
SE0219	The epidemiology of TSEs in ruminants and assessment of possible associated risk to human health	01/01/97	31/01/00
SE1409	Development of an antemortem test for BSE and natural scrapie infection through the detection of abnormal deposits of PrP	01/04/94	31/03/98
SE1411	Further analysis of nucleic acid differences between control and scrapie/BSE infected animals	01/04/94	31/03/98
SE1412	PrP gene variants and their potential as marker for natural and experimental scrapie susceptibility in sheep	01/04/94	31/03/98
SE1413	Strain-typing of scrapie agent in meat and bone meal	01/01/97	31/12/99
SE1414	Studies on the "species barrier" in scrapie and BSE	01/04/95	31/03/2000
SE1415	Strain typing of BSE pathogen in mice and comparison with strains from natural sheep scrapie [was SE1403]	01/04/95	31/03/99
SE1417	The effect of PrP genotype on the thermostability of scrapie agent	01/04/95	31/03/2000

Project code	Project title	Start date	End date
SE1421	BSE and scrapie agent susceptibility to laboratory facsimiles of rendering practices [was SE1404]	01/04/95	31/03/98
SE1422	Practical aspects of inactivation of BSE and scrapie agents [was SE1405]	01/04/95	31/03/97
SE1707	Sensitivity studies of fibril detection techniques used in Electron Microscopy for the diagnosis of scrapie	01/04/91	30/09/97
SE1713	Gain information on use of resistant rams as method of controlling or eradicating scrapie	01/04/92	31/03/99
SE1718	Identification and characterisation of the scrapie agent from a low protein, high infectivity fraction of brain	01/10/95	30/09/99
SE1725	Studies of the enhancement of reproducibility of PrP Scrapie detection after cold storage of scrapie affected tissue	01/04/95	31/03/98
SE1727	Identification of putative NA components of the etiologic agent of the transmissible spongiform encephalopathies	01/06/95	31/05/96
SE1729	PrP gene codon 171 and species susceptibility to scrapie like diseases	01/04/96	31/03/99
SE1734	Approaches to the identification of nucleic acids associated with the transmissible encephalopathies	01/01/97	31/12/98
SE1814	To determine if scrapie can be transmitted by transfer of embryos from ewes infected with scrapie to uninfected ewes	01/10/95	30/09/98
SE1820	Evaluation of techniques to remove spinal cord from sheep carcasses as part of TSE control measures	01/01/97	31/03/97
SE1822	Transmissibility of scrapie to pigs by oral exposure to brain homogenate [was SE1813]	01/04/95	31/03/98
SE1823	Investigation of the role of the embryo in maternal transmission of scrapie in sheep	01/07/95	31/03/98
SE1910	The demonstration and immunostaining of small virus-like particles in experimental scrapie rodent brain	01/04/96	31/12/97
SE1917	Scrapie infection of sheep neural and extraneural cell lines	01/01/94	31/12/96
SE1919	Studies to identify possible homologies between TSEs	01/04/95	31/03/98
SE1920	Ultrastructural, morphological and immunoytochemical studies of TSE	01/04/96	31/03/99
SE1922	Studies of the sensitivity and specificity of methods of PrP scrapie detection in animal TSEs	01/04/95	30/11/97

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is currently appraising two projects which have been submitted for research funding on the subject of hay mites. The project titles are as listed. These proposals outline work to determine whether hay or feed mites contain the prions—or potential infective agent—of scrapie or BSE.

ZD0416: The exposure of British sheep and cattle to mites

ZD0455: Replication of scrapie and BSE prions in mites

The prioritisation of other research projects will determine whether funding for these proposals will be made available.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has evaluated concerning the number of bovine infective units of BSE required per 100 gm of tissue for an inoculated mouse to be reliably expected to develop the disease. [18196]

Mrs. Browning: The principal research so far conducted to determined the concentration of infectivity—titre—in a BSE-affected tissue by assay in cattle is the study to compare the efficiency of cattle and mice for the bioassay of BSE-affected brain. This experiment is incomplete and there are no other studies proposed to assay quantitatively other tissues in cattle.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the amount of infectivity, in infective units which has been spread on the land by bovine faeces. [18198]

Mrs. Browning: No such estimate is available.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many BSE-infected cattle he estimates were consumed in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the EU by 1 January 1995. [18199]

Mrs. Browning: The article published by Professor Anderson et al, "Transmission dynamics and epidemiology of BSE in British cattle", in *Nature* on 29 August 1996 estimated that 446,000 infected animals entered the food chain before the specified bovine offal ban at the end of 1989, with approximately 283,000 more before the end of 1995. No estimates of the likely numbers of infected animals consumed in the United Kingdom or EU are available.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the methods of disposal that are *(a)* permitted and *(b)* currently in operation for (i) specified bovine material and (ii) non-specified bovine material from cattle with bovine spongiform encephalopathy, including the condensate and washwater produced from rendering of such material. [18696]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[pursuant to his reply, 6 March 1997, c. 746]:* Where animals are compulsorily slaughtered under the Animal Health Act 1981 as being affected with, or suspected of being affected with, BSE, the Animal By-Products Order 1992 (SI 1992/3303) requires the carcases of such animals to be rendered, incinerated or buried. There is no legal requirement for such carcases to be destroyed specifically by incineration.

It has, however, been the Ministry's practice to use incineration whenever feasible. In the early years of the BSE epidemic, incineration capacity was insufficient to deal with all the cattle involved. At that time, some animals were disposed of by burial, a practice noted, without objection, by the Southwood committee. Since

1991, incineration capacity has been sufficient for other methods to be used only very rarely and in exceptional circumstances.

Thus, up to the end of 1991, 50,735 carcases of cattle affected, or suspected of being affected with BSE were incinerated; 6,117 were disposed of—after the removal of heads, which were incinerated—in landfill sites. Since 1991, only four carcases of BSE cases have been buried, on farm—not landfill—where, because of the remoteness of the area, incineration was not deemed practicable. The last of these was in 1995.

The three cases from 1996 described in my answer of 6 March as having been buried were referred to in error. These cases have now been identified as having been passed to the Cental Veterinary Laboratory for research purposes and their carcases were incinerated.

The carcases of cattle slaughtered under the over-30 month scheme, which started in May 1996 and for which cattle suspected of BSE are ineligible, are required by EU Council Regulation 716/96 to be incinerated or rendered and destroyed. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee advised, in June 1996, that it did not regard the incineration of meat and bonemeal and tallow from animals slaughtered under this scheme to be necessary on scientific grounds.

Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which public health experts were members of SEAC during the chairmanship of Dr. Tyrell; and what were his Department's sources of public health advice during that period. [18133]

Mrs. Browning: The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee was set up under the chairmanship of Dr. Tyrrell on 3 April 1990. He remained chairman until 4 October 1995.

The following members of SEAC, during the chairmanship of Dr. Tyrrell, were medical doctors.

Dr. David Tyrrell FRCP., FRCPath., FRS.

Professor I. Allen MD, Dsc., FRCPath., FRCPI., FRCPSG., FRCPE.

Professor J. Pattison DM., BM., Bch., FRCPath.

Dr. R. G. Will MA (Camb), MD., MB., Bch., MRCP (UK).

The committee was set up to advise both the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health. The main sources of public health advice during Dr. Tyrrell's chairmanship were SEAC, the Department of Health and the Government's chief medical Officer and the national CJD surveillance unit, set up in May 1990.

Dairy Farms (Rents)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the annual rental cost for one acre of land on an average dairy farm in the United Kingdom for each month from January 1995 to February 1997. [18193]

Mr. Boswell: The information is not available in the form requested. Estimates of the rent of agricultural land in England and Wales are collected annually. Until 1995, the rent inquiry collected information from land agents on the levels of rents for agricultural land let under full agricultural tenancies and did not collect information on the types of farm. This showed that the average rent in October 1995 for all farms in England was £111 per hectare—£45 per acre. In October 1996, the annual survey of tenanted land was introduced to collect information from tenants and covered all types of tenancy agreements. The results from this survey are currently being analysed and will be available very shortly.

Cattle (Mortality Rates)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the standardised mortality ratios and confidence intervals for cattle born in each month from June 1988 to date. [18195]

Mrs. Browning: Standard mortality ratios have not been calculated; they are not appropriate as the date suspect cases are slaughtered does not have a constant relationship with the date of clinical onset. The results of the analysis of standardised morbidity ratios have been published in the document "Programme to Eradicate BSE in the United Kingdom" figure 18, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

There have been too few cases of BSE in 1992-born animals to make any difference to the published ratios.

Central Veterinary Laboratory

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the overall research budget of the Central Veterinary Laboratory for each year from 1987 to 1996. [18197]

Mrs. Browning: The Central Veterinary Laboratory was merged with the veterinary investigation centres of the state veterinary service in October 1995, to form the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. The overall research budget for CVL from 1989 to 1995 and then the VLA for 1995–96 were as follows:

Year	*Research budget (£000)*
1989–90	8,834
1990–91	9,231
1991–92	9,733
1992–93	9,673
1993–94	10,834
1994–95	10,031
1995–96	10,706

Figures prior to 1989–90 are not available.

Departmental Data

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which independent researchers outside his Department have been given access to computerised departmental data; and which researchers having requested it have not received such access. [18194]

Mr. Boswell: It is not possible to provide a full response to this question because of disproportionate cost. However, MAFF's policy on the dissemination of data is designed to deal with requests for access on an equitable

basis and we operate under the official statistics code of practice and the code of practice on access to government information.

MAFF receives a considerable number of requests for access to computerised data for research purposes—covering a wide range of departmental responsibilities. As may be seen from the details contained in the document "Requests by Independent Researchers for Access to Computerised Data held by The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House, MAFF endeavours to respond positively and has provided data in the majority of cases where legislation and confidentiality restrictions allow. However, the confidential nature of certain information means that some requests have not been approved and the above document also gives some details of these.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19351]

Mr. Boswell: Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large number of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for the Department to calculate systematically the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16188]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

Name of agency	*Number of employed*	*Total cost £*	*Average cost £*	*Average length of contracts*
1993–94	Nil	—	—	—
1994–95				
Grafton Recruitment Premiere Employment	5	28,491	5,698	16 months
1995–96				
Grafton Recruitment Apple Recruitment Agency Group 4 Securities Services Ltd. BNA Nursing Agency	19	132,975	[1]8,266	[1]11.08 months

[1] Excludes the BNA Nursing Agency whose staff were not employed on a contractual basis.

Rev. David Templeton (Assault)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which paramilitary organisation was responsible for the assault on the Rev. David Templeton in Ballyduff; what was the nature of the injuries inflicted; and if he will make a statement. [17708]

Sir John Wheeler: David Templeton, a Presbyterian minister, was assaulted on 7 February 1997 by three masked men who entered his home and beat him with cudgels.

His injuries are confirmed as a fractured jaw, fractures to both legs and multiple cuts and abrasions to his arms and legs.

No group has claimed responsibility for this brutal and disgraceful attack, which has been widely condemned.

Action for Community Employment

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much has been spent on the ACE programme in each of the last 15 years; [18440]

(2) how many ACE managers have been made redundant following the reduction in expenditure on the programme in 1996; [18438]

(3) how much has been spent on training ACE managers in the 16 years of the ACE scheme. [18439]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Ms Marjorie Mowlam, dated 6 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, to reply to your questions about the Action for Community Employment (ACE) Programme.

Parliamentary Question 408 (Ref: 18440)

The following expenditure has been incurred on ACE since 1981:

Year	*Expenditure (£ million)*
1981–82	1.67
1982–83	5.24
1983–84	10.60
1984–85	13.61
1985–86	18.34
1986–87	29.14
1987–88	29.47
1988–89	40.39
1989–90	48.95
1990–91	50.42
1991–92	51.68
1992–93	52.96
1993–94	50.61
1994–95	50.00
1995–96	49.96
1996–97	[1]39.83

[1] Allocation.

Parliamentary Question 409 (Ref: 18438)

In total 119 ACE Core posts will be shed by 31 March 1997 as a direct result of the 1996–97 budgetary reductions. Of these 48 are management posts including assistant and deputy managers.

Parliamentary Question 411 (Ref: 18439)

Structured training was introduced progressively int the ACE programme from 1989. Since then, approximately £600,000 has been spent on training ACE core staff including managers.

Rural Residents (Buses)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of rural residents who live more than half a mile from a bus route; and if he will make a statement. [18406]

Mr. Moss: No such estimate has been made.

Water Pollution

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what records of chemicals used or stored for industrial purposes are held by the Department of the Environment for use when investigating the cause of pollution incidents affecting watercourses. [18269]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Environment and Heritage Service under its chief executive, Mr. Robert C. Martin. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert C. Martin to Mr. Roy Beggs, dated 6 March 1997:

As Chief Executive of Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), I am responsible for all operational aspects of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland's environmental policies.

I am therefore responding to the Parliamentary Question which you put down in the House of Commons on 28 February 1997 "to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what records of chemicals used or stored for industrial purposes are held by DOE (NI) for use when investigating the cause of pollution incidents affecting watercourses."

The Chief Executive of this Department's Water Service has also contributed to this reply.

Within the United Kingdom the Government is committed to minimising any escape to water of those chemicals identified as especially hazardous, more commonly referred to as Red List substances. In Northern Ireland, my service is currently aware of 188 premises which use or store Red List substances and a detailed record is held for each sites. These records include Information on each substance, quantities stored, the purpose for which they are used and the measures in place to prevent pollution of waterways.

EHS also hold records of all agrochemical retailers in Northern Ireland registered under the BASIS agrochemical scheme and regularly inspects their stores to ensure that they pose a minimal water pollution risk. BASIS, as a voluntary scheme managed by the agrochemical manufacturers, which sets stringent standards for pollution prevention and general safety.

All industries which discharge either effluent to the public sewer or treated effluent to a watercourse must have the consent of this Department. In either case, strict limits are set on the type and maximum concentration of materials which can be discharged. The application form for Water Act consent requires that chemicals stored on premises are listed.

The Water Service has confirmed that they maintain records of all chemicals used in the course of its functional work and stored on its premises. The only other information held by Water Service about chemicals used or stored in premises is in respect of those premises where a discharge to a public sewerage network is subject to the consent of the Department, through the system of trade effluent consents. Those making application for such a consent are required to provide details of whatever chemicals are being used for any industrial process being conducted on their premises.

I trust you will find this reply helpful.

Policing (Harryville)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the costs of policing Harryville on Saturday nights, including the costs of police manpower and any associated overtime. [18391]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not yet possible to give figures for Saturday 22 February. However, it is estimated that typical costs for previous Saturdays have been in the region of £27,000, including the costs of police manpower and associated overtime costs.

Housing (Disabled Tenants)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of new houses provided by *(a)* Northern Ireland Housing Executive and *(b)* voluntary housing associations have been constructed to meet the needs of disabled tenants in each of the last five years [18563]

Mr. Moss: The number and percentage of new houses constructed to meet the needs of disabled tenants in each of the past five years is as follows:

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Year	Number new build	To meet needs of disabled	Percentage
1996	953	319	33
1995	812	214	26
1994	969	349	36
1993	1,328	325	25
1992	873	303	35
Total	4,935	1,510	30

Registered Housing Associations

Year	Number new build	To meet needs of disabled[1]	Percentage
1996	1,389	644	46
1995	1,181	636	54
1994	1,001	586	58
1993	946	625	66
1992	1,229	555	45
Total	5,746	3,046	53

[1] In addition, unless it is inappropriate to do so, all new housing association bungalows, ground floor flats and flats served by lifts are designed to full mobility standard, i.e. to be convenient for ambulant disabled people to live in, including those who use wheelchairs but are not wheelchair bound or to facilitate disabled users. However, information on this stock is not held separately and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Executive Estates (Lorry Parking)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it the practice of the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland to inform recipients of haulage operators' licences that parking in bays or on grass areas within Housing Executive estates is prohibited and could lead to the withdrawal of the operator's licence. [18562]

Mr. Moss: The Department does not consider it necessary to advise and warn licensed haulage operators specifically about parking of their vehicles in Northern Ireland Housing Executive estates.

As a condition of their road freight operators licence, vehicles used under the licence must not be parked overnight on public roads, which would include parking bays provided within Housing Executive developments. Where the holder of a licence fails to comply with any condition of the licence, he shall be guilty of an offence and be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding £1,000. The Department may also revoke or suspend an operator's licence where a condition of the licence has not been complied with.

Parking on grass areas is prohibited by the NIHE.

Countryside Enhancement Scheme

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the official notice regarding the (i) opening for applications and (ii) closing of the countryside enhancement scheme appeared in the press in Northern Ireland; how many applications were received, from *(a)* each county and *(b)* each council district; to whom advance notice of the scheme was given and on what dates; when copies of the details of the scheme were made available to (1) farmers and (2) other bodies; and if he will place a copy of the details of the scheme in the Library. [18513]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* (i) A press release was issued on 27 January 1997 announcing the opening of the farm and countryside enhancement scheme and (ii) another press release was issued on 30 January 1997 announcing the closure.

(a) The following applications were received from each county:

	Number
Co. Antrim	73
Co. Down	291
Co. Londonderry	535
Co. Armagh	674
Co. Fermanagh	866
Co. Tyrone	1,752

(b) The following applications were received from each district council:

	Number
Armagh	295
Craigavon	58
Limavady	162
Newry and Mourne	535
Omagh	726
Belfast	3
Dungannon	418
Lisburn	74
Newtonabbey	34
Strabane	267
Cookstown	341
Fermanagh	855
Londonderry	106
Magherafelt	224
Other District Councils	31

Sixty-two applications were received and are being checked to find out the council area to which they belong. The Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association was informed on the afternoon of 27 January 1997 when the press release was being issued. Attempts were made to inform the Ulster Farmers Union, but it could not be contacted until the morning of 28 January 1997.

Details of the scheme was made available to farmers and other bodies on 28 January 1997. A leaflet with details of the scheme will be placed in the Library.

Road Accident Fatalities (Costs)

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the average cost to public funds of a road accident fatality. [18742]

Mr. Moss: The average cost, based on Department of Transport estimates, is £812,010.

Road Safety

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would be the cost of increasing the number of road safety officers from the present 12 to 17. [18741]

Mr. Moss: The annual cost of increasing the number of road safety education officers from the planned 11 to the recommended 18 would be £176,323.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of the report commissioned by his Department on road safety education. [18739]

Mr. Moss: The cost of the research and report was £9,105.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many road accident casualties resulted from *(a)* overloaded lorries and lorries with mechanical defects and *(b)* errors by drivers, riders and pedestrians and defiance of the laws on speeding, drink driving and seat belts. [18737]

Mr. Moss: Road casualty accident figures provided by the RUC are as follows:

(a) Accident casualties resulting from overloaded lorries and lorries with mechanical defects.

1993: 5

1994: 20

1995: 29

(b) Accident casualties caused by drivers, riders and pedestrians and defiance of the laws on speeding, drink driving and seatbelts.

1993: 21,691

1994: 23,518

1995: 22,499

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons the number of road safety officers is to be reduced from 12 to 10. [18740]

Mr. Moss: I have decided, in the light of competing priorities for road safety funding, that the number of road safety education officers should be reduced from 13 to 11. Road safety remains a priority for the Government and the overall resources allocated to it, particularly for vehicle enforcement and accident remedial and traffic calming measures, continue to increase year on year.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to achieve the code of good practice recommendation of one road safety officer per 50,000 population before 2000; and what additional resources he plans to devote to this aim. [18738]

Mr. Moss: I have no such plans. Competing priorities for road safety funding combined with general pressure on all departmental spending, render such a recommended staffing level inappropriate.

Sub-programme for Agricultural and Rural Development

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has as to how many SPARD schemes have not had a claim for payment submitted; and, of these, how many relate to buildings related to *(a)* beef production and *(b)* potato production. [18985]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* A total of 5,004 applications made under the sub-programme for agriculture and rural development capital grants and farm innovation schemes have not had a claim for payment submitted. Of these *(a)* 1,760 had buildings related to beef production included and; *(b)* 156 had buildings related to potato production included.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19340]

Sir John Wheeler: Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large number of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for my Department systematically to calculate the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Research Councils (Commissions)

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many commissions his Department placed with the Agriculture and Food Research Council and the Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council in each year from 1979 to the present; how many such commissions he expects to place in 1997; and what the value was of the commissions in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [19368]

Mr. Ancram: Nil.

Emergency Provisions Act

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish the report from Mr. J. J. Rowe, QC on the operation in 1996 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996; and if he will make a statement on the provisions contained in the Act. [19525]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have received Mr. Rowe's report. It is being published today and copies are being placed in the Library. I am most grateful to him for his work.

With the resumption of violence in Northern Ireland, there is renewed use of the powers contained in the Act. Mr. Rowe believes the Act remains necessary. This is also the view of the Government. I am therefore laying before the House today a draft order which would continue for a further year those provisions in the Act which are currently in force.

DEFENCE

Organophosphates

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research into the health effects of organophosphate-based insecticides and pesticides has been conducted by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down for his Department since 1979. [19090]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency has not conducted any research programmes on the health effects of pesticidal organophosphorous compounds.

Netheravon Airfield

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about fire cover at Netheravon airfield on Salisbury plain. [19065]

Mr. Soames: Airfield camp, Netheravon is being retained in the defence estate to house flying and non-flying units and as a landing site and forward mounting base for helicopters using the Salisbury plain training area. Under current plans, fire service cover will be provided by a six-man team based at Middle Wallop.

On-site Inspections

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the on-site inspections made in the United Kingdom under the Stockholm and Vienna documents in the last five years. [19225]

Mr. Soames: The Stockholm document was superseded by the Vienna document in 1990. There has been one inspection in the United Kingdom under the Vienna document since 1992:

1–4 March 1994: Russia inspected 3 Commando Brigade on Exercise Royal Dawn in Scotland.

Additionally, there have been seven evaluation visits under the Vienna document:

22 April 1992: Russia to 24 Airmobile brigade, Catterick Garrison.

15 December 1992: Sweden to 19 Mechanised brigade, Colchester.

20 July 1993: Russia to 1 Mechanised brigade, Tidworth.

17 May 1995: Russia to 2 (South East) brigade, Shorncliffe.

7 June 1996: Sweden to HQ 2 division, York.

22 June 1996: Sweden to HQ 2 division, York.

27 February 1997: Ukraine to 145 (Home Counties) brigade, Aldershot.

Trident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of Trident missiles purchased from the United States of America to date. [19223]

Mr. Arbuthnot: So far, the UK has purchased 44 Trident missiles from the United States. A contract for a further seven was placed by the US Department of Defence in November 1996 on behalf of the United Kingdom.

NATO

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to revise NATO's strategic concept agreed in 1991. [19109]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave on 6 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *712*, to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes).

Army Foundation College

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many students are expected to enter the Army foundation college in the first five years; and what will be the cost per student. [19105]

Mr. Soames: During the first year of operation, commencing in September 1998, 600 students are expected to enter the college, with the annual intake rising to a planned total of some 1,300 students in the year from September 2000. As the college is the subject of a private finance initiative proposal, its running costs will depend on the outcome of the PFI process. In addition, each student will be paid a salary of between £105 to £168 per week, according to age.

Guns

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many guns have been stolen or cannot otherwise be accounted for in each service, categorised by type of gun, in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [19279]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 16 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *537*.

Former Prisoners of War

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the review of possible further compensation for British second world war prisoners of war is likely to be concluded; and if he will make a statement. [19256]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 24 February 1997 to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), *Official Report*, column *120*.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19350]

Mr. Soames: Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large numbers of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for my Department systematically to calculate the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Naval Movements (Ayrshire)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *639*, what the naval manoeuvres were arranged; and if there was any liaison between his Department and officials of the Cabinet Office in arranging them. [19414]

Mr. Soames: The naval activity which took place off the Ayrshire coast on 31 January 1997 was planned some 12 months in advance. There was no requirement for liaison with officials of the Cabinet Office. This was part of routine naval operations involving UK and NATO forces in UK territorial waters.

Corporal Simon Cullen

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to reply to the letter of 5 December 1996 from the hon. Member for East Lothian about events relating an injury to Corporal Simon Cullen, MBE. [19361]

Mr. Soames: The case in question is a complex one which involved a number of issues requiring careful examination. Our investigation are, however, almost complete and I will write to the hon. Member within the week. I apologise for my delay in so doing.

SCOTLAND

Cycle Challenge Fund

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many projects have benefited from the cycle challenge fund; and if he will list them. [18381]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office cycle challenge was announced in December 1996. Its aim is to offer grant support in 1998–99 for innovative cycle projects designed to encourage an increase in cycle use. The closing date for applications is 15 June 1997. No applications have yet been received. It is hoped that decisions on successful projects will be announced by December 1997.

Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many food and agriculture scientists were employed in Government-funded food and science establishments by his Department on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* 31 March (i) 1995, (ii) 1990, (iii) 1985 and (iv) 1980. [18178]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 5 March 1997]:* The Scottish Office currently employs 86 scientists at the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency and 159 scientists in the fisheries research services. They work in

a wide range of scientific areas, including food and agriculture. Information for the earlier years is no longer held centrally.

Non-NHS Health Care Providers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure on the purchase of health care from non-NHS providers in 1995–96 by *(a)* district health boards, *(b)* fundholding general practitioners and *(c)* NHS trusts in Scotland. [18800]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

Purchase of health care from non-NHS providers	*Health board*	*Fundholding GPs*	*NHS trusts*
	£	£	£
Argyll and Clyde	7,608,155	12,586	217,554
Ayrshire and Arran	3,361,111	4,809	0
Borders	1,806,601	61,326	0
Dumfries and Galloway	635,719	4,929	44,347
Fife	834,835	60,822	1,041,826
Forth Valley	1,683,462	124,937	0
Grampian	955,627	392,437	991,358
Greater Glasgow	18,004,559	102,803	0
Highland	2,143,443	81,924	0
Lanarkshire	9,161,237	38,328	0
Lothian	7,434,878	342,981	0
Orkney	5,370	0	0
Shetland	7,920	0	0
Tayside	771,508	108,942	0
Western Isles	122,443	0	0
Scottish totals	54,536,868	1,336,824	2,295,085

Over £31 million is spent on charities and voluntary bodies and is included in the figures in the table.

NHS Employees' Pay

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the NHS salaries and wages costs for *(a)* all administrative, clerical and management staff and *(b)* nurses and midwives in each financial year from 1988–89 and 1993–94. [18893]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

£000

Financial year	*Administrative, clerical and management staff*	*Nurses and midwives*
1988–89	113,844	731,406
1989–90	130,055	778,921
1990–91	152,546	834,093
1991–92	175,717	910,326
1992–93	200,639	964,363
1993–94	236,252	973,912

Nurses

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the hospital and community health services nurses who are *(a)* qualified, *(b)* unqualified, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* learner staff and *(e)* Project 2000 students, as whole-time equivalents, employed in each year since 1991. [18895]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information available is shown in the table.

Nursing staff[1] by qualification

Whole-time equivalent: at 30 September

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Nursing staff[1]	47,838.3	47,981.7	47,775.2	47,726.3	47,766.9
Hospital[1]	42,610.6	42,842.7	42,664.1	42,545.2	42,458.9
Qualified	27,060.0	26,988.8	26,780.0	26,899.6	26,916.6
Unqualified	15,550.6	15,854.0	15,884.0	15,645.5	15,542.4
Community[1]	5,227.8	5,138.9	5,111.2	5,181.1	5,308.0
Qualified	4,716.1	4,643.4	4,617.5	4,646.7	4,730.2
Unqualified	511.7	495.5	493.7	534.3	577.7
Midwifery staff[2]	4,345.2	4,393.6	4,389.4	4,365.0	4,279.3
Midwives	2,765.4	2,783.2	2,814.4	2,804.6	2,745.8
Hospital	2,488.8	2,510.4	2,532.3	2,495.2	2,462.4
Community	276.7	272.7	282.1	309.4	283.4
Combined Duty Nurses[3]	533.0	516.6	499.1	480.0	439.1
Hospital maternity staff[4]	1,046.8	1,093.8	1,075.9	1,080.4	1,094.4
Qualified	182.9	215.4	223.9	253.0	311.6
Unqualified	864.0	878.5	852.0	827.4	782.8
Nurses in training					
Hospital[5]	9,883.7	7,924.9	5,029.2	2,147.7	627.1
Community[5]	98.0	48.5	[7]35.2	[8]206.0	[8]245.0
P2000 students[6]	—	1,403	3,617	5,445	6,191
Programmes in midwifery	—	121	283	424	456
Other	—	1,282	3,334	5,021	5,735

Notes:

[1] Excludes midwives, maternity nursing staff, combined duty nurses working with an element of midwifery, nurse teachers, nurses in training and P2000 students in nursing and midwifery. Some nursing staff included in the 'hospital' category may in fact work in a community setting.

[2] Excludes nurse teachers, nurses in training and P2000 students in nursing and midwifery. Some nursing staff included in the 'hospital' category may in fact work in a community setting.

[3] Midwives with combined duties including health visiting and district nursing.

[4] Consists of nursing staff working in the midwifery specially without a midwifery qualification.

[5] Nurses in training include staff on post-basic training.

[6] Figures have been supplied by the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland. Data are numbers at 31 October.

[7] Under recorded. Some nurses in training have been unavoidably included with qualified grades.

[8] Figures have been supplied by the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland. Data are numbers at 31 October and include nurses in training who are not sponsored by the NHS. Some nurses in training have been unavoidably included with qualified grades.

Source:

National Manpower Statistics from payroll (NAMS), National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland, ISD (Scotland).

Irvine Housing Association

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for what reason Scottish Homes plans to pay its first monitoring visit to the Irvine housing association in July 1997; and if he will instruct Scottish Homes to bring forward its monitoring visit to the Irvine housing association. [19398]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am advised by Scottish Homes that, in line with the established timetable for monitoring visits following registration of a new association, Irvine housing association received a post registration visit after a year of operating, and is scheduled for a full monitoring visit after a further two years, in July 1997.

Scottish Homes is also currently addressing issues relating to certain aspects of the association's membership policy, which is being amended, and other matters. In advance of the outcome of this process, I am not persuaded that there is a need for Scottish Homes to bring forward its planned monitoring visit.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) by what date Scottish Homes expects the Irvine housing association to have in place its new membership policy for the association; [19399]

(2) if he will list the principles which Scottish Homes require housing associations to operate in relation to their housing allocation systems and what assessment he has made of the Irvine housing association's compliance with these principles in respect of its policy towards applications for housing from new applicants. [19440]

Mr. Robertson: The information requested relates to operational matters which are the responsibility of Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Mr. John Ward, to respond to the hon. Member direct.

NHS Staff

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS clerical, administrative and management staff there were in each year since 1989. [18896]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information available is shown in the table.

General and senior manager grades and administrative and clerical staff employed in the Scottish Health Services

Whole time equivalent: at 30 September

	General and senior manager grades[1]	*Administrative and clerical*[2]
1989	n/a	15,222.9
1990	n/a	15,923.8
1991	523.6	16,060.5
1992	800.5	16,839.0
1993	1,151.6	17,386.9
1994	1,720.0	17,754.4
1995	2,180.2	17,597.9

Notes:

[1] The increase in numbers can be partially accounted for by the assimilation of nursing, professional and A&C staff to senior manager grades.

[2] For the years prior to September 1991, management grades are included in A&C grades 1–10.

n/a=not applicable.

Source:

National Manpower Statistics from payroll (NAMS), ISD (Scotland).

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many (i) doctors, (ii) nurses and (iii) administrators were employed by the NHS in Scotland in each year since 1986–87; and if he will indicate for each year the percentage of NHS staff each category represented. [19128]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information available is shown in the table.

Selected staff groups employed in the Scottish Health Service[1]

Whole time equivalent: as at 30 September

	Whole time equivalent					*Percentage of all staff*				
	Doctors[2]	*Nursing staff*[3]			*Administrators*[4]	*Doctors*[2]	*Nursing staff*[3]			*Administrators*[4]
		Total	*Qualified*	*Unqualified*			*Total*	*Qualified*	*Unqualified*	
1986	5,735.6	50,867.4	33,616.0	17,251.4	14,445.5	5.1	45.5	30.1	15.4	12.9
1987	5,736.6	51,716.0	34,267.9	17,448.1	14,712.3	5.1	46.2	30.6	15.6	13.1
1988	5,994.7	52,053.1	34,658.3	17,394.8	14,803.2	5.4	46.9	31.2	15.7	13.3
1989	6,014.0	52,650.8	35,325.9	17,324.9	15,222.9	5.5	48.4	32.4	15.9	14.0
1990	6,174.9	52,283.1	35,372.0	16,911.1	15,923.8	5.8	49.0	33.2	15.9	14.9
1991	6,203.1	52,647.6	35,576.3	17,071.3	16,584.1	5.8	49.3	33.3	16.0	15.5
1992	6,339.6	52,828.9	35,454.6	17,374.3	17,639.6	5.9	49.1	33.0	16.2	16.4
1993	6,476.4	52,634.7	35,270.1	17,364.6	18,538.5	6.0	48.7	32.6	16.1	17.2
1994	6,683.4	52,521.2	35,381.4	17,139.8	19,474.4	6.2	48.5	32.7	15.8	18.0
1995	6,849.3	52,416.3	35,379.8	17,036.5	19,777.9	6.3	48.3	32.6	15.7	18.2
1996[5]	7,061.1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes:

[1] Post 1990 figures include data for State Hospital, Carstairs.

[2] Comprises hospital and community medical staff. Excludes general practitioners.

[3] Excludes nurse teachers, nurses in training and P2000 students in nursing and midwifery.

[4] Comprises general and senior managers, staff employed on A and C grades and ambulance and control officers. The increase in the number of administrative staff can be partially accounted for by the assimilation of nursing and other professional staff to senior manager grades.

[5] Provisional.

n/a = unavailable.

Source:

National Manpower Statistics from payroll (NAMS), Medical and Dental Census, ISD Scotland.

NHS Administration (Costs)

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total costs associated with administration in the NHS in Scotland (i) in real terms, (ii) in cash terms and (iii) as a percentage of total NHS expenditure in Scotland in each year since 1986–87. [19129]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

	Real terms £000	*Cash terms* £000	*Percentage of total NHS expenditure*
1986–87	184,639	184,639	8.9
1987–88	180,810	190,437	8.4
1988–89	184,568	207,401	8.2
1989–90	187,701	225,654	8.2
1990–91	192,975	250,521	8.4
1991–92	246,017	339,839	9.3
1992–93	245,905	353,996	9.1
1993–94	276,039	400,344	9.7
1994–95	310,168	467,611	10.8
1995–96	315,343	486,964	11.1

The introduction of capital charging in 1991–92, to reflect the costs of using capital resources, is reflected in that and subsequent years' expenditure.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total costs to his Department of local government reorganisation in Scotland in each year since 1992. [19156]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office made additional financial provision available to councils in connection with local government reform as set out in the table.

£ million

	Scottish Office provision
1995–96	
Costs of shadow elections	5
Costs of shadow councils	36
Capital allocations	15
1996–97	
Transitional costs	70
1997–98	
Transitional costs	20
Total	146

In addition, a division within the Scottish Office dedicated to local government reform existed from 1992–95 at a total aggregate cost of £853,099. It is now up to councils to manage their business efficiently so that local government reform delivers the best possible long-term savings for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

Health Boards (Publicity Budgets)

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the annual publicity budget of each health board in Scotland in each year since 1986–87. [19131]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Stone of Destiny

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown of the costs associated with returning the Stone of Destiny to Scotland. [19130]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) on 4 December 1996, column *695*.

Health Care International, Clydebank

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding has been made available by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Government agencies to HCI, Clydebank in each year since its inception. [19132]

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on 21 May 1996, columns *152-54* which set out all support from public funds given to Health Care International (Scotland) Ltd. There has been no additional support to HCI from public funds since then.

Farmed Salmon

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the current market conditions for farmed salmon produced in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [19516]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am concerned about stability in the European market for farmed salmon and have taken various initiatives to try to improve the position. The outcome of the investigations of the Scottish industry's anti-dumping and anti-subsidy complaints are imminent. If convincing evidence comes to light from the Commission's investigation of those complaints, I have assured the industry of the Government's whole-hearted backing.

Sleep Laboratory (Funding)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received on the future funding of the sleep laboratory at Edinburgh royal infirmary; and if he will make a statement. [19362]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply on 28 February to the Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), column *456–57*. Some 229 letters have been received about the future funding of the national sleep laboratory.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much Scottish Homes spent on *(a)* its public

relations and marketing activities and *(b)* informing its tenants of its stock transfer arrangements in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97. [19396]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The available information is set out in the table.

Expenditure on publicity and marketing

	Total £	*On publicity relating to stock transfers* £
1994–95	990,000	32,000
1995–96	865,000	67,000
1996–97	650,000	115,000

Notes:
1. 1996–97 figures are the planned expenditure for the year.
2. Figures in the first column include expenditure on printing and publishing internal and external documents, annual reports, newsletters, policy and research documents and the funding of conference events, exhibitions and displays.
3. Figures in the second column include expenditure on local advertising to attract competition from alternative landlords, the printing and publication of tenants' newsletters, leaflets and other documents explaining transfer procedures and giving up to date information.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when Scottish Homes expects to proceed with the ballot of its remaining tenants within the Cunninghame, South constituency in order to find a new landlord. [19397]

Mr. Robertson: I am advised that Scottish Homes intends to seek outline proposals from alternative landlords interested in the transfer of Scottish Homes; stock in the Irvine and Kilwinning areas during the second half of 1997. On this basis, the ballot might take place in early 1999.

Research Councils (Commissions)

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many commissions his Department placed with the Agriculture and Food Research Council and the Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council in each year since 1979; how many such commissions he expects to place in 1997; and what the value was of the commissions in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices. [19367]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The number and value of Scottish Office-funded research contracts placed with the Agriculture and Food Research Council and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council institutes in each year since 1991–92 are set out in the following table. Contracts to be let in 1997 have yet to be advertised, and it is therefore not yet known which contractors will be successful. Data in respect of the financial years before 1991–92 are not held centrally.

Total value of research contracts placed (£ thousand)

Year	*Number of research contracts placed*	*Cash*	*Constant prices (1995–96)*
1991–92	0	0	0
1992–93	0	0	0
1993–94	1	56	58
1994–95	2	236	242
1995–96	0	0	0
1996–97	1	142	139

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent by Ayrshire and Arran health board in pursuit of legal action surrounding its planning application to North Ayrshire council and its predecessor Cunninghame district council in respect of the site of the former Ravenspark hospital; and what authorisation his Department has given to Ayrshire and Arran health board to pursue this legal action. [19400]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is a matter for Ayrshire and Arran health board. The health board does not require Scottish Office approval to pursue this kind of legal action.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste Water (High Natural Dispersion Areas)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment which areas of the North and Irish seas have been designated high natural dispersion areas. [18779]

Mr. Clappison: I have placed in the Libraries of the House a table of those areas in England and Wales in the North and Irish seas jointly identified by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales as high natural dispersion areas for the purposes of the EC directive on urban waste water treatment. The areas are identified by their reference number and the names of associated discharges.

A marine water body or area can be identified as a high natural dispersion area if the discharge of waste water does not adversely affect the environment as a result of morphology, hydrology or specific hydraulic conditions which exist in that area.

High natural dispersion areas identified in Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Gas and Electricity (Standards of Performance Scheme)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate *(a)* the savings to gas consumers in pounds sterling and *(b)* the reduction in carbon emissions since 1994, if a scheme equivalent to the standards of performance scheme for electricity consumers had been introduced for gas consumers. [18872]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: It is not possible to make meaningful estimates, since they would depend on hypothetical assumptions about a series of factors, including the types of project run by gas companies under a standards of performance scheme, the level of consumers' take-up of project schemes, the costs of individual projects, and other factors.

Cryptosporidium

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many incidents of cryptosporidum in the water supply have been notified to him in the past 12 months; and in which water company areas. [18911]

Mr. Clappison: Water companies in England and Wales are required to report all incidents in which drinking water quality might be affected. All incidents are investigated by the drinking water inspectorate. Most incidents are relatively minor happenings.

The most significant risk to drinking water quality is the presence of cryptosporidium oocysts. On cryptosporidium, the notification to the inspectorate can relate either to the detection of cryptosporidium oocysts in treated water or to an increase of the illness cryptosporidiosis in the community or both. The transmission of the illness occurs in a number of ways and often through contact with animals. One recent outbreak of cryptosporidiosis was found to be associated with the failure of a milk pasteurisation plant.

All incidents are investigated fully by the inspectorate. As cryptosporidiosis can be transmitted in many ways, the source of any outbreak has to be established through epidemiology. A case of South West Water Services Ltd. allegedly supplying water unfit for human consumption during 1995 because of cryptosporidium is currently before the courts.

Notifications of events involving cryptosporidium since 1 March 1996 are listed below under three headings, with the status of the investigation. It should be noted that not all notifications become confirmed as incidents.

Cryptosporidium oocysts detected in treated water but no reported increase of cryptosporidiosis in the community

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*	*Status*
South West Water	29 May 1996	Littlehempston	Concluded
Cambridge Water	30 May 1996	Duxford/Linton	Concluded
South West Water	27 June 1996	Crown Hill WTW	Concluded
Mid Kent Water / Southern Water	3 July 1996	Burham WTW	Concluded
Yorkshire Water	17 October 1996	Elvington WTW (raw water only)	Under investigation
Northumbrian Water	22 October 1996	Lumley WTW	Under investigation
Yorkshire Water	21 February 1997	Pately Bridge	Under Investigation

An increase in cryptosporidiosis in the community but oocysts not detected in treated water

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*	*Status*
Yorkshire Water	21 March 1996	Tophill Low	Under investigation
Anglian Water	12 February 1997	Bedford area	Under investigation
Three Valleys Water	26 February 1997	Luton/Dunstable	Under investigation

Both oocysts detected in treated water and an increase of cryptosporidiosis in the community

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*	*Status*
North West Water	29 April 1996	The Wirral	Under investigation
Portsmouth Water	18 November 1996	Itchen WTW	Under investigation
Three Valleys Water	2 March 1997	Clay Lane WTW	Under investigation

Salisbury Bypass

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has received from English Nature concerning the proposed Salisbury bypass. [19097]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Highways Agency report on the scope for realigning the section of the route across the sensitive area of the River Avon floodpath south of Salisbury, which incorporates advice from English Nature and others, has recently been submitted to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport. They will consider English Nature's views as part of their consideration of the Highways Agency's report.

Council Leaseholders

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which London local authorities have adopted the exchange sales scheme for council leaseholders who have unmortgageable properties. [18431]

Mr. Clappison: Six London authorities have reported to us that they have adopted the exchange sales scheme: the London boroughs of Barnet, Brent, Croydon, Hammersmith and Fulham, Sutton, and the City of Westminster.

Willenhall Shopping Precinct Project

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the policy of English Partnerships in respect of negotiations with Coventry city council regarding the Willenhall shopping precinct project; [18889]

(2) what are the reasons for the delays in the negotiations between English Partnerships and those partners involved in the Willenhall shopping precinct project; [18890]

(3) if he will commission an urgent inquiry into the manner in which English Partnerships has handled negotiations with those partners involved in the Willenhall shopping precinct project. [18891]

Sir Paul Beresford: English Partnerships received an application from a private developer, Bellway Urban Renewal, in July 1996 for funding of £1.7 million towards a proposal it had developed with Coventry city council and the Coventry and East Mercia Co-operative Society for the development of Willenhall shopping precinct. The agency has been consistently supportive of the project and has submitted it to close and careful appraisal to ensure the best value for money, as it does for every other part of its programme. English Partnerships has now confirmed its offer to Bellway Urban Renewal, and a press conference and start on site, both involving the city council, are scheduled for Monday 10 March. English Partnerships has a strong working relationship with Coventry city council, spanning a wide range of projects of which this is a key component.

The time scale is customary for a project of this size and complexity, which has required negotiation with a number of parties, including the local community.

English Partnerships

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the way English Partnerships conducts negotiations on the projects it is involved with. [18892]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is completely satisfied with the way in which English Partnerships operates its development programme. Before committing any resources, English Partnerships submits all potential projects to close appraisal in order to ensure that the agency follows the latest best practice and achieves the best possible value for public money at its disposal. The basis of this appraisal is described in the agency's published "Investment Guide" and "Community Investment Guide".

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19345]

Sir Paul Beresford: Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is my Department's general practice to make clear in replying that an answer could be given only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large number of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for my Department to calculate systematically the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Teesside Development Corporation

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves), of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *677*, if he will *(a)* list and *(b)* make a statement on the regeneration schemes to be brought forward by the Teesside development corporation. [19232]

Sir Paul Beresford: The increase in funding for the Teesside development corporation in 1996–97 was a result of bringing forward part of the grant in aid already allocated to the development corporation for 1997–98. There was no extra public funding involved. The corporation was offered the possibility of earlier availability of funding as part of a wider readjustment of the single regeneration budget, of which urban development corporations now form a part. Adjustments of this sort are part of the routine financial management of the SRB.

TDC's corporation plan for the remainder of its life, until it is wound up in March 1998, includes the completion of its work at Teesdale and at Middlesbrough dock. The corporation will now be in a position to bring forward work on that programme.

House Conditions

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide for each region from the 1991 English house condition survey the *(a)* construction date by tenure, *(b)* unfitness by tenure, *(c)* worst or best condition by tenure, *(d)* unfit vacants by tenure, *(e)* unfitness by dwelling type and tenure, *(f)* reason for vacancy by tenure and *(g)* variation of general comprehensive and urgent repair costs by tenure. [19255]

Mr. Clappison: The sample of dwellings surveyed in the 1991 English house condition survey is too small to provide reliable results at this level of disaggregation.

Residuary Bodies

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what have been the costs to date of running the residuary bodies established under section 22 of the Local Government Act 1992. [19526]

Sir Paul Beresford: Total net expenditure by the local government residuary body (England) in 1995–96 was £190,000. Forecast total net expenditure for 1996–97 is £400,000, some £268,000 of which represents payment to the East Riding of Yorkshire council for maintenance of archives of the former Humberside county council.

Design Improvement Controlled Experiment

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the findings of the evaluation of the design improvement controlled experiment commissioned from Price Waterhouse will be available. [19545]

Mr. Curry: This is being published today. Copies of the report "The Design Improvement Controlled Experiment: an Evaluation of the Impact, Costs and Benefits of Estate Re-modelling" have been placed in the Library of the House.

Air Quality

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to issue the regulations and guidance required for implementation of part IV of the Environment Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [19365]

Mr. Gummer: The national air quality strategy will be published shortly. The regulations and guidance will follow.

Docklands Light Railway

Mr. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the Government will implement the 1992 manifesto commitment to privatise the docklands light railway; and if he will make a statement. [19842]

Mr. Gummer: Following an open competition, the operation of the docklands light railway will be privatised today through a seven-year franchise to Docklands Railway Management Ltd.—a consortium of Serco Group plc and a team of DLR Ltd. managers. DRML will take over full responsibility for DLR operations in April.

Safety on the DLR remains the first and overriding priority. Before DRML takes over DLR operations, its safety case must be approved by Her Majesty's railway inspectorate.

The franchise will embrace the operation and maintenance of trains, track and other equipment on the DLR network as well as marketing and revenue collection. The franchisee will also operate train services on the new 4.2 km extension of the DLR to Lewisham,

which is being built under the Government's private finance initiative by City Greenwich Lewisham Rail plc, when it opens to passenger service in 1999–2000.

I announced my intention to franchise the DLR in October 1994. I said that the Government's aim was further to improve the DLR's efficiency, reliability and quality of service and ensured that the railway continued to develop as a customer-oriented public transport service. I also said that I aimed to reduce the DLR's dependence on public subsidy. All of these objectives will be achieved through the contract DLR Ltd. will let to DRML today.

The franchise insists upon service levels to be maintained to meet customer expectations and to underpin the Government's regeneration policies in Docklands and the Thames Gateway. DLR services must, as a minimum, be operated between 5.30 am and 12.30 am Mondays to Fridays, 6.00 am to 12.30 am on Saturdays and 7.30 am to 11.30 pm on Sundays. Frequent train services must be operated. Quality of service must continue to be provided in terms of train reliability, cleanliness, availability of escalators and lifts, and so on, safeguarded by DLR's existing passenger charter standards.

The DLR will remain part of London's integrated ticketing arrangements and travelcards will continue to be valid for travel on the DLR.

DRML will receive three main types of remuneration: a fixed fee payable by DLR Ltd., set in advance for each of the seven years of the franchise, indexed to the retail prices index, to meet the operating deficit DRML expects to incur on the existing DLR network; and to meet DRML's forecast costs in operating services on the Lewisham extension; the fare revenue from passengers on the existing DLR network; ancillary income from commercial activity on DLR stations, such as shops and merchandising.

If the operating deficit is greater than DRML has forecast, the fixed fee will not be increased to compensate for the shortfall.

Financial incentives will also play a part. The fixed fees payable by DLR Ltd. to DRML will be reduced if minimum service levels are not achieved or if quality standards are not met. No fee will be paid if DLR services are not run through the default of DRML. Balanced against that, DRML will receive incentive payments if it delivers a quality of service above the charter standards.

Capital investment in the DLR will continue throughout the franchise period to ensure that the DLR's longer-term needs are not overlooked—£45 million is earmarked for this in total. Moreover, safeguards for DLR Ltd. in the form of performance bonds and a retention account, with termination rights in the contract, will ensure that the DLR is properly maintained for the period of the franchise and handed back to DLR Ltd. in good condition.

Through these arrangements, significant operational and commercial risks will be transferred to DRML in relation to DLR's future costs and income, thereby giving DRML incentives to achieve cost efficiency, maximise income and deliver quality of service to customers. The taxpayer will benefit too. By bringing in private sector expertise on a risk-taking basis, DLR's dependence on public subsidy will also be reduced by 24 per cent. over the franchise period. In the three years covered by the 1996 public expenditure survey, Government grant to DLR Ltd. will be reduced by around £8.5 million.

DRML will be regulated by the residual DLR Ltd., which will regulate minimum service levels, quality standards, investment in maintenance and so on.

The successful outcome of the DLR franchise competition is a further demonstration of the benefits that privatisation can deliver. I have thanked the chairman of DLR Ltd., Sir Anthony Gill, and his board, for achieving significant improvements in DLR reliability and cost efficiency over recent years, in line with my requirements, and for their success in letting this franchise to deliver continuing benefits in higher quality of service.

Organophosphates

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *154*, if he will list the titles of the research project reports on organophosphates; and if he will place in the Library copies of each report produced since 1987. [19482]

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is given in the table. Copies of these reports will be placed in the House Library later this week.

Other research into the environmental impact of pesticides and veterinary medicines, which covers impact on headwater streams, the transport of pesticides by colloids, indirect effects on farmland birds, and the impact of sea-lice treatments on sea loch ecology, is still in progress.

"Proposed Environmental Quality Standards for Azinphos-methyl in Water" (DOE 2348-M/1, January 1991)

"Proposed Environmental Quality Standards for Fenitrothion in Water" (DOE 2197-M/2, January 1991)

"Proposed Environmental Quality Standards for Dichlorvos in Water" (DOE 2249-M/2, February 1991)

"Proposed Environmental Quality Standards for Malathion in Water" (DOE 2110-M/2, February 1991)

"Proposed Environmental Quality Standards for Dimethoate and Omethoate in Water" (DOE 3300-1, (February 1994)

"Proposed Environmental Quality Standards for Trinzophos in Water" (DOE 3620/1, December 1994)

"Proposed Environmental Quality Standards for Demetons in Water" (DOE 3654 1, September 1995)

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Attorney-General how many of his answers to parliamentary questions in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19336]

The Attorney-General: The information is not available and could be provided only by an exhaustive analysis of the time taken to prepare answers to previous parliamentary questions which would itself involve disproportionate cost.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases were referred to the Crown Prosecution Service for each year since its formation; how many were abandoned prior to *(a)* court stages and *(b)* trial; how many resulted in (i) conviction, (ii) acquittal and (iii) discharge; and if he will make a statement. [19027]

The Attorney-General: Table 1 shows the number of cases referred to the Crown Prosecution Service since its inception. The figures are inclusive of cases in which the service advised the police pre-charge, and of non-criminal proceedings.

Table 2 shows the number of cases completed by the service and the way in which they were finalised: these figures are available in a consistent format only since April 1991. Cases in which the Crown Prosecution Service advised the police pre-charge and non-criminal proceedings are identified separately.

The remainder of finalised cases are divided into those discontinued before the first court hearing; discontinuances at the first hearing and subsequent to the first hearing, but before trial; cases written off; those resulting in a bind over to keep the peace; committals to the Crown court; proceedings discharged at a committal hearing; and cases heard in magistrates' courts. Hearings are inclusive of guilty pleas as well as cases proceeding to a contested hearing after a plea of not guilty.

Table 3 shows the number and proportion of hearings resulting in conviction and in dismissal.

The number of cases abandoned is not determined solely, or even primarily, by the judgment of lawyers. The Crown Prosecution Service has no choice but to discontinue cases when witnesses fail to appear, refuse to give evidence, or change their story; when defendants produce driving documents proving their innocence; when evidence must be excluded because of irregularities in its collection; and when gaps in the prosecution case cannot be plugged by the police. About half of cases discontinued are estimated to fall into the above categories.

Convictions have remained consistently high, at around 98 per cent. of all cases proceeding to a hearing, supporting the view that the Crown Prosecution Service has succeeded in identifying cases in which the balance of evidence weighs in favour of prosecution, and has effectively pursued them in the courts.

Table 1: Crown Prosecution Service receipts

Year ending March	*Received in Magistrates' Courts*
1988	[1]786,333
1989	1,574,116
1990	1,622,347
1991	1,625,057
1992	1,571,175
1993	1,530,586
1994	1,459,296
1995	1,443,743
1996	1,354,177
1997	[2]1,006,070

[1] October 1987–March 1988 only.
[2] April 1996–December 1996 only.

Table 2: Crown Prosecution Service completed cases in Magistrates' Courts

Year ending March	*Finalised*	*Advice*	*Non criminal proceedings*	*Discontinued before first hearing*	*Discontinued before trial*	*Write off*	*Bind over*	*Committed to Crown Court*	*Discharged at committal*	*Heard in Magistrates' Court*
1992	1,568,853	73,337	22,752	12,282	162,167	78,730	28,673	129,667	2,872	1,058,747
1993	1,532,512	72,549	26,105	12,453	181,321	87,652	27,834	112,082	2,153	1,010,495
1994	1,454,239	72,146	27,097	11,526	157,181	117,358	23,555	102,549	1,774	941,053
1995	1,477,617	72,169	28,616	10,492	150,937	141,783	23,166	103,593	1,601	945,295
1996	1,352,330	53,433	22,705	12,870	139,859	112,316	18,822	91,255	1,511	899,594
1997[1]	987,702	34,326	9,805	10,476	103,897	74,341	15,158	72,572	1,415	665,713

[1] April 1996 to December 1996 only.

Table 3: Crown Prosecution Service case outcomes

Year ending March	*Convicted*	*Per cent.*	*Dismissed*	*Per cent.*
1992	1,040,997	97.4	27,753	2.6
1993	993,018	97.6	24,507	2.4
1994	925,698	97.7	21,470	2.3
1995	931,136	97.8	20,997	2.2
1996	886,562	97.9	18,637	2.1
1997[1]	656,630	98.1	12,951	1.9

[1] April 1996–December 1996 only.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many asylum seekers have been in receipt of income support or housing benefit for each month since October 1995; and what was the cost of providing *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit in each month. [15804]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables:

Asylum seekers receiving income support in Great Britain between November 1995 and May 1996

Income support	*Number of recipients*	*Estimated monthly expenditure (£ million)*
November 1995	49,000	12
February 1996	50,000	12
May 1996	50,000	13

Asylum seekers in receipt of income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit

	Number of recipients May 1995	*Estimated monthly expenditure 1995–96 (£ million)*
Housing benefit	31,000	11
Council tax benefit	15,000	0.6

Notes:
1. All numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Estimated expenditure is rounded to the nearest million pounds.
3. Estimated monthly expenditure for income support has been calculated using numbers and average weekly payments in the enquiry week.
4. Housing benefit/council tax benefit expenditure figures have been estimated using average amounts at May 1995, the latest information available.
5. Recipient figures refer the benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
6. No information available for asylum seekers, not in receipt of income support and in receipt of housing/council tax benefits.

Sources:
1. "Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries" November 1995, February 1996 and May 1996.
2. Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample enquiry or housing benefit/council tax benefit recipients also in receipt of income support for Great Britain taken at the end of May 1995.

State Retirement Pension

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in which of the past 10 years (i) the single person's full basic retirement pension, (ii) the married couple's full basic state retirement pension and (iii) the married woman's pension rate has been *(a)* rounded up and *(b)* rounded down. [17861]

Mr. Heald: The category A basic retirement pension—the single person's retirement pension—was rounded up for the years: 1989, 1992, 1993, 1996 and 1997 and was rounded down for the years: 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1994 and 1995.

The category B basic retirement pension—the married women's retirement pension—was rounded up for the years: 1987, 1988, 1990 and 1992 and was rounded down for the years: 1989, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997.

The married couples rates consists of the single rate plus the married woman's pension and is therefore not uprated independently.

Note:

In 1994 an amount was added to the standard rate of basic retirement pension in respect of an addition for VAT on fuel. The rounding calculation was carried out before this extra amount was added.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the forecast increase in work load at the Blackfriars Benefits Agency office following the proposed closure of the Kennington Benefits Agency office in September; what is the proposed increase in staffing to meet this increased work load; and what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the implications of benefits recipients who used the Kennington Benefits Agency office having to use the Blackfriars office. [18213]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Simon Hughes, dated 6 March 1997.

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the forecast increase in workload at the Blackfriars Benefits Agency (BA) office following the proposed closure of the Kennington BA office in September; what is the proposed increase in staffing to meet this increased workload; and what studies he has (a) commissioned and (b) evaluated on the implications of benefits recipients who used the Kennington BA office having to use the Blackfriars office.

The BA District of Bankside includes the offices at Kennington Park, Southwark and Thames South. The decision to close the Kennington Park Office has not been made. The proposed closure is part of the Area's Estate Strategy to reduce its accommodation costs by ten per cent during 1997/98 and a further twenty per cent progressively during the following five years.

The consultation process started on 3 March and will take approximately six weeks. As an essential part of this process the District will be writing to all local Members of Parliament and interested third parties informing them of the reasons for the proposed closure and requesting their comments. The office will also undertake a customer survey of those customers who currently use the Kennington Park Office to establish their opinions on their business being carried out by alternative means.

On average 140 customers visit the Kennington Park Office each day. It is not possible to estimate exactly how many customers would choose to visit Southwark. For general advice customers could go to either Brixton or Battersea BA offices, which are located within a two mile radius. Telephone calls and postal enquiries from customers in the Kennington Park area are dealt with by the Southwark office. It is anticipated that if Kennington Park closes the majority of staff would move with the workload to Southwark.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of absent fathers who have given up work to avoid payments to the Child Support Agency. [18272]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Stephen Timms, dated 6 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about absent fathers giving up work to avoid paying maintenance to the Child Support Agency. I am afraid that as you imply, my answer cannot be a precise one.

To begin with, we do not break down details of absent parents (or indeed parents with care) by gender so I cannot solely cover absent *fathers* as you asked. Moreover, as people move in and out of employment over the years for a wide range of reasons, it is not practicable to catalogue the reasons for every such development. Having said that, practical experience shows that very few absent parents deliberately give up their jobs to avoid paying legally due maintenance for their children. It is certainly the case that at some stage in the process, some absent parents threaten to take such a step, but the threat seems to be rarely carried out. Such an action would have a seriously detrimental effect on them and any second family they may have, not least because the maintenance assessment formula ensures that all absent parents, and their second families, are at least £30 a week better-off after payment of maintenance than they would be if unemployed and receiving Income Support. No one should now be assessed to pay more than 30% of their *net* income

in current maintenance, or more than 33% in an arrears case. In addition, leaving work voluntarily will have an adverse effect on the amount of Job Seekers Allowance that may be payable.

Moreover when an absent parent resumes employment the Agency will reassess liability to ensure the correct amount of maintenance is paid and if necessary will enforce compliance by a detachment of earnings order. In practice we do not even have to take this action very often, so a rough estimate of how many absent parents give up a job and stay unemployed purely to avoid maintaining their children is "very few indeed"—especially viewed against the 1.5 million cases the Agency has now cleared. However there will of course always be some individuals who will go far beyond normal, rational behaviour and will indeed take the action that is the subject of your question.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how much money collected by the Child Support Agency has accrued to the Treasury in the last three years for which figures are available; [18469]

(2) what estimate he has made of the annual saving to the Government in terms of reduced benefit entitlement as a result of the work of the Child Support Agency. [18475]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 6 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security concerning monies collected by the Child Support Agency and benefit savings.

Benefit savings are recorded when payment of maintenance or other action by the Agency leads to either a reduction in or a cessation of certain social security benefits paid to parents with care.

Figures for annual benefit savings since Agency inception are as follows:

1993–94: £418 million

1994–95: £479 million

1995–96: £493 million

1996–97 (to 31 January 1997): £395 million

The Agency does not get direct credit for all the benefit savings generated. During 1995–96 the Agency worked closely with the Benefits Agency to progress initiatives to reduce the burden on the general taxpayer. This meant that some of the savings that would have been scored by the Child Support Agency were instead scored by the Benefits Agency and this effect has carried over to 1996–97.

Child maintenance payments are retained by the Secretary of State for Social Security to offset benefit that has already been paid to the parent with care or to refund benefit that has already been paid.

As requested, details for the last three years are as follows.

1994–95: £54.94 million

1995–96: £70.92 million

1996–97 (to 31 January 1997): £79.69 million

These amounts are included within the overall figures for benefit savings quoted above. They should be seen in the context of the total amount of child maintenance that has been paid by absent parents (total figures for collected/arranged are quoted below) under this Agency's administration.

1994–95: £187.40 million

1995–96: £301.50 million

1996–97 (to 31 January 1997): £322.34 million

(the target for 1996–97 is a band of £380 million to 400 million, we are on course to achieve this)

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many absent fathers in the case load of the Child Support Agency are unemployed; and of those how many were in employment when the agency first issued a demand to them. [18271]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Stephen Timms, dated 6 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of absent fathers in the Child Support caseload who are unemployed and of those how many were in employment when the agency first issued a demand to them.

The information is not available in the precise format requested: The Agency does not differentiate between the cases it deals with on a gender basis, and I am therefore unable to provide any estimate concerning absent *fathers*. Latest figures available show that 253,700 absent *parents* were in receipt of earned income and 209,100 were not. Absent parents without an earned income include categories such as Income Support as well as other benefits such as Incapacity Benefit. We are unable to provide the exact number that are unemployed. A person who is unemployed could be so for many reasons. We have no reason to differentiate between an absent parent who has become unemployed because they have left employment and an absent parent who is unemployed due to other circumstances. The fluctuation of the labour market, especially at certain times of the year, means that an absent parent can and will move over the years in and out of work.

I hope this is helpful.

Pensioners

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those aged over 65 years were totally dependent on income from state benefits in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* the latest date at which figures are available. [18464]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Year	*Percentage of pensioner units receiving all their income from state benefits*
1979	23
1990–91 and 1994–95	15

Source:

The Pensioners' Incomes Series 1994–95.

Note:

A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age (SPA) or a couple where the man, defined as the head, is over SPA.

Free School Meals

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *281*, how many of the families on family credit gaining from free school meals would be *(a)* couples and *(b)* lone parents. [18945]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Number of families gaining from extending entitlement to free school meals to families receiving family credit

1997–98

Family type	*Numbers gaining (000s)*
All families	540
Couples	300
Lone parents	240

Figures are rounded to the nearest 5,000.

Family Credit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of employed adults receive *(a)* family credit and *(b)* disability working allowance. [18984]

Mr. Roger Evans: The proportion of the employed workforce in December 1995 receiving family credit was 3 per cent. A negligible proportion received disability working allowance.

Sources:

1. Social security statistics 1996.

2. "Labour Market Trends" December 1995.

Note:

Proportions have been rounded to the nearest 1 per cent.

Benefits Agency (Refurbishment)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the annual expenditure in refurbishment and capital works in each of the Benefits Agency's offices within area AD3 in each of the past five years. [18663]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Simon Hughes, dated 6 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what was the annual expenditure in refurbishment and capital works in each of the Benefits Agency's offices within area AD3 in each of the past five years.

The information is not available in the format requested. I should explain that Area Directorate 3 (AD3) London South was reorganised in April 1996 prior to that it had been known as AD3 South London and West Sussex. The attached Appendix gives details of the Benefits Agency Districts forming part of AD3, since and prior to the reorganisation.

Information is only available from 1994/95 for capital projects costing more than £5,000 and is shown below. Information for individual offices, projects costing £5,000 or less and prior to 1994/95 could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

AD3 London South and West Sussex

1994/95: £3,924,565

1995/96: £5,352,277

AD3 London South

1996/97: £3,721,385

These figures are provisional and subject to change.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appendix: AD3 London South from April 1996

Benefits Agency districts

Bankside

Canterbury and Thanet

Channel

East Sussex

Hampshire North

Hounslow and Kingston

London Central

Makerfield Benefit Centre

North Kent

North Surrey

Palace

Solent and Forest

South Circular

South Downs

South East Hants and Wight

South West Thames

Surrey Downs

Thameside

West Kent

West Sussex

AD3 South London and West Sussex prior to April 1996

Benefits Agency districts

Bankside

London Central

Makerfield Benefit Centre

North Surrey

Palace

South Downs

South West Thames

West Sussex

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken by his Department concerning the contractorisation of BAMS; and what were the results of this analysis. [19013]

Mr. Burt: A formal cost-benefit analysis was not undertaken. A collaborative study with private sector companies, together with the experience gained from similar exercises within the Department, confirmed the potential to deliver savings.

Liable Relatives' Intervention

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money was saved by liable relatives' intervention in each year since 1980. [19314]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Savings resulting from liable relatives intervention for the period 1989 to 1993 were:

1989–90: £207 million;

1990–91: £232 million;

1991–92: £283.9 million;

1992–93: £313 million.

Information for years prior to 1989–90 is available only in relation to savings arising in cases where the person remained on benefit. Such information as is available is as follows.

1980: £94.69 million;

1981: £121.68 million;

1982: £131.72 million;

1983: £129.69 million;

1984: £128.75 million;

1985: not available;

1986: £143.83 million;

1987: £138.74 million;

1988: £138.53 million.

Notes:

1. The figures for 1980 to 1988 are based on recorded benefit savings in the week of the annual statistical enquiry, multiplied by 52 to reach an annual figure.

2. Weekly figures were rounded to the nearest thousand pounds.

3. Data are not available for 1985.

Sources:

Information for 1980–88, Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiries 1980–88.

Information for 1989–90 to 1992–93: Social Security Departmental Reports for the years in question.

Incapacity Benefit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women previously in receipt of invalidity benefit have failed the all-work incapacity benefits test; and how many of these are now receiving jobseeker's allowance. [19252]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The number of incapacity benefit recipients disallowed following the application of the all-work test for the period 13 April 1995 to 31 January 1997 is 159,000[1]. As at 17 January, 28,000[2] incapacity benefit leavers were claiming jobseeker's allowance.

Notes:

1. The figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

[1] The figure is taken from a 100 per cent. aggregate count of the computer system and excludes a small number of cases not held on the system.

[2] The figure is supplied by the Employment Service and includes incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance claimants.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people between the ages of (i) 50 and 54, (ii) 55 and 59 and (iii) 60 and 64 years were awarded *(a)* five points or less, *(b)* eight points or less, *(c)* 11 points or less and *(d)* 14 points or less in the test for eligibility for incapacity benefit. [19254]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been awarded incapacity benefit in each of the last two years. [19253]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Number of spells of incapacity benefit commencing

Quarter ending	*Men*	*Women*
31 May 1995	44,000	20,000
31 August 1995	87,000	37,000
30 November 1995	92,000	41,000
29 February 1996	94,000	39,000
31 May 1996	88,000	42,000
31 August 1996	81,000	38,000

1. Figures will include a small proportion of claimants with more than one spell of sickness.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

3. Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the computer system, and exclude a small number of cases not held on the system.

Appeals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, column *503*, if the April 1997 reprint of leaflet NI 246 will make it clear that an appellant who has not opted for an oral hearing within 10 days, or such other period as the clerk or chairman may have decided, will not be entitled to an oral hearing unless the chairman is satisfied that an oral hearing is necessary to enable the tribunal to reach a decision. [19353]

Mr. Roger Evans: The leaflet will make it clear that it will be for the chairman to decide whether to hold an oral hearing in any case where the appellant did not originally opt for one.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answers of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *721*, 30 January, *Official Report*, column *363* and 17 February, *Official Report*, column *423*, if he will list the changes in his policy regarding the provision of information in reply to questions about appeals; and if he will ensure that information on appeals is published. [19033]

Mr. Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 4 March, *Official Report*, column *561*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many members of disability appeal tribunals carried out medical examinations for the purpose of the all-work test in the most recent month for which information is available. [19280]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is obtainable only by matching the independent tribunal service's records of medical members of disability appeal tribunals against current information held by the Benefits Agency medical services.

The results of such an exercise indicate that, during November 1996, the latest month for which information is available, 66 medical members of disability appeal tribunals carried out medical examinations for the purpose of the all work test.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the degree of compliance with the requirement of section 40(2) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 relating to the composition of the tribunal where an appeal is dealt with by a social security appeal tribunal without an oral hearing. [19278]

Mr. Evans: The composition of the panel of members for social security appeal tribunals is a matter for the president of the independent tribunal service, his honour Judge Bassingthwaighte.

Decision Making and Appeals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish his proposals for improving decision making and appeals; [19030]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of Dr. Roy Sainsbury's analysis of the responses to the consultation document on decision making and appeals. [19031]

Mr. Roger Evans: The final analysis report by Dr. Sainsbury is being drafted and a copy will be placed in the Library when completed.

An announcement of our final proposals will be made in due course.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Scurity how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19338]

Mr. Burt: Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large numbers of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for the Department systematically to calculate the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many couples where the claimant is (i) 50 to 54, (ii) 55 to 59 and (iii) 60 to 64 years received jobseeker's allowance of *(a)* £10, *(b)* £10.01–£20, *(c)* £20.01–£30, *(d)* £30.01 to £40, *(e)* £40.01–£50, *(f)* £50.01–£60 and *(g)* £60.01–£70 per week in the latest year for which figures are available; and what was the range of jobseeker's allowance payments to each of these age groups; [19248]

(2) how many couples where the claimant is *(a)* 50 to 54, *(b)* 55 to 59 and *(c)* 60 to 64 years have their income-related jobseeker's allowance reduced because of income from other sources, indicating what those other sources are; [19250]

(3) how many couples where the claimant is *(a)* 50 to 54, *(b)* 55 to 59 and *(c)* 60 to 64 years are in receipt of income related jobseeker's allowance. [19245]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information on jobseeker's allowance is not yet available. Provisional summary findings from the November 1996 quarterly statistical enquiry will be published on 20 March 1997 and more detailed analyses will be published in the summer. The information will be placed in the Library and I will write to the hon. Member.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many men aged *(a)* 50 to 54, *(b)* 55 to 59 and *(c)* 60 to 64 years are in receipt of (i) contributory-based jobseeker's allowance, (ii) income-related jobseeker's allowance, (iii) incapacity benefits, (iv) housing benefit and (v) council tax benefit. [19251]

Mr. Evans: The information on jobseeker's allowance is not yet available. Provisional summary findings from the November 1996 quarterly statistical enquiry will be published on 20 March and more detailed analyses will be published in the summer. The information will be placed in the Library and I will write to the hon. Member. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Incapacity benefit recipients (May 1995 and August 1996)

Thousands

	Incapacity benefit	*Severe disablement allowance*
31 May 1995		
Aged 50–54	252	36
Aged 55–59	354	39
Aged 60–64	385	24
31 August 1996		
Aged 50–54	258	40
Aged 55–59	354	43
Aged 60–64	378	26

Notes:

1. Provisional jobseeker's allowance findings will include estimates of claimants by type of allowance in payment, age, sex and duration of current claim. The detailed analyses will include information on partners and dependants, amounts of Jobseeker's Allowance and other benefits and income.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Sample size 5 per cent.
4. Sample excludes a small number of cases not held on the system.

Source:

Pensions Strategy Computer System (Incapacity).

Number of housing benefit/council tax benefit recipients by age and sex for Great Britain as at May 1995

Thousands

	Aged 50 to 54	*Aged 55 to 59*	*Aged 60 to 64*
Housing benefit			
Men also in receipt of income support	87	85	103
All recipients without income support	70	89	97
Council tax benefit			
Men also in receipt of income support	101	104	138
All recipients without income support	91	117	140

Notes:

1. Figures refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Age breakdown is based on the age of the claimant.
4. It is not possible to identify all men in receipt of housing benefit or council tax benefit. For those also in receipt of income support men can be identified and figures for these recipients have been shown. For those not also in receipt of income support men cannot be separately identified and therefore figures for all recipients have been given.

Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample enquiries for recipients with and without income support taken at the end of May 1995.

Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of average earnings the £175 weekly pension estimated to result from the plan he announced on 5 March will represent. [19556]

Mr. Heald: The figure of £175 a week in today's prices is projected to represent 26 per cent. of average earnings in 2040, assuming 1.5 per cent. real earnings growth up to that year.

Capital and Earnings Limits

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each benefit the capital and earnings limits at *(a)* their April 1997 value, *(b)* the value at their introduction and *(c)* the value which would have resulted from an increase based on (i) earnings and (ii) prices. [17098]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 25 February 1997]:* The information is set out in the tables:

Capital limits

Benefit	*Value at April 1997* (£)	*Value when introduced* (£)	*Date introduced* (£)	*April 1997 rate if increase based on earnings* (£)	*April 1997 rate if increase based on prices* (£)
Income support	3,000	3,000	April 1988	5,111.65	4,421.40
	8,000	6,000		10,223.35	8,842.75
	[1]10,000	3,000		5,111.65	4,421.40
	[1]16,000	6,000		10,223.35	8,842.75
Jobseeker's allowance	3,000	3,000	October 1996	3,126.00	3,078.00
	8,000	8,000		8,336.00	8,208.00
Family credit	[2]3,000	3,000	April 1988	5,111.65	4,421.40
	8,000	6,000		10,223.35	8,842.75
Housing benefit	3,000	3,000	April 1988	5,111.65	4,421.40
	16,000	6,000		10,223.35	8,842.75
Council tax benefit	3,000	3,000	April 1993	3,452.40	3,346.85
	16,000	16,000		18,412.60	17,849.80
Disability working allowance	3,000	3,000	April 1992	3,621.05	3,464.00
	16,000	16,000		19,314.90	18,474.50
Social fund funeral payments	500	500	April 1987	918.40	760.50
	1,000	1,000	April 1990	1,426.30	1,338.05
Community care/budgeting loans	500	500	April 1988	851.90	736.85
	1,000	1,000	April 1990	1,426.30	1,338.05

Notes:

[1] The £10,000 and £16,000 capital limits for people living permanently in a residential care or nursing homes also apply in jobseeker's allowance and to certain people entitled to housing benefit and council tax benefit. The increase in the value of these limits, introduced in April 1996, have been valued for income support only.

[2] Earnings top-up, an in-work benefit being piloted in eight areas from October 1996 for three years, has not been included in the table. The capital limits for earnings top-up are set at the same levels as those for family credit.

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 p. at each uprating.

Sources:

1. The earnings calculations have been carried out using the average earnings (whole economy) index as supplied by the Office of National Statistics.

2. The prices calculations have been carried out using the retail prices index, all items, less rent, local taxes and mortgage interest payments all benefits.

Earnings limits—income related benefits

Benefit	*Value a April 1997* £	*Value when introduced* £	*Date introduced*	*April 1997 rate if increase based on earnings* £	*April 1997 rate if increase based on prices* £
Income support (earnings disregard)	5	5	April 1988	8.50	7.35
	[1]10	[1]5		8.50	7.35
	15	15		25.60	22.05
Jobseeker's allowance (earnings disregard)	5	5	October 1996	5.20	5.15
	10	10		10.40	10.25
	15	15		15.65	15.40
Housing benefit (earnings disregard)	5	5	April 1988	8.50	7.35
	10	10		17.10	14.75
	15	15		25.60	22.05
	25	25		25.60	25.05
Council tax benefit (earnings disregard)	5	5	April 1993	5.75	5.60
	10	10		11.50	11.20
	15	15		17.25	16.80
	25	25		28.75	27.85

Earnings limits—income related benefits

Benefit	*Value a April 1997* £	*Value when introduced* £	*Date introduced*	*April 1997 rate if increase based on earnings* £	*April 1997 rate if increase based on prices* £
Family credit[2] (earnings threshold)	77.15	51.45	April 1988	87.70	75.75
Disability working allowance (earnings threshold)	57.85	39.95	April 1992	48.20	46.10
	77.15	66.60		80.45	76.95

Notes:

[1] The £10 couples disregard was introduced in October 1996.

[2] Earnings top-up, an in-work benefit being piloted in eight areas from October 1996 for three years, has not been included in the table. The capital limits are for earnings top-up are set at the same levels as those for family credit.

1. The table does not include the childcare disregard in family credit, disability working allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5p. at each uprating.

Sources:

1. The earnings calculations have been carried out using the average earnings, whole economy, index as supplied by the Office of National Statistics.
2. The prices calculations have been carried out using the retail prices index, all items, less rent, local taxes and mortgage interest payments for all other benefits.

Earnings limits—non income related benefits

Benefit	*Value at April 1997* (£)	*Value when introduced* (£)	*Data introduced*	*April 1997 rate if increase based on earnings* (£)	*April 1997 rate if increase based on prices* (£)
Personal earnings limits					
Jobseeker's allowance (contributory based)	See note[1]	See note[1]	October 1996	See note[1]	See note[1]
Invalid care allowance	50	6	April 1976	35.80	25.50
Severe disablement allowance therapeutic earnings limit	46.50	23.50	November 1984	51.75	40.80
Incapacity benefit therapeutic earnings limit	46.50	44	April 1995	47.30	46.55
Earnings limits where adult dependency increases are payable					
Retirement pension	49.15	18.80	November 1985	38.10	30.35
	37.35	0.80	July 1948	See note[2]	16.00
Short-term incapacity benefit	29.15	27.50	April 1995	29.60	29.15
	35.90	33.85		36.40	35.90
Long term incapacity benefit	49.15	46.45	April 1995	49.95	49.25
	37.35	35.25		37.95	37.35
Unemployability supplement	49.15	18.80	November 1985	38.10	30.35
	37.35	linked to RP		See note[2]	See note[3]
Severe disablement allowance	49.15	28.45	November 1984	62.60	49.25
	37.35	12.95		28.45	22.35
Maternity allowance	29.15	1.075	October 1953	See note[3]	16.50
Invalid care allowance	22.35	4.90	April 1976	29.35	20.90
Earnings limits where child dependency increases are payable					
All benefits where child dependency increases are payable	135	80	November 1984	176.20	138.45
	17	10	See note[5]	22.05	17.40

Notes:

[1] The disregard in contribution-based jobseeker's allowance is calculated by adding the age-related benefit to the disregard and subtracting 1p. The value of the disregard is therefore linked to the rates of contribution jobseeker's allowance.

[2] There are no average earnings (whole economy) indices available before 1963. As these benefits were introduced before that date no calculation can be carried out.

[3] In November 1985, the earnings limits in unemployability supplement and retirement pension were brought in line with those in unemployment benefit. Prior to that date a tapered disregard existed in retirement pension.

[4] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5p. at each uprating.

[5] The rate of child dependency additions are payable in the following benefits: incapacity benefit, retirement pension, severe disablement allowance, invalid care allowance and unemployability supplement. The earnings limits are £135 per week for the first child and £17 for each subsequent dependent child. The limits were aligned in November 1984 and have been revalued from a common date.

Sources:

1. The earnings calculations have been carried out using the average earnings (whole economy) index as supplied by the Office of National Statistics.
2. The prices calculations have been carried out using the retail prices index (all items).

HEALTH

Community Care

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the draft Community Care (Residential Charges) Bill and the policy statement to follow up the consultation document, "A New Partnership for Care in Old Age". [19541]

Mr. Dorrell: I am publishing both documents today. Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Library.

Breast Implants

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, column *70*, if he will make it his policy to collect information centrally on the number of breast implants which leak. [18409]

Mr. Horam: The medical devices directive—Council directive 93/42/EEC concerning medical devices—already requires manufacturers of medical devices, including breast implants, to review systematically any reports of implant failures which might have caused death or serious injury. Under the directive, manufacturers are also required to notify the relevant competent authority—in the United Kingdom, the Medical Devices Agency—of such cases.

NHS Hospitals

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data he has collated concerning the increase in the number of posts of *(a)* matron and *(b)* director of nursing services in NHS hospitals; what supervising duties such posts carry; and what guidance his Department has given regarding numbers, duties, or good practice as regards such posts. [18461]

Mr. Horam: The responsibility for determining the most appropriate form of nurse management and advice lies with the individual national health service employer concerned. The National Health Service Trusts (Membership and Procedure) Regulations 1990 state that the executive directors of an NHS trust shall include a registered nurse or registered midwife, except in the case of a trust which does not provide services directly to patients or a trust whose principal function is to provide ambulance or patient transport services. The NHS executive has published two documents that identify the existing roles of trust nurse executive directors: "One year on—The Nurse Executive Director Post" and "Sharpening the Focus: The roles and perceptions of nursing in NHS Trusts". Copies are available in the Library.

Hospitals (Red Alert Status)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals were on red alert status for each month since April 1995. [18609]

Mr. Horam: Red alert status is not a term defined or used by the national health service on a national basis.

Primary and Community Health Service Projects

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the *(a)* primary and *(b)* community health service projects, established with the support of the London implementation group, will be financed by health authorities after March 1997; and if he will make a statement. [18702]

Mr. Malone: On the basis of decisions on community health schemes made so far, some 300 schemes worth £64 million will be funded through London initiative zone funds in 1997–98; some 70 further schemes worth £10.5 million which are currently funded through London initiative zone funds will be funded directly by health authorities.

In primary care, the Government have made £20 million available in 1997–98 within the London initiative zone to support the third year of educational initiatives and work force flexibilities for general practitioners.

Patient Hotels

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts which have opened patients hotels, showing *(a)* the location, *(b)* number of beds, *(c)* average bed occupancy rates, *(d)* the revenue cost of provision per occupied bed per day, *(e)* the opening date and *(f)* the capital cost and in each case the source of funding. [18707]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive care beds for children were available in each health authority in each of the last five years; and what was their occupancy rate. [18709]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally in the form requested.

School Dental Services

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many school pupils by health authority were both inspected and reinspected by the school dental services in each year since 1990. [18732]

Mr. Malone: The available data for the number of contracts made by patients aged between five and 15, inclusive, with a member of the community dental service, by region, in the years ending March 1991 to March 1995, are shown in the table.

Number of children[1] aged 5 to 15 screened by the Community Dental Services by Regional Health Authority year ending 31 March

England

Regional Health Authority	*Number screened*			
	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
England	2,664,444	3,033,094	2,953,258	2,908,020
Northern	204,883	233,184	207,820	195,474
Yorkshire	216,436	245,724	245,449	232,797
Trent	323,329	308,122	324,244	306,121
East Anglian	103,841	130,949	128,122	95,500
North-west Thames	155,531	161,789	177,807	169,365

Number of children[1] aged 5 to 15 screened by the Community Dental Services by Regional Health Authority year ending 31 March

England

Regional Health Authority	Number screened 1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
North-east Thames	176,381	213,956	208,032	205,935
South-east Thames	225,879	228,527	192,584	206,526
South-west Thames	77,823	133,632	138,645	138,771
Wessex	153,802	159,101	155,165	154,369
Oxford	111,294	169,564	159,206	162,518
South Western	179,918	178,358	171,669	146,690
West Midlands	336,035	389,408	366,920	420,783
Mersey	141,133	179,184	186,575	192,129
North Western	258,159	301,596	291,020	281,042

Number of children[1] aged 5 to 15 screened by the Community Dental Services by DH Regional Office[2] at year ending 31 March 1995

England

Region	Number screened
England	2,891,211
Northern and Yorkshire	445,653
Trent	318,423
Anglia and Oxford	290,028
North Thames	363,792
South Thames	326,219
South and West	295,672
West Midlands	401,756
North Western	449,668

[1] The figures count each separate occasion a patient was in contact with a member of the community dental service. The number of individuals seen will be smaller.

[2] The 14 regional health authorities were restructured to form eight regional offices on 1 April 1994.

Patient Readmissions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients, by region, were readmitted to hospital within one month of their discharge in the last three years. [18729]

Mr. Horam: Since April 1996, the NHS executive has collected, routinely, information on patients aged 75 and over who are readmitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge. Information collected for quarter three for 1996–97 is shown in the table. Information on those aged less than 75 is not available centrally.

Number of patients aged 75 and over who are readmitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge

Region	Q3 actual
Northern and Yorkshire	3,380
Trent	[1]2,990
Anglia and Oxford	2,510
North Thames	[1]2,970
South Thames	3,190
South and West	3,290
West Midlands	1,810
North West	3,200

[1] Includes estimate for missing data.

1. Data were collected as part of the quarterly monitoring of NHS activity, quarter 3, 1996–97.
2. Figures exclude admissions to psychiatry specialties and discharges from psychiatry specialties.
3. Figures supplied are the sums for health authorities within the regional office area.

Junior Doctors (Study Leave)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average annual amount of study leave given to junior doctors in each of the last three years. [18789]

Mr. Malone: Aggregated details of the national uptake of study leave are not available.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS hospitals are currently operating bone density scanners osteoporosis. [18793]

Mr. Horam: It is for the local health authorities to decide what priority to give to making bone density measurement available to those who need it, and how best to co-ordinate services to meet local needs.

Community Care (Judicial Reviews)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many judicial reviews relating to community care policy there have been since 1 April 1994; [18875]

(2) how many requests for judicial reviews relating to community care policy have been turned down since 1 April 1994; [18877]

(3) what has been the cost of each judicial review relating to community care policy since 1 April 1994. [18876]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not held centrally.

NHS Hospitals (Waste)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the total weight of the toxic waste produced annually by hospitals in each NHS region;[18879]

(2) what is the total weight of the inert or inactive waste produced annually by hospitals in each NHS region.[18880]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Patient Involvement Measures

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sums have been spent by each of the English district health authorities on measures to increase patient involvement in the last year for which figures are available. [18767]

Mr. Horam: Improving patient involvement is a key priority for the NHS, as set out in the planning and priorities guidance for 1996–97 and 1997–98. The Department has allocated a central budget of £1,179,000 for the development of patient involvement over the three years 1996–97 to 1998–99. Information on spending by individual health authorities is not available centrally.

Severance Payments

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total amount spent *(a)* overall and *(b)* in each NHS region by NHS trusts on severance payments in the current financial year. [18769]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Private Sector Nursing and Care Contracts

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the number, type and value of contracts issued by local authorities to the private sector for nursing and care home beds in the most recent year for which figures are available. [18784]

Mr. Burns: In 1994–95, the latest year for which this information is available, expenditure by local authority social services departments in England on placements in independent residential care homes was £811 million and in independent nursing homes £403 million. Both figures include all adult client groups. Information on numbers and types of individual contract are not held centrally.

Casualty Units (Medical Vacancies)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are in medical posts in casualty units in the United Kingdom. [18786]

Mr. Malone: Information on vacant medical posts is available only by specialty. The term "casualty" is not used within the national health service to describe a specialty. The whole-time equivalent number of vacant medical posts in the accident and emergency specialty in the NHS in England at 30 September 1995 was 80. This figure is rounded to the nearest 10 and includes all consultant, staff grade, senior registrar, registrar and senior house officer vacancies. This is the latest available information.

Data on vacant posts are difficult to interpret and do not necessarily imply a shortage. Some vacancies will be wholly or partly filled by locums. For others, NHS trusts may find alternative ways to provide the service rather than re-advertising. The numbers give no indication of how long the post has been empty. Some of these will be in the process of being filled.

Source:

The medical and dental work force census 30 September 1995.

Non-NHS Health Care Providers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure on the purchase of health care from non-NHS providers in 1995–96 by *(a)* district health authorities, *(b)* fundholders and *(c)* NHS trusts in England. [18801]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is contained in the table:

Expenditure on the purchase of health care from non-NHS providers in England for 1995–96

	Expenditure £000
District health authorities	510,906
General practitioner fundholders	66,250
NHS trusts	92,191
Regional health authorities and special health authorities	128,242
Total	797,589

Source:

1. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.
2. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.
3. The annual accounts of the Family Health Services Authorities.

Notes:

The figures are provisional.

Gender Identity Dysphoria

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are currently being treated for gender identity dysphoria. [18791]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not available centrally.

NHS Employees' Pay

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the amount spent on salaries and wages for nurses and midwives in each NHS region in each year from 1988–89 to 1995–96; [18765]

(2) if he will list the amount spent on salaries and wages for general and senior managers in each NHS region in each year from 1988–89 to 1995–96; [18761]

(3) if he will list the amount spent on salaries and wages for administrative and clerical staff in each NHS region in each year from 1988–89 to 1995–96. [18766]

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list NHS salaries and wages costs for *(a)* general and senior managers, *(b)* nurses and midwives and *(c)* administrative and clerical staff, for each financial year from 1988–89 to 1993–94. [18774]

Mr. Malone: The information requested will be placed in the Library shortly.

Electricity Transmission Lines (Health Implications)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated and what data he has collated concerning the incidence of physical or other abnormalities in (i) children and (ii) adults exposed through work or domicile to permanent electro-magnetic forces arising from high-tension electricity transmission lines; and what plans he has for the mapping of such incidences. [18763]

Mr. Horam: The Department obtains advice on the health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields from the National Radiological Protection Board and other sources including its own funded research. The primary focus of concern has been on power lines and

childhood cancer where the results have not shown a proven link: the NRPB's advisory group on non-ionising radiation conducted an extensive review of the subject in 1992 and concluded that there was no firm evidence of a carcinogenic hazard from exposure that might be associated with residence near major sources of electricity supply, the use of electrical appliances or work in the electrical, electronic and telecommunication industries. The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment has endorsed the advisory group's report. A supplementary report in 1994 was published by the NRPB to take into account the results of epidemiological studies from Scandinavia, France and Canada. Copies of the advisory group's report and the supplementary documents are available in the Library.

Several epidemiological studies are currently under way to investigate childhood cancer in relation to various possible causes including electromagnetic fields. The largest study of this type in this country is the United Kingdom childhood cancer study which is funded in part by the Department of Health with technical support provided by the NRPB. The Department is also funding two pilot studies, one of adults and one of children, looking at cancer incidence near power lines. I am not aware of studies mapping the incidence of other types of abnormality in either adults or children.

National Blood Authority

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of bills were paid by the National Blood Authority within 30 days of its receiving them in the past three years. [18790]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available centrally in respect of 1993–94 or 1994–95. The National Blood Authority's published accounts for 1995–96 show that 80 per cent. of invoices were settled within 30 days.

Hospital Accounts (Patients' Money)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was held in hospital accounts in respect of the balance of patients' money in each of the last five years in each NHS region. [18794]

Mr. Horam: The information is given in the table.

Patients' money held by health authorities and trusts on 31 March

Regional Health Authority	*1992 £000*	*1993 £000*	*1994 £000*	*NHS Executive Region*	*1995 £000*	*1996 £000*
Northern	4,718	5,282	4,076	Northern and Yorkshire	5,526	6,775
Yorkshire	5,024	3,790	3,276			
Trent	5,041	4,302	3,844	Trent	3,950	4,285
East Anglian	2,605	2,429	2,272	Anglian and Oxford	6,688	6,824
Oxford	3,092	3,027	3,150			
North-west Thames	7,241	7,922	7,484	North Thames	10,951	10,205
North-east Thames	6,455	6,288	4,678			
South-east Thames	3,426	3,140	2,613	South Thames	10,189	9,823
South-west Thames	7,170	7,241	7,112			
Wessex	2,885	2,766	2,819	South and West	5,131	4,749
South Western	2,363	2,338	2,128			
West Midlands	3,950	3,505	3,429	West Midlands	4,058	3,729
Mersey	1,967	1,372	1,125	North West	5,891	3,477
North Western	4,245	3,797	2,138			
Special HAs	380	614	577	Special HAs	0	0
Total	60,562	57,813	50,721	Total	52,384	49,867

Figures for 1996 are provisional.

Market Testing

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS services which have been market-tested. [18781]

Mr. Horam: A list of services market tested by one or more national health service trusts is as shown. It is based on information supplied to the NHS executive's market testing database.

Hotel and non-clinical support (60 per cent. in the last year): Accommodation, Car Parks, Catering, Courier, Creche, Domestic, Environmental Health Management, Facilities Management, Gardening, General Patient Services, Hotel Services, Laundry/Linen, Pest Control, Portering, Security, Supplies, Switchboard/Reception, Transport, Waste Disposal, Interpreter.

Admin, information and financial (18 per cent. in the last year): Advertising and Recruitment, Agency Staffing, Audit, Banking, Clerical and Secretarial, Computer, Consultants, Financial , Human Resources, Insurance, Legal, Management Services, Micro-filming.

Clinical and Clinical support (5 per cent. in the last year): Anaesthetics, Bio-Engineering, Chiropody, Clinical Coding, Continuing Care for the Elderly, Central Sterile Supply Department, Hospital sterilizing and Disinfecting Unit Dental, Clinical Genetics, Haematology, Infection Control, In-Vitro Fertilisation Services, Lithotripsy, Medical Physics, Mobility Provisions, Medical Photography, Nuclear Medicine, Ophthalmology, Magnetic Resonance Imaging, Occupational Health, Orthotics, Occupational Therapy, Oxygen Therapy Units, Prosthetics, Pathology, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Patient Appliances, Radiology, Speech Therapy, Termination of Pregnancy, Perfusionists, Mobile Cardiac Catheterisation.

Building and Engineering (4 per cent. in the last year): Building and Engineering, Design Electrical, Energy Management, Estates Management, Fire Systems, Flooring, Repairs and maintenance, Gas Supply, Glazing, Lighting, Painting, Water Services.

Building and equipment/Systems Maintenance (16 per cent. in the last year): Building, Building and Engineering, Estates, Equipment/Systems.

Training (1 per cent. in the last year)—Education, Fire, Staff.

Notes:

1. There is no standard definition of services or list of services within the NHS and those listed above relate to units' interpretation.
2. Service headings such as "Hotel Services" and "Facilities Management" include a wide and varying range of individual services e.g. catering, portering, security car parking. Again there is no set pattern of which services make up hotel services, and so on; the information relates to individual provider units' interpretation.

Children's Hospices

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were cared for in each of the last three years in children's hospices in the United Kingdom. [18785]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Casualty Nurses

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are in nursing posts in casualty units in the United Kingdom. [18787]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected by the United Kingdom Health Departments.

Measurement of vacancy rates is a matter for local employers. Information relating to nursing vacancies generally is recorded by the Office of Manpower and Economics and is available in the annual report of the Review Body for Nursing staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine. Copies of the review body's report are placed in the Library each year.

Patients (Deaths)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases have been reported in each health authority in each of the last five years of patients dying after hospital admission but before being found a bed. [18878]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Private Health Care

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were referred to private health care by NHS doctors in 1995–96. [18792]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department established its Internet site; what representations he has received and what data he has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19147]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health Internet site was established in June 1995. Statistics received from the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency on the use of the site show that weekly page accesses to the Department's site have increased from just under 2,000 in June 1995 to over 10,000 in February 1997. The Department of Health's home page is consistently among the top 20 most used pages on the CCTA's open government site. Other pages, such as the hospital league tables, press releases and monthly publications update, are visited frequently. Users of the Department's web site are encouraged to provide feedback via a form on the site. All suggestions for improvement are considered and many have been implemented.

The Department continues to increase the amount of information, and now provides the full text of key communications such as White and Green Papers, press releases and consultative documents, as well as listings of new departmental publications. Later this year, access to departmental circulars is planned and enhanced provision of statistical publications. The Department also encourages staff to consider electronic media, including the Internet, in deciding where to publish departmental communications.

Eye Tests

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS eye examinations took place in 1995–96. [19096]

Mr. Malone: In 1995–96, family health services authorities in England paid for 6,511,680 national health service sight tests.

Dentists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *643*, how many of the dentists struck off for breaches of professional conduct were found guilty of fraud. [19306]

Mr. Malone: These figures are not held centrally. This is a matter for the General Dental Council.

Mortuaries

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mortuaries *(a)* in NHS trusts and *(b)* elsewhere had insufficient accommodation to meet demand over the Christmas period. [18705]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

GP Practices (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner practices there are in the London borough of Wandsworth. [19491]

Mr. Malone: The available information is that there were 131 general practitioner practices in Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth family health services authority at 29 March 1996.

Source:

General Medical Service Census

(practice—includes GP partnerships and practices)

Care (Capital Asset Rules)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authorities are applying the same capital asset rules to means testing for domiciliary care and for residential care. [19419]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not available centrally.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been provided with electrically powered indoor wheelchairs by health authorities in England in each of the last three years. [19374]

Mr. Burns: We do not collect separate figures for indoor-powered wheelchairs. However, the respective figure for all powered wheelchairs are:

1993–94: 8,569

1994–95: 9,441

1995–96: 10,000

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been provided with electrically powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs by health authorities in England in each of the last three years. [19375]

Mr. Burns: No separate information was collected before 1996–97 about the number of electrically powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs issued by the national health service wheelchair services. From 1996–97, additional funding for the provision of electrically powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs has been made available to health authorities as part of the wheelchair initiative announced by my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), on 26 February 1996. By 6 February 1997, a total of 718 electrically powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs had been ordered and were in the process of being issued.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expenditure has been incurred by health authorities for the purchase of electrically powered *(a)* indoor and *(b)* indoor-outdoor wheelchairs in each of the last three years. [19376]

Mr. Burns: The information requested about expenditure on electrically powered indoor wheelchairs is not collected centrally.

Additional funding amount to £6.4 million has been paid to health authorities in England for the financial year 1996–97 for the provision of electrically powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs as part of the wheelchair initiatives announced on 26 February 1996.

Lung Cancer

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current average cost to the NHS of the treatment of a person suffering from *(a)* lung cancer and *(b)* mesothelioma over the course of their illness. [19378]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is being carried out by his Department into methods of treatment for transmissible spongiform encephalopathies; what information he has collated on research being carried out by other organisations in the United Kingdom on this subject; and if he will make a statement. [18253]

Mr. Horam: We need to improve our understanding of the nature of the agent which causes spongiform encephalopathies before we are able to investigate possible methods of treatment. This is a high priority in our centrally directed programme of research across departments and research councils.

Preliminary studies suggest that a small number of compounds may have beneficial effects in producing deactivation and/or slowing the rate of disease and further work to expand these very preliminary early findings is about to be funded by the Medical Research Council. The MRC will be meeting with the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries to explore other opportunities from past, present or future research.

New Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial provision has been made for the costs of caring for those affected by new variant CJD; over what period these costs are expected to be incurred; and if he will make a statement. [18254]

Mr. Horam: No specific financial provision has been made for the care of patients affected by new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. Patients with nvCJD, which remains a very rare condition, should receive all clinically necessary health and social services as decided by those responsible for their care and the authorities locally. It is still too soon to make any prediction about future numbers of cases and consequent costs.

NHS Staff

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the overall number of *(a)* administrative staff, *(b)* managerial staff, *(c)* nurses, *(d)* junior doctors and *(e)* other medical staff employed in each region in 1995 and 1996. [18772]

Mr. Malone: Information is not available in precisely the format requested. The information available centrally for 1995—the latest available year—is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health service (HCHS) and General Medical Service (GMS) staff by selected staff groups by NHS Executive Regional Office areas:

England 1995

	Managers[1] *(wte)*	*Clerical and administrative staff*[2] *(wte)*	*Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff*[3] *(wte)*	*Junior doctors*[4] *(headcount)*	*Other medical staff*[5] *(headcount)*
Northern and Yorkshire	3,710	22,470	48,380	3,730	7,550
Trent	2,770	15,920	34,090	2,650	5,080
Anglia and Oxford	2,980	15,790	33,810	2,450	5,760
North Thames	4,420	23,870	48,450	5,210	8,170
South Thames	3,850	23,850	43,680	3,860	7,730
South and West	3,230	21,000	44,360	2,770	7,120
West Midlands	2,930	17,570	36,180	2,540	5,550
North West	2,950	23,450	51,700	3,860	7,310

Notes:
[1] Includes HCHS administrative managers and GMS practice managers and fund managers.
[2] Includes HCHS clerical and administrative staff, and GMS administrative staff including secretarial and reception staff and computer operators.
[3] Includes HCHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (excluding learners and Project 2000 students of which there were 4,580 and 33,000 respectively in England in 1995) and GMS practice nurses.
[4] Includes senior registrars, senior house officers and house officers.
[5] Includes other hospital medical staff, public health medicine and community health service medical staff and general medical practitioners.
All figures are rounded to the nearest ten, consequently, totals may not equal the sum of components.
HCHS figures relate to 30 September 1995
GMS figures relate to 1 October 1995
Sources:
Department of Health's annual medical and dental and non-medical workforce censuses and bi-annual General Medical Service census.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of NHS clerical, administrative and management staff in each year since 1989. [18775]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Service (HCHS) and General Medical Services (GMS) management and administrative staff

England 1989 to 1995[1]

	Whole-time equivalents
1989	148,030
1990	165,390
1991	179,830
1992	192,600
1993	194,910
1994	198,830
1995[1]	200,500

Notes:
[1] HCHS figures for 1989 to 1994 are based on staff on general and senior manager payscales and staff on administrative and clerical payscales. A new classification of staff was introduced in 1995 which classifies staff by what they do rather than how they are paid. The figures for 1995 are, therefore, not directly comparable with figures for earlier years.
GMS figures include: secretarial and reception staff in 1989; figures from 1990 also include clerical staff, practice managers and computer operators, and figures for 1995 include fund managers.
All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
All HCHS figures are at 30 September each year, and GMS figures as at 1 October of each year.
Source:
Department of Health's annual non-medical workforce census and bi-annual General Medical Services census.

University Research

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received about the provision of funding for university medical imaging and electronic instrumentation research programmes; what assessment it has made of the future viability of such programmes; and if he will make a statement. [18776]

Mr. Malone: With respect to Department of Health funding under the medical device research programme, six out of the first 12 contracts have been awarded in medical imaging and electronic instrumentation, of which four involve universities. The estimated total cost of the six studies is £1.7 million.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19343]

Mr. Horam: Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large numbers of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for the Department systematically to calculate the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Radiotherapy

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the register compiled by Radiotherapy Action Group Exposure of breast cancer patients permanently damaged by radiotherapy; and what action he plans to take in response. [19122]

Mr. Horam: The Department is familiar with RAGE and its activities on behalf of patients who have suffered adverse effects following radiotherapy treatment for breast cancer, but is not aware of such a register.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cancer patients have been permanently damaged by radiotherapy in the last 15 years. [19121]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Prodigy Prescribing Pilot System

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those illnesses and conditions for which the Prodigy prescribing pilot system is able to print information leaflets; [19125]

(2) if he will list the patient groups which have been consulted while developing the patient information provided under the Prodigy prescribing pilot system. [19124]

Mr. Malone: Phase 2 of the Prodigy project will include patient information leaflets for the majority of conditions covered by the system. A full list of the conditions covered in phase 1 and copies of the phase 1 guidelines were placed in the Library in July 1996, following publication of the Prodigy interim report.

Comments on the patient information leaflets for phase 2 were sought from various interested parties in November 1996, and are now being taken into account.

The following organisations received a full set of patient information leaflets:

Long Term Medical Conditions Alliance

Patients' Association

Consumers' Association

Association of Health Councils for England and Wales

The following organisations received a selection of leaflets relevant to the conditions they represent:

Acne Support Group

Age Concern

Al-Anon Family Groups UK and Eire

Alcohol Concern

Alcoholics Anonymous

Alzheimer's Disease Society

Arthritis and Rheumatism Council

Arthritis Care

Ash

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers

Association of Continence Advice

British Deaf Association

British Diabetic Association

British Heart Foundation

British Liver Trust

British Lung Foundation

British Migraine Association

British Polio Fellowship

Brook Advisory Centres

CITA

CRY-SIS Support Group

Depression Alliance

ERIC

Family Heart Association

Family Planning Association

Fellowship of Depressives Anonymous

FORESIGHT

Herpes Viruses Association

Hypothyroidism Support Group

Hysterectomy Support Network

INCONTACT

International Glaucoma Association

ISSUE

La Leche League

Manic Depression Fellowship

Migraine Trust

MIND

Mind Over Matter

Miscarriage Association

NAPS

National Asthma Campaign

National Back Pain Association

National Deaf Children's Society

National Eczema Society

National Endometriosis Society

National Osteoporosis Society

Psoriasis Association

Quitline

Raynaud's and Scleroderma Association

Save our Sons

Stroke Association

Women's Health

Women's Health Concern.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of guidelines in phase I of the Prodigy prescribing pilot system; and how many, and which, of these have been updated for phase II. [19127]

Mr. Malone: Phase 1 of the Prodigy system incorporated advice and recommendations covering 244 main diagnoses and 566 sub-categories. These were placed in the Library in July 1996. In the light of comments received from users of the system and others, a proportion of the guidelines have been reviewed beginning with those most frequently used by general practitioners in the phase 1 trials. A team is currently working on reviewing further guidelines for use in phase 2, and will continue to seek comments on the use and content of the guidelines as the project progresses.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the costs incurred to date on the Prodigy prescribing pilot system. [19126]

Mr. Malone: To date, approximately £2.3 million has been spent on Prodigy phases 1 and 2, incorporating software development, hardware and evaluation costs. As a full breakdown of costs would include commercially sensitive information relating to the suppliers involved, it would not be appropriate to publish such details.

Private Partnership Insurance

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice has been given to his Department by the Government Actuary about *(a)* the likely uptake and *(b)* the cost to his budget of introducing private partnership insurance for long-term care; and if he will place the figures and papers received from the Government Actuary in the Library. [19310]

Mr. Burns: The Government have made no estimates of the likely take-up of the partnership scheme; it is for individuals to decide whether or not to take out partnership insurance.

The possible public expenditure costs of the partnership scheme are considered in appendix 4 of the policy statement "A New Partnership for Care in Old Age", which was published today. The estimates of costs were produced by the department. No figures or papers were received from the Government Actuary.

Fluoridation (North West Water)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from health authorities about North West Water's decision not to implement additional fluoridation schemes. [19068]

Mr. Malone: None.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on North West Water's decision not to implement additional fluoridation schemes. [19067]

Mr. Malone: Fluoridation of water supplies is a matter for local decision.

Prescriptions

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances patients are not entitled to NHS prescribing resulting from a private consultations; and what guidance is published by his Department to health authorities on the procedures they should follow for NHS prescribing in relation to patients who have previously had a private consultation. [19116]

Mr. Malone: Doctors may provide national health service prescriptions only when they are providing NHS services; for general practitioners, this is set out in their terms and conditions of service. No further guidance has been issued.

Community Care (Wiltshire)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost to Wiltshire county council of a community care place in a residential home run by *(a)* the county council and *(b)* the private sector. [19072]

Mr. Burns: The cost of placements to the local authority will vary according to the charges paid by individuals. Account should also be taken of the residential allowance which is paid by the Department of Social Security to local authority placements in independent sector homes. Wiltshire county council has advised that the current basic fee charged to individuals placed by it in its in-house residential care homes is £268 and to similar placements in the independent sector £214. Information on a nationally comparable basis is published in the "Key indicators of local authority social services 1996", copies of which are available in the Library.

Pameton

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date and under what marketing authorisation number Stirling Winthrop was granted a licence for Pameton. [19281]

Mr. Malone: Pameton was granted the marketing authorisation PL 00071/0216 on 1 November 1983.

Contact Lenses

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what responsibility *(a)* the hospital eye service has for the supply of contact lenses to patients for whom they are clinically necessary and *(b)* the (i) general optical service and (ii) the DSS has in ensuring that such patients can get such contact lenses. [19496]

Mr. Horam: Contact lenses can be supplied for either clinical or cosmetic reasons by an ophthalmic medical practitioner or by an optician practising either in hospital or in the community. Children, people on low incomes, or patients with complex optical needs are entitled to national health service optical vouchers. Patients who are entitled to full help with meeting the costs of their optical appliances, and have a clinical need for contact lenses, will receive them free of charge.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent by fundholding general practitioner practices in England on purchasing hospital and community health services from private sector providers as defined by sub-code 160 in form FAA 23 in the accounts filed by health authorities in each year since GP fundholding started. [19612]

Mr. Malone: The table shows money spent by fundholding general practitioner practices in England on purchasing hospital and community health services from private sector providers as defined by sub-code 160 in Form FAA 23.

Year	*£000*	*Number of fundholding practices*	*Non-NHS spend as percentage of total budget*
1991–92	3,698	306	0.9
1992–93	13,127	587	1.6
1993–94	29,899	1,249	1.6
1994–95	52,557	2,066	1.9
1995–96	66,250	2,613	1.9

Source:
Annual accounts of FHSAs.
Note:
Figures for 1995–96 are provisional.

Records (Access)

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if local authority social services departments are under an

obligation to refuse a person access to his own records before 1989 and to claim public interest immunity without discretion to waive this. [19501]

Mr. Burns: While there is no statutory right of access to manual personal records held by a social services department before 1 April 1989, the Department encourages local authorities to make as much information available as possible, especially where this helps an individual to understand records made after this date.

Cancelled Operations (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled on the day of, or after, the patient had been admitted to hospitals under the aegis of Durham Hospitals NHS trust in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [19359]

Mr. Horam: Figures for cancelled operations by trust are not available centrally in the form requested. However, figures for April to December 1996 for cancelled operations by health authority are available in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 March 1997

ENVIRONMENT

Sewage (UV Disinfection)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the locations of sewage plants with ultra violet light disinfection treatment, indicating the relevant water and sewerage company. [18777]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency has provided the following list of the locations of sewage plants with ultra violet light disinfection treatment:

	Location
South West Water	Lyme Regis
	Exmouth
	Menagwins (St. Austell)
	St. Columb Major
Southern Water	New Romney (Littlestone)
	Dymchurch
	Camber
Anglian Water	Cleethorpes (Newton Marsh)
	Mablethorpe
	Wells-next-to-the-Sea
	Heacham
	West Mersea
North West Water	Newbiggin
	Askham-in-Furness
	Silloth
Welsh Water Dwr Cymru	Newgale
	Aberystwyth
	Llanelli (Bynea)
	Tywyn/Aberdyfi
	Criccieth

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the percentage of sewage treated by ultra violet light disinfection for each water and sewerage company. [18778]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency has provided the following estimates of the percentage of sewage treated by ultra violet light disinfection for each water and sewerage company:

South West Water, 2.9 per cent.; Southern Water, 0.3 per cent.; Anglian Water, 2.9 per cent.; North West Water, less than 0.1 per cent.; and Welsh Water Dwr Cymru, 4.7 per cent.

Sewage Discharge

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines govern the prosecution of breaches in discharge consents. [18780]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency follows the code for Crown prosecutors and the Attorney-General's guidelines on criteria for prosecutions. Specific prosecution policies are under development. Currently, in respect of prosecution for breaches of discharge consents, the agency follows procedural guidance adopted by the National Rivers Authority.

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department established its Internet site; what representations he has received and what data he has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19149]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department of the Environment's Internet site was established in late 1994. The average weekly accesses are 8,500 from a wide cross-section of users both at home and overseas. My Department has received no representations on its use of the Internet. We view the Internet as an important means of augmenting the provision of information in all areas of the Department's responsibilities. My Department is looking at increasing the availability of information on the Internet as part of its normal publishing procedures.

Water Safety

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that in each water company area in England the water is safe to drink. [19305]

Mr. Clappison: The main task of the drinking water inspectorate is to check that water companies supply wholesome drinking water and in doing so comply with the requirements of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989, as amended. The results of the inspectorate's checks are published in its annual reports. The inspectorate also investigates incidents which adversely affect, or threaten to affect, drinking water supplies. Local authorities can also carry out their own monitoring.

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the current remuneration of the chief executive of the QEII Conference Centre; and what was the figure in *(a)* March 1996 and *(b)* March 1995; [19577]

(2) if the remuneration of the *(a)* chief executive and *(b)* senior management of the QEII Conference Centre will be linked to the profitability of the centre following the change to trading fund status; and who is responsible for determining remuneration levels and benefits packages. [19576]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have asked the chief executive of the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. C. Buck to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 10 March 1997:

1. Current: £50,000 per annum + up to 15% bonus based on performance, paid in a lump sum, not pensionable.

2. March 96: £46,588 per annum + up to 10% bonus based on performance, paid in a lump sum, not pensionable.

3. March 95: £45,764 per annum + up to 10% bonus based on performance, paid in a lump sum, not pensionable.

The Chief Executive is a member of the Senior Civil Service, and his pay is not linked to the profitability of the Centre. The Chief Executive is not a member of the Centre's Pay and Grading Scheme, or entitled to receive any bonus earned by all Centre staff.

The DOE is responsible for determining the Chief Executive's pay and bonus, under the terms of his contract.

The Directors' are members of the Centre's Pay and Grading scheme, as are all staff with exception of the Chief Executive.

They therefore are linked to the profitability of the Centre. However the amounts payable are capped by the constraints of the Centre's Pay and Grading Scheme.

The Chief Executive is responsible for the operation of this scheme.

The total amount payable to the Centre's staff is subject to approval from the Secretary of State.

Art (Open Spaces)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) which organisations he consults on the effectiveness of his Department's policies to encourage greater provision of art in open spaces; [19655]

(2) whom he consults when evaluating the provision of *(a)* fountains, and *(b)* other types of sculptures using water in public open spaces. [19656]

Sir Paul Beresford: These are matters essentially for local decision. Only exceptionally would the Secretary of State be asked to comment.

Port of Tilbury (Ammonium Nitrate)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the findings of the Health and Safety Executive, following its visit to the port of Tilbury in February to examine the unloading and storage of ammonium nitrate. [19853]

Sir Paul Beresford: The port of Tilbury was visited by two inspectors form the HSE's chemical and hazardous installations division on 4 February 1997. Ammonium nitrate was being stored in bulk in a dedicated warehouse towards the centre of the port complex. No unloading was taking place at the time of the visit. The storage arrangements were considered satisfactory and in accordance with published HSE guidance.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 3 March, *Official Report*, column *467*, if he will list the changes he is making to the consultants' report to the Countryside Commission before placing it in the Library. [19734]

Mr. Clappison: The Countryside Commission has amended the original report on the A36 Salisbury bypass, prepared by the consultants Novell Tullett. The two changes are:

(i) Report summary (Page 1, paragraph 1.2)—the words "with its" have been added to the second sentence, between "the Avon Valley" and "Conservation Area";

(ii) Appendix 2 to the report—the summary of the draft report by English Nature to the Highways Agency has been replaced by a summary of their final report.

A copy of the final report has been placed in the Library.

Fuel Tanker Incident (West Thurrock)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what investigation the Health and Safety Executive is considering into the scale of hazard and the circumstances surrounding the roll-over of a fuel tanker at West Thurrock shopping park on Monday 3 March. [19851]

Sir Paul Beresford: The fuel tanker in question shed part of its load when it overturned at West Thurrock shopping park on 3 March 1997. The HSE is aware of the incident and is making inquiries with the operator and manufacturers of the tanker.

Wytham Woods Experimental Site

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, what were the findings of the HM specialist inspector of biosafety, from the Health and Safety Executive, following his visits to the experimental site at Wytham Woods in June 1994 and September 1995; and if he will place the reports in the Library. [19901]

Sir Paul Beresford: The HSE inspectors concluded that there were no concerns for either human health and safety or environmental safety as a result of this work, and the release had been carried out in accordance with the terms of the consent.

The information contained within the reports is available under the Environmental Information Regulations 1992. I have arranged for a copy of the report to be placed in the Library.

Commission for the New Towns

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has decided upon the future of the Commission for the New Towns; and if he will make a statement. [20010]

Mr. Curry: On 15 May last, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) *Official Report*, column *489*, I explained our intention to establish a residuary body to deal with any assets and liabilities of urban development corporations and housing action trusts that remained at wind up, and to dispose of the remaining new town land holdings. I said that, subject to parliamentary approval of powers given in the then Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill, we intended to base this body on the Commission for the New Towns. We believed it made sense to build on the CNT's expertise and experience in order to maximise the return to the Exchequer.

Following enactment of the Bill, we appointed consultants to consider whether it would be better to retain the CNT as a legal entity and reform it for this residuary role, or to set up a new body that would draw largely on the skills of former CNT staff. We also asked them to advise on the optimal size, structure and locations for the residuary body.

The consultants have advised that better value for money would be achieved by retaining the CNT, albeit in a slimmed-down form with a revised structure and focus, than by starting afresh with a new body. The Government agree with this advice and have therefore decided to extend the life of CNT for a number of years so as to enable it to continue to dispose of its assets and liabilities in an orderly and cost-effective manner. We intend, however, to undertake a fundamental review in 2000 of future strategy options and to determine in the light of conditions prevailing at that time how soon the commission could be closed.

From 1 April 1998, therefore, a revamped CNT will concentrate on selling the remaining new towns land and on disengaging from the residual assets and liabilities of the eight urban development corporations which wind up at the end of March 1998. It will also be able to act as a residuary body for those housing action trusts which wind up during its lifetime.

I have every confidence that the CNT will continue to maintain its excellent track record, which has led to receipts of over £2.3 billion in the last 15 years as well as resulting in additional private investment, good quality development and economic growth in the new towns. We shall expect it to meet challenging performance targets, but without resorting at any stage to firesales of its assets, since that would not achieve value for money and would be likely to disrupt local property markets. The CNT will also be expected to continue to take account of the interests of the local community when disposing of assets or settling liabilities.

Environment Council

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 3 March. [20067]

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at the Environment Council on 3 March. The Council agreed conclusions to establish the Community's negotiating position for the preparatory meetings for the third conference of the parties to the framework convention on climate change, in Kyoto, Japan, in December of this year. They agreed that the EU should propose that developed countries should reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 15 per cent. below 1990 levels by the year 2010. They identified current commitments from member states, including a commitment from the United Kingdom for a reduction of 10 per cent. that would enable EU countries as a whole to reduce their emissions by 10 per cent. by the year 2010. They also agreed to identify further policies and measures to enable EU countries to deliver an overall reduction of 15 per cent. by 2010, should developed countries agree to that target at the Kyoto conference.

The Council discussed the draft council resolution on the implementation and enforcement of Community environmental law but agreed to defer a final decision until the views of the European Parliament become available; a common position was agreed on the funding of European non-governmental organisations subject to a UK parliamentary scrutiny reserve.

In the Council discussion on the two directives on proposed fuel quality and car emission standards by 2000 (Auto-Oil Stage 1). I welcomed the progress being made on these important proposals and emphasised the need for agreement to be reached as soon as possible. I also supported the majority view that it was important for the Commission to bring forward by the end of 1998 its proposals for mandatory fuel and car emissions standards for 2005.

Over lunch, the Council discussed the position of the negotiations on the proposed framework agreement on leghold traps. I reiterated my concerns that the existing proposals were inadequate and emphasised the need for a much stronger agreement. Further negotiations with the third countries are expected to begin shortly.

There was a presentation by the Commission on its recently adopted proposals for the reduction of emissions of volatile organic compounds; the Dutch presidency hopes to secure political agreement on this at the June Environment Council. The water framework directive was also presented. In the discussion on the use of environmental agreements, I welcomed the Commission's recent communication and highlighted the importance of these measures as an alternative or complement to a regulatory approach.

The Council also adopted a directive amending the directive 85/337 on environmental impact assessment. This is to be implemented by March 1999 and the Government will be consulting on its implementation later this year.

I also took part in the structured dialogue meeting with Environment Ministers from the countries from central and eastern Europe in which we had a useful exchange of views on climate change and energy efficiency issues.

Petrol Vapour Recovery

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in response to the 1995 recommendation by the Environment Committee concerning the introducing of petrol vapour recovery for vehicle refuelling (stage II). [20114]

Mr. Clappison: In response to a recommendation from the House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment, we undertook to consider the case for implementation of the stage II petrol vapour recovery system at service stations once the results of further research into its costs were available. Stage II is designed to reduce emissions of volatile organic compounds. These can be harmful in their own right and also contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone which can have adverse effects on human health and on the environment.

Research has demonstrated that stage II offers better value for money than alternative methods for reducing emissions arising from vehicle refuelling at petrol stations. Stage II also compares favourably with abatement techniques used in other industry sectors. The

Government therefore intend to consult later this year on proposals for the introduction of stage II controls at certain petrol stations.

In so doing, we shall be seeking to involve the petroleum industry and other interested parties as fully as possible. The final adoption of the proposals will be based on consideration of the overall costs and benefits. Our research has shown that the cost per tonne of volatile organic compounds abated rises rapidly at smaller stations and this will obviously influence our proposals. We are particularly aware of the need to avoid imposing any necessary costs and regulatory burdens on small stations, especially those in rural areas where availability of supply can be a problem.

Preliminary research undertaken for my Department has shown that evaporative emissions during vehicle refuelling may also contribute to ambient levels of benzene around some petrol stations which exceed the proposed national air quality standard. Over the coming year, we shall be carrying out further research to evaluate the extent of this problem and to consider the potential abatement options.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Parishes Protection Group

Mr. Flynn: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment he has made of the letter from the Parishes Protection Group of 11 February, to the Church Commissioners; if he will place a copy of the reply in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [19029]

Mr. Alison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 10 February, column *14*.

The Church commissioners have been engaged in extensive correspondence with the Parishes Protection Group on a wide range of issues relating to their work, in particular the proposals for the future financing of clergy pensions. The Parishes Protection Group has made a number of assertions which the commissioners do not accept and the commissioners have made their position clear to the group. The hon. Member, in this connection, will have received a copy of a recent note on the legality of the payment of clergy pensions. I will place this in the Library.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Business Tenants

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will conduct a review of the Landlord and Tenant (Covenants) Act 1995 to assess the impact of modification of section 19 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1927 on business tenants. [18480]

Mr. Streeter: The Landlord and Tenant (Covenants) Act 1995 came into force on 1 January 1996. The modifications to section 19 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1927, made by section 22 of the 1995 Act, apply, broadly speaking, only to tenancies, other than residential tenancies, which came into force after 1 January 1996 and apply only to assignments. It is too early to review the operation of section 22 of the 1995 Act.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Entry Clearance (Mr. Javed Iqbal)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date a recommendation was issued to the British post in Islamabad to issue Mr. Javed Iqbal, ref: TH/21422/96, with a visa; and if he will make a statement. [19751]

Mr. Kirkhope: The adjudicator's determination dated 18 October 1996 on Mr. Iqbal's appeal against the decision by the entry clearance officer in Islamabad to refuse him entry clearance was received by my Department on 28 October 1996 but, due to an administrative error which I very much regret, details were not forwarded to the entry clearance officer until 6 March 1997.

Mr. Iqbal's representatives in the United Kingdom were informed of the position on the same date.

Yardies

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if illegal immigrants described as yardies have been allowed to remain in the United Kingdom in order to act as informers for the Metropolitan police in the period since January 1993. [19664]

Mr. Kirkhope: The management and use of informants are operational matters for the police. It is police practice never to confirm or deny whether someone is an informant.

Although there may be exceptional circumstances in which it is in the public interest, in the handling of immigration cases, to take account of an individual's assistance to the authorities, there is no general policy of allowing illegal entrants to remain in this country because they have agreed to provide information to the police.

Deportation

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the police or immigration enforcement officers have the power to prevent the serving of Home Office deportation orders on illegal immigrants. [19665]

Mr. Kirkhope: There may be circumstances in which it is decided not to pursue service of a deportation order, but all such cases would need to be authorised at a senior level in the deportation section of the immigration and nationality directorate.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he gives to the postponement of deportation in circumstances in which absence of the deportee would place a temporary, but significant, additional burden on voluntary or statutory community care services. [19082]

Mr. Kirkhope: There is no provision under the immigration rules for people who are subject to deportation action to remain here on the basis that they

are providing care which would otherwise be provided by voluntary or statutory services. However, in all cases where consideration is being given to whether deportation should proceed, any compassionate circumstances are balanced against the public interest in maintaining an effective immigration control.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to discuss the delay in hearing cases, with particular reference to the case of Mr. Paul Melling of 8 Parkgate drive, Astley Bridge, Bolton; and if he will make a statement. [18904]

Mr. Maclean: I am fully aware of the volume of cases awaiting a hearing before the board and, in consultation with its chairman, Lord Carlisle of Bucklow QC and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, I increased its membership last year to help reduce delays. Lord Carlisle knows that I am open to further approaches should he consider that further members are needed to complete the work on the 1990 scheme, now superseded by the tariff-based scheme effective from 1 April 1996. Ministers do not intervene in, or comment on, the handling of individual applications.

Drug Education

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that the drug confiscation fund may be used for prevention campaigns on the lines of drug abuse resistance education. [18953]

Mr. Maclean: I am not sure whether the question refers to the seized assets fund or the central drugs fund, both of which draw on the proceeds of drug trafficking seized under international confiscation agreements.

The seized assets fund is used for individual projects directed against the misuse of drugs and drug trafficking. Its use is not restricted to enforcement initiatives—expenditure is split about equally between enforcement work and projects for prevention, education and rehabilitation. All applications are considered on their merits. Because of the uncertainty of the amounts available from one year to the next, the fund supports one-off projects rather than continuing programmes.

The central drugs fund is focused on enforcement. It helps meet the additional costs to United Kingdom police forces of international drugs investigations.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations on anti-drug campaigns he has received from the Department for Education and Employment since 26 February. [18951]

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education and Employment wrote to me on 3 March 1997 to draw my attention to the debate on drug abuse resistance education which took place on 26 February 1997.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he is giving to reforming the budget process of police forces to enable them to invest equal funds in drug prevention campaigns on the lines of drug abuse resistance education and on drug law enforcements. [18952]

Mr. Maclean: None. The allocation of resources and the deployment of officers are operational matters for individual chief officers of police. They must decide on their own priorities, taking local needs into account. Each force has a drugs strategy, which covers prevention and education as well as enforcement, and all forces are represented on their local drug action teams.

Prison Ship (Portland Harbour)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations the Prison Service has had with Dorset police authority concerning the *(a)* potential security risks and *(b)* extra costs of mooring a prison ship in Portland harbour. [18744]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 11 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about what consultations the Prison Service has had with the Dorset Police Authority concerning the potential security risks and extra costs of mooring a prison ship in Portland harbour.

Discussions have been held between the Dorset police and Prison Service headquarters staff and the governor-designate of the prison ship about the operational implications of mooring a prison ship in Portland harbour. Arrangements were made by the Prison Service for representatives of the Dorset police to make a familiarisation visit to the ship in New York. Further detailed discussions are planned for later this months when key prison managers are transferred to the commissioning project team.

There have been no representations from the Dorset Police Authority concerning any extra costs to them of mooring a prison ship in Portland port.

Prisons (Drugs Testing)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *211*, if he will list the prisons involved in the research project carried out by the university of Oxford centre for criminological research; what type of *(a)* drug testing and *(b)* methodology this research project will employ; if it will include recommendations for future Prison Service drug policy in its final report; and if he will publish the results of the research. [18747]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Hugh Taylor to Mr. George Howarth, dated 11 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the research project being carried by the University of Oxford Centre for Criminological Research.

The project has as its focus the Mandatory Drug Testing Programme introduced in all prisons from April 1996. The researchers will obtain information using structured interviews with

prisoners and staff, at each of the five establishments involved in the study: Wellingborough; Long Lartin; Onley; New Hall; and Swansea. No drug testing takes place as part of the study.

The researchers' report may make recommendations for policy. Generally findings of research in prisons are published.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *211*, what methodology the research project carried out by the national addiction centre will use; if it will include recommendations for future Prison Service drug policy in its final report; and if he will publish the results of the research. [18748]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Hugh Taylor to Mr. George Howarth, dated 11 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent question about the research project being carried out by the National Addiction Centre.

The researchers have been asked to compare information on the prevalence of drug misuse in prison obtained from The Mandatory Drug Testing programme, the specific characteristics of the drugs in use in prison and information on the criminal and other background of prisoners, with a view to identifying factors and trends in prisoner drug abuse while in prison.

Where appropriate the researchers have been asked to make recommendations on future Prison Service Drugs policy. Generally findings of research in prisons are published.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to incorporate random drug testing in the Prison Service key performance indicator for mandatory drug testing. [18746]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Hugh Taylor to Mr. George Howarth, dated 11 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the incorporation of random drug testing in the Prison Service's mandatory drug testing key performance indicator.

Random drug testing already forms the basis of the Service's key performance indicator in respect of mandatory drug testing. In 1996–97 the target is for the percentage of random drug tests in which the result is positive to be lower in the fourth quarter than in the first.

Privately Operated Prisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what would be the cost of replacing all the locks in each of the privately operated prisons; [18718]

(2) if he will make a statement on the security grounds on which the Prison Service may withhold payment to privately operated prisons on the basis of unsatisfactory performance. [18719]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 11 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about security at privately operated prisons.

We have a commercial contract for the supply of locks for all prisons, including the existing privately operated prisons. The cost of relocking establishments will vary according to the size of the prison and the class of locks. Typical costs will be in the range of between £40,000 and £64,000.

Payments may be withheld from contractors at privately operated prisons for failure to deliver contracted performance; this may include failure to meet required security standards.

Firearms (Compensation)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a breakdown of the estimated costs of compensation arising from the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. [18736]

Miss Widdecombe: The estimated breakdown of expenditure arising from the compensation and ex gratia payment schemes provided by the legislation is as follows:

Large calibre handguns: up to £50 million;

Ancillary equipment for large calibre handguns: about up to £80 million;

Small calibre handguns: up to £12 million; and

Expanding ammunition: de minimis.

In addition, it is estimated that up to £5 million will be required in relation to administrative costs, for example storing guns and handling compensation claims.

Blakenhurst Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional security measures were introduced at Her Majesty's prison, Blakenhurst following the publication of a photograph of a bunch of keys in *The Birmingham Post* in 1994. [18715]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Hugh Taylor to Mr. George Howarth, dated 11 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about what additional security measures were introduced at Blakenhurst prison following the publication of a photograph of a bunch of keys in the Birmingham Post in 1994.

Following such an incident (in 1993 not 1994) locks in parts of the prison were replaced.

Irish Republic (Repatriation of Prisoners)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date a request by Patrick Lynch, detained at Her Majesty's prison Parkhurst, to be repatriated to the Republic of Ireland, was referred to the Republic; what response he has received; and if he will make a statement. [19016]

Miss Widdecombe: The request submitted by Mr. Lynch for repatriation to the Republic of Ireland was referred to the Irish authorities on 20 January 1997. The

Irish authorities acknowledged receipt of the documentation by letter dated 28 January 1997. No further communications have been received in this case.

National Criminal Intelligence Service

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the inquiries into leaks of confidential information from NCIS which took place in each of the last three years, indicating for each by whom the inquiry was conducted and the outcome. [19066]

Mr. Maclean: There have been two inquiries into leaks of confidential information from the NCIS in the last three years.

The first inquiry was in September 1995 and followed the publication in the media of confidential information from a strategic assessment of the impact of Russian organised crime in the United Kingdom. The inquiry was conducted by the Metropolitan police at the request of the Director General of NCIS. The information in question had been circulated to other relevant law enforcement agencies in the normal way and it was not possible to identify who was responsible for the leak.

The second inquiry commenced, at the request of the Director General of NCIS, in December 1995 and was conducted by John Stevens, at that time the Chief Constable of Northumbria. The inquiry was prompted by a case in which telephone intercept material was supplied unlawfully to defence counsel. It also examined the administrative process for handling intercept material and future safeguards. The inquiry found no evidence of corrupt practice at NCIS and all the intercept material has been accounted for. The Director General has welcomed the inquiry's review of procedures for handling intercept material and all of its recommendations are being taken forward.

Child Prostitutes

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children were convicted in the United Kingdom as common prostitutes in each of the last 10 years. [19062]

Mr. Maclean: The available information for England and Wales is given in table A.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has contributed figures shown at table B.

Information on convictions in Scotland are the responsibility for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Table A: Number of females aged under 18 convicted for offences under the Street Offences Act 1959 section 1[1] by age, 1985 to 1995
England and Wales

Year	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total under 18	18+	All ages
1985	—	—	—	—	—	5	31	223	259	8,900	9,159
1986	1	—	—	—	2	2	24	268	297	8,794	9,091
1987	—	—	—	—	—	1	24	313	338	7,833	8,171
1988	—	—	—	1	—	7	22	420	450	8,379	8,829
1989	—	—	—	—	—	5	24	361	390	9,742	10,132
1990	—	—	—	—	1	2	22	346	371	9,649	10,020
1991	—	—	3	—	—	5	35	278	321	9,238	9,559
1992	—	—	1	—	—	7	25	215	248	8,530	8,778
1993	—	—	—	—	—	7	25	73	105	7,243	7,348
1994	—	—	—	1	3	13	35	89	141	6,433	6,574
1995	—	—	—	—	—	4	25	72	101	5,411	5,512

[1] Common prostitute loitering or soliciting for the purpose of prostitution.

Table B: Number of persons aged under 18 convicted for offences under the Towns Improvement[1] Act 1854 section 72 and the Belfast borough bylaws, 1987 to 1996

Northern Ireland

Year	Total under 18	18+	All ages
1987	—	50	50
1988	—	53	53
1989	—	52	52
1990	3	57	60
1991	—	43	43
1992	—	39	39
1993	—	16	16
1994	—	6	6
1995	—	2	2
1996	—	—	—

[1] Prostitutes—soliciting.

Mr. Sheerman: To the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that criminal proceedings are taken against those who abuse children and young people as suppliers or purchasers of child prostitutes. [19091]

Mr. Maclean: The institution of criminal proceedings is a matter for the police and the prosecuting authorities. The Government regard the abuse of children in prostitution as a serious matter and are satisfied that all working in this field share that concern.

The Government are currently reviewing the penalties available for all sex offences, including those relating to the organisation of prostitution, to ensure that these are adequate to reflect the gravity of the behaviour concerned.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications were made in *(a)* January 1996, *(b)* February 1996, *(c)* January 1997 and *(d)* February 1997. [19095]

Mr. Kirkhope: A total of 2,275 applications for asylum in the United Kingdom were lodged in January 1997; data for February are not yet available. The equivalent figures for January and February 1996 were 3,310 and 2,850 respectively.

Polling Stations (Disabled Access)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of polling stations require remedial work to facilitate access for disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [19229]

Mr. Sackville: It is the responsibility of district and London borough councils under section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by schedule 4 of the Representation of the People Act 1985, to designate as polling places, so far as is reasonable and practicable, only places which are accessible to the disabled. Councils are not required to account to this Department for their progress in meeting this responsibility and no details are available centrally. However, acting returning officers are regularly encouraged to apply to the Home Office for grants towards the cost of providing temporary ramps where it is not possible for them to use a building for the purpose of a polling place which would otherwise afford easy access for the disabled. £175,400 has been provided in grant aid for these purposes since the last general election.

Deaths in Police Custody

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have died in police custody in the Metropolitan police area in each of the last five years. [19489]

Mr. Maclean: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has provided the following information on the number of deaths in police custody, based on Home Office deaths in custody criteria:

Year (January–December)	*Men*	*Women*
1992	14	1
1993	16	2
1994	14	0
1995	12	0
1996	18	2
Total	74	5

CS Gas

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions Merseyside police have used CS gas; what criteria apply in respect of its use; and if he will make a statement. [19616]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* I understand that Merseyside police have used hand-held CS spray 300 times since 1 March 1996. The use of any form of force is governed by section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967. The Association of Chief Police Officers has issued guidelines to forces on the use of CS spray.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (Institutes)

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much of the money paid in respect of staff costs to each of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council-owned institutes in 1994–95 was attributable to *(a)* salaries and *(b)* other costs; and if he will indicate the nature of those other costs. [18884]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The figures are shown in the table. "Other" includes research expenditure and general maintenance and running costs. Capital is excluded.

£000

	Salaries	*Other*	*Total*
Institute for Animal Health	9,827	7,408	17,235
Babraham Institute	6,605	4,160	10,765
Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research	7,836	3,642	11,478
Institute of Arable Crops Research	11,113	4,389	15,502
John Innes Centre	8,524	4,485	13,009
Institute of Food Research	9,379	6,602	15,981
Silsoe Research Institute	5,286	1,843	7,129
Rolsin Institute	4,320	3,104	7,424
Total	62,890	35,633	98,523

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19348]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large numbers of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for my Department systematically to calculate the cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Research Councils

Mr. Garnier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will place in the Library further memorandums concerning the prior options reviews of research council establishments. [20063]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have placed in the Library of the House today memorandums setting out the rationale for the decisions concerning research council establishments which my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced on 29 January, *Official Report*, column *231–32*.

Chemical Weapons Convention Advisory Committee

Mr. Garnier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will appoint the chairman of the Chemical Weapons Convention Advisory Committee. [20064]

Mr. Nelson: I have appointed Dr. T. D. Inch, Secretary-General of the Royal Society of Chemistry, as chairman of the National Authority Advisory Committee for an initial period of four years.

The other members will be announced in time for the committee to be in place before the convention enters into force on 29 April 1997.

Lloyd's (Solvency)

Mr. Garnier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he intends to implement to improve the supervision of the solvency of Lloyd's of London. [20065]

Mr. Nelson: Following the successful completion of Lloyd's reconstruction and renewal plan last year, I have been considering whether any steps need to be taken to strengthen further the protection to policyholders provided by the solvency margin regime in the Insurance Companies Act 1982, as adapted for Lloyd's.

I have concluded that it would be appropriate to introduce an additional solvency test for Lloyd's supplementing those already specified in the legislation. I have today laid regulations before the House that will achieve this with effect from the end of this year.

Under the arrangements provided for by the Insurance Companies Act 1982, Lloyd's is currently subject to two separate solvency tests. The first requires an auditor to certify that there are assets, including centrally held assets, of sufficient value to meet the liabilities of each member of Lloyd's. The second test treats Lloyd's as a whole as if it were a single insurance company and requires Lloyd's to maintain sufficient assets to cover its total liabilities plus a minimum margin of solvency. That global required solvency margin equates broadly to the greater of 16 per cent. of the total net premiums in the previous year or 23 per cent. of the average total claims incurred over a three-year period. Failure to meet either of these test would trigger the intervention powers of the Secretary of State.

The third test which I have now introduced requires Lloyd's to demonstrate that it can cover an additional "combined" minimum margin of solvency. This combined margin is calculated on the basis of a prescribed level of net assets for each member, in addition to that required to cover their liabilities. If any members are unable to demonstrate such net assets, Lloyd's will be required to show that sufficient centrally held assets—principally the central fund—are available to cover the aggregate of the individual shortfalls. The assets of other members which exceed their prescribed level of net assets may not be taken into account for these purposes. Failure to meet this additional test would also trigger the Secretary of State's intervention powers.

This additional test reflects better the fact that members of Lloyd's are not responsible for each other's losses, while recognising that Lloyd's does have centrally held assets that can be used to cover any shortfalls. It will provide policyholders with an additional degree of protection against adverse developments, and will also encourage a prompt response should financial difficulties ever begin to develop at Lloyd's in the future. Lloyd's is reviewing its own financial requirements, placed on its members and other aspects of the Lloyd's chain of security, in ways which should complement the changes I am announcing today and which should enhance further the security of policyholders.

Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the impact to date on lending under the small firms loan guarantee scheme of the changes to the scheme implemented from 1 September 1996. [19736]

Mr. Page: It is too early to assess the impact on lending of the changes introduced on 1 September 1996.

Research and Development

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, columns *61–62*, if he will list *(a)* the current number of jobs associated with each of the projects listed; and *(b)* the amount of regional aid awarded in each region and each year to the projects. [19355]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost because it is not held centrally by my Department.

Advisory Committee on Chemical Weapons

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he plans to announce the chairmanship and membership of the Advisory Committee on Chemical Weapons. [19258]

Mr. Anthony Nelson *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* I have appointed Dr. Tom Inch, secretary-general of the Royal Society of Chemistry, to chair the Chemical Weapons Advisory Committee. The appointment will be for an initial period of four years.

The other members of the committee will be selected following consultations with Dr. Inch and an announcement will be made as soon as possible, so that the committee can be in place before the chemical weapons convention enters into force on 29 April 1997.

Architectural Technologists (Guidance Booklet)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take steps to permit the British Institute of Architectural Technologists to publish an appointment and fee scale guidance booklet equivalent to those published by other allied professional bodies. [19517]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The decision to publish such a guidance booklet is one for the British Institute of Architectural Technologists. However, the institute should take into account the provisions of the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976.

Clean Technologies

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives exist to promote investment and development in clean technologies in United Kingdom businesses; and if he will make a statement. [19328]

Mr. Page: The joint Department of Trade and Industry and Department of the Environment environmental technology best practice programme—ETBPP—has as one of its main aims the encouragement of the take-up and development by business of cost-effective cleaner technology. Support for collaborative research and development with European partners under EUREKA, LINK—particularly the waste minimisation through recycling, reuse and recovery in industry programme—and the Office of Science and Technology's funding of research councils, are also relevant. In addition, proposals to help business enhance environmental performance and competitiveness were among those eligible to bid for support under the sector and local challenges.

Environmental Technologies

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the level of funding for research into environmental technologies in each of the last five years; and what funding is planned for 1997–98. [19330]

Mr. Page: Support for research and development on technologies for a specific environmental function under the environmental technology innovation scheme, EUREKA-EUROENVIRON and the environmental technology best practice programme was as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1992–93	2.91
1993–94	2.95
1994–95	2.53
1995–96	1.75
1996–97 (to 28 February 1997)	0.71
Total	10.85

That support includes programmes operated by both the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment.

Some of the research and development supported under general DTI programmes, such as the small firms merit award for research and technology, the support for products under research, LINK and other EUREKA activities and through the Office for Science and Technology's funding of research councils, will be relevant to environment technologies.

Support for new and renewable energy technologies and clean coal technologies was as follows:

£ million

Year	*New and renewables*	*Clean coal*
1992–93	25.5	4.0
1993–94	25.2	7.8
1994–95	19.1	7.9
1995–96	18.3	7.7
1996–97 (to 31 December 1996)	10.2	3.4

Estimates for 1997–98 will be published in the Department's expenditure plans report.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives and schemes for assistance there are to encourage the export of *(a)* British environmental technologies and *(b)* British environmental services. [19329]

Mr. Page: The environmental technology and services sector can, of course, benefit from the full range of overseas trade services which are available to all UK companies. Proposals to help businesses enhance their export performance were among those eligible to bid for support under the sector challenge. In addition, under the business and environment programme, the joint environmental markets unit—JEMU—undertakes a variety of activities specifically to assist the environmental industry.

JEMU has done much to raise the profile of the industry overseas. Our export services now treat environmental technology as a priority in nearly two-thirds of Britain's top 80 markets. The unit has published around 60 market opportunity briefs and five sector reports to help UK suppliers identify markets and benchmark performance. JEMU has established a database of more than 4,500 UK suppliers of environmental technology and expertise which is used to answer queries from overseas customers looking for British sources of supply as well as identifying companies for missions and other awareness-raising events. JEMU also works closely with the industry to help representative bodies to identify and address competitiveness issues, such as the major problem of fragmentation, which impact on export performance. This has included help with establishing world-class certification schemes and benchmarking trade association performance.

Pollution Abatement Technology

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the United Kingdom's share of the world market for pollution abatement technology; what estimate he has made of the size of that market share during *(a)* the next five years and *(b)* the next 10 years. [19327]

Mr. Page: This information is not available.

Roslin Institute

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much public money has been provided to the Roslin institute in each year since its inception. [18964]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The figures for income from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and other research councils and Government Departments are:

1993–94: £6.3 million

1994–95: £6.6 million

1995–96: £7.3 million.

SCOTLAND

Rural Residents (Buses)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of rural residents who live more than half a mile from a bus route; and if he will make a statement. [18404]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None. Our recently published Green Paper, "Keep Scotland Moving", (Cm 3565) however recognised the clear role of transport

in rural areas of Scotland in enhancing accessibility, promoting economic development and preventing depopulation.

Schools (Safe Routes)

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made is implementing safe routes to schools. [18380]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The identification and implementation of safe routes to school is primarily the responsibility of local authorities. Projects involving safe routes to school may be eligible for funding from the Scottish cycle challenge fund announced in December 1996.

Local Government (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the visits abroad made by councillors and officials of Scottish councils in the last three years which were paid for out of public funds. [18379]

Mr. George Kynoch: I am aware that expenditure by councils on overseas visits is quite rightly a matter of substantial public concern, particularly in the light of recent allegations about overseas visits by Glasgow city councillors. That is why I wrote to the leader of Glasgow city council on 7 February asking for information on this. The response which I have received from that council reveals that a total of £79,656 has been spent during the current financial year sending councillors to overseas events which include a cultural symposium in St. Petersburg, a "City Days" event in Rostov-on-Don, the international rose trials exhibition in Rome and a meeting of the International Badminton Federation in Hong Kong. The information from Glasgow records amounts of up to £2,819 being paid as subsistence to individual councillors for particular overseas visits. Glasgow city council has not submitted information about expenditure on officials' visits. I have placed a copy of Glasgow city council's letter in the Library of the House.

I also wrote to the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on 7 February asking for information on other councils' expenditure sending councillors to conferences and overseas visits. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has so far failed to reply, and I am today asking for information about councillors' and officials' visits directly from councils. I intend to make this information publicly available when I have received it.

Blind and Partially Sighted People

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are registered *(a)* blind and *(b)* partial-sighted. [19085]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At 31 March 1995, there were 21,124 people registered blind and 9,351 people registered partially-sighted in Scotland.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19339]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large number of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for the Scottish Office to systematically calculate the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Oral Cancer

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients received hospital in-patient or day care for oral cancer in each of the last five years. [19315]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table.

Total number of in-patient and day cases discharges for oral cancer: Scotland

Year	*In-patient*	*Day case*	*Total*
1991–92	1,014	66	1,080
1992–93	1,063	93	1,156
1993–94	1,107	128	1,235
1994–95	1,087	115	1,202
1995–96	1,164	207	1,371

Cataracts

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients received hospital in-patient or day care for cataracts in each of the last five years. [19316]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table.

Total number of in-patient and day case discharges for cataract extraction: Scotland

Year	*In-patient*	*Day case*	*Total*
1991–92	10,645	41	10,686
1992–93	12,384	324	12,708
1993–94	12,276	1,420	13,696
1994–95	12,270	2,847	15,117
1995–96	11,459	4,332	15,791

Housing

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *678*, in what circumstances a local authority can act under the terms of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 against the owner of a privately owned property in a state of disrepair; what action these powers require the owner of the property to take; what liability use of this legislation beings on the local authority; and which clauses of that Act confer on the local authority the power to act. [19530]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Section 87 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 enables a local authority to serve a notice on the owners of buildings requiring that they be brought into a reasonable state of repair. If the owners comply the authority may be liable to pay repairs grant. If they do not comply the local authority may arrange and pay for the works to be carried out and recover the cost from the owner. If in the interests of health or safety, or to prevent damage to any property, it appears necessary to an authority to repair a building immediately it may do so without prior notice and recover the costs from the owner.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers of electors in each parliamentary constituency in Scotland on the registers that will be used in the general election. [19622]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table.

	Number
Aberdeen Central	54,548
Aberdeen North	54,895
Aberdeen South	60,982
Airdrie and Shotts	58,255
Angus	60,359
Argyll and Bute	49,982
Ayr	56,455
Banff and Buchan	59,189
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross	41,953
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	66,392
Central Fife	58,884
Clydebank and Milngavie	52,643
Clydesdale	64,048
Coatbridge and Chryston	52,547
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	48,590
Cunninghame North	56,147
Cunninghame South	50,234
Dumbarton	56,875
Dumfries	63,360
Dundee East	58,790
Dundee West	57,809
Dunfermline East	52,530
Dunfermline West	53,005
East Kilbride	65,915
East Lothian	57,988
Eastwood	67,525
Edinburgh Central	63,969
Edinburgh East and Musselburgh	60,097
Edinburgh North and Leith	61,962
Edinburgh Pentlands	60,338
Edinburgh South	62,949
Edinburgh West	61,715
Falkirk East	57,331
Falkirk West	53,308
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	53,273
Glasgow Anniesland	53,324
Glasgow Baillieston	51,589
Glasgow Cathcart	49,765
Glasgow Govan	50,150
Glasgow Kelvin	57,695
Glasgow Maryhill	52,854
Glasgow Pollok	49,693
Glasgow Rutherglen	51,106
Glasgow Shettleston	48,270
Glasgow Springburn	53,814
Gordon	59,503
Greenock and Inverclyde	49,364
Hamilton North and Bellshill	54,158
Hamilton South	47,023
Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber	66,278
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	62,091
Kirkcaldy	52,618
Linlithgow	54,258
Livingston	60,944
Midlothian	48,045
Moray	58,957
Motherwell and Wishaw	52,702
North East Fife	59,352
North Tayside	62,007
Ochil	57,170
Orkney and Shetland	32,621
Paisley North	50,261
Paisley South	54,573
Perth	60,887
Ross, Skye and Inverness West	56,141
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	47,739
Stirling	53,069
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	63,822
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	51,448
West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine	59,884
West Renfrewshire	53,096
Western Isles	23,293

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many hospitals screen patients for MRSA on admission; [19846]

(2) how many hospitals have reported cases of MRSA in the past 12 months; how many cases there were in total; and in how many cases MRSA was the cause of or contributed to death; [19847]

(3) what measures are being taken to prevent the spread of MRSA outside hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [19848]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information regarding hospitals is not held in the form requested, but the Scottish centre for infection and environmental health monitors the overall incidence of MRSA across Scotland.

In May 1996, the Scottish Office issued information and advice to health boards, social service departments and residential nursing homes about the care of people in the community with MRSA and about infection control generally in residential and nursing homes. This included Department of Health publications entitled "MRSA—What nursing and residential homes need to know" and "Guidelines on the Control of Infection in Residential Homes", copies of which are in the Library.

Fisheries Research Services Agency

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Fisheries Research Services Agency will be established; and when its framework document will be published. [20101]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Fisheries Research Services will come into existence as an executive agency on 1 April 1997. Its framework document has been published today and a copy has been placed in the Library.

TREASURY

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16178]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury does not use private employment agencies for the recruitment of permanent staff. In the last three years, it has used only the Recruitment and Assessment Agency. However, it does use Brook Street Bureau plc and Excel Recruitment Ltd. to provide emergency secretarial cover on an *ad hoc* basis—and also Employment Services to recruit administrative staff on a casual basis.

The responses for the Department's agencies are given below.

HM Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue

As the recruitment of staff has been delegated to local budget holders the information requested is not readily available.

Royal Mint

In 1996 the Royal Mint used two agencies. The answers to the specific points are given below.

(a) NBS consultants

(b) 1

(c) £14,000

(d) Permanent

(a) Office Angels

(b) 1

(c) £3,000

(d) Permanent

In 1995, the Royal Mint also used the following agency to employ a casual for six months: Hays Accountancy Personnel—cost £916.

Paymaster

Paymaster has not used private employment agencies during the past three years.

Office for National Statistics

The ONS was formed on 1 April 1996 following the merger of the Central Statistical Office—a Chancellor's Department—and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys—formerly the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Health. The CSO assumed responsibility for part of the former Employment Department in July 1995. The answer refers only to the former CSO part of the ONS.

The CSO used private employment agencies to provide short-term only temporary cover, usually for secretarial staff and messengers. The number of such staff employed is not readily available, nor the cost to CSO. The usual period of employment was about two weeks.

The private employment agencies used for the employment of temporary staff were: Josephine Sammons Ltd., Adecco Alfred Marks and Meridian.

The Recruitment and Assessment Agency was used to assist in recruitment when it was a Government agency. Its successor, Capita, was similarly used in November–December 1996 for an executive officer recruitment scheme. The total cost was £14,733.32. The median cost per person recruited was £998.75. All 13 recruits were offered initial one-year contracts, with the possibility of subsequent permanent status.

Valuation Office

The following is all the information available from the Valuation Office's new financial system. The system holds information relating to payments made on invoices but does not hold the detail necessary to ascertain the answers to parts (b) and (d) of the question.

(a) The agencies used by the VA are:

Brook Street Bureau

Back-up Training and Personnel

Blue Arrow Personnel

Susan Hamilton Personnel

Michael Page UK Ltd.

Reed Staffing Services

The Capita Group PLC

Manpower PLC

Kelly Services (UK)

Adecco Alfred Marks.

(c) Figures are only available from the NFS for this financial year—1 April 1996 to date: £66,280.82.

Public Debt

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those EU states whose public debt as a ratio of gross domestic product price exceeded the ratio as provided by the Maastricht treaty at the latest available date; and if he will indicate the percentage by which the debt exceeded the ratio. [17386]

Mr. Jack: Figures for public debt as a ratio of gross domestic product can be found in the publication "European Economy" which is available in the Library.

European Tax Levels

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each European Economic Area country the amount of tax as a percentage of income paid by *(a)* a married couple with two children under 11 and *(b)* a single taxpayer without children on (i) average, (ii) highest quintile and (iii) lowest quintile incomes. [18589]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Married Couples (Taxation)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost in 1997–98 of giving a married taxpayer the option of *(a)* transferring his or her basic personal allowance to their spouse and *(b)* allowing married couples to be assessed jointly in each case on the basis that the allowances to which each was entitled would be added together and set against the joint income and the amounts chargeable at the lower and basic rates would be double that chargeable in the case of a single person and that couples would not also receive the married couples allowance. [18590]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The estimated full-year cost at 1997–98 income levels of allowing couples to transfer their unused personal allowance to their spouse is estimated to be £3.4 billion. If married couples could opt for joint assessment, the estimated total full year cost would be £5.2 billion. These figures do not take into account any behavioural change which would result from such measures.

Inland Revenue (Targets)

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *406*, when the Inland Revenue last published its performance against annual targets; and when it next expects to do so. [19484]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The Inland Revenue last published its performance against annual targets on 4 November 1996 in its report for the year ending 31 March 1996 (Cm 3446). The report for the year ended 31 March 1997 is expected to be published in autumn 1997. The Inland Revenue also expects to publish the 1996–97 customer service results against targets for the regional executive offices responsible for the local tax offices in a press release in early summer 1997. Leaflets for customers showing the results will be available in local tax offices at the same time.

TRANSPORT

Automatic Train Protector System

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the advantages of fitting the automatic train protector system to locomotives; and if he will make a statement. [19666]

Mr. Watts: On 30 March 1995 the then Secretary of State for Transport announced that the Government had concluded, on the basis of independent advice from the Health and Safety Commission, that applications of automatic train protection—ATP—may be justified on certain parts of the rail network. Advice received from both the British Railways Board and Railtrack, and endorsed by HSC, confirmed that network-wide fitment of ATP, as piloted, was not reasonably practicable, because the costs far outweighed the benefits and that there were alternative safety investments which would be likely to yield greater effectiveness in terms of lives saved, and be better value for money. This information was subsequently published in "Railways Safety", HM chief inspecting officer of railways' annual report on the safety record of the railways in Great Britain during 1994–95, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Railtrack remains committed to a co-ordinated programme to reduce the risks of ATP preventable accidents. These measures comprise Railtrack's train protection strategy and are described in a letter from the chairman of Railtrack dated 21 November 1995, which was placed in the Library of the House on 29 November 1995. The strategy includes a driver reminder appliance—DRA—due to be installed in train cabs during 1997 and completed in 1998, and a train protection warning system—TPWS—due to be piloted in 1997 and to commence installation by early 1998. Subject to technical feasibility and the test of reasonable practicability, TPWS will be installed at those locations assessed by Railtrack to be at greatest risk of ATP preventable accidents.

In the longer term, ATP measures will be included in the Heathrow express route, the west coast main line modernisation scheme, the channel tunnel rail link and any future high speed lines. The Great Western and Chiltern line pilot schemes will continue. In addition, full consideration will be given by Railtrack to the option of including ATP functions in all future major resignalling schemes.

Ambulance Service Minibus Drivers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what regulations govern the requirement for ambulance trust district transport service minibus drivers to be medically tested for their public service vehicle licences; and when these regulations were last reviewed. [19671]

Mr. Bowis: The medical requirements for drivers of minibuses depend on a number of factors, including the number of seats in the vehicle and the date on which the driver obtained a licence. The requirements were reviewed recently in the context of the second EC driving licence directive, whose licensing provisions were implemented, with effect from 1 January 1997, by the Driving Licences (Community Driving Licence) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996/1974), the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996/2824), and the Minibus and Other Section 19 Permit Buses (Amendment) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996/3088).

Ferry Safety

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the percentage of ferries operating to and from UK ports which do not meet SOLAS 90 standards; and if he will make a statement. [18683]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* All ferries operating to and from UK ports comply with the relevant survivability standard which applies to them. The SOLAS 90—safety of life at sea—standard was being phased in on a timescale ending in 2007. That standard and timescale have now been superseded by the Stockholm agreement, which requires a higher standard phased in on a much shorter timescale, ending in 2002. At least 35 per cent. of all seagoing ro-ro passenger ferries operating to and from United Kingdom ports already meet the SOLAS 90 standard.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those ferries operating to or from UK ports which do not meet SOLAS 90 standards; and if he will make a statement. [18682]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The Government have no plans to publish a list of ferries related to the SOLAS 90 survivability standard alone. New regulations come into force on 1 April to implement the Stockholm agreement on ferry safety, which sets a survivability standard higher than SOLAS 90. Under the regulations, all ferries operating regular scheduled international services to or from United Kingdom ports, and on UK domestic routes where conditions are

comparable to those on international voyages, will be required to meet the SOLAS 90 survivability standard and have the ability to resist capsize with up to half a metre of water on the car deck. We shall be publishing a list in April showing the dates by which individual ferries must comply with this new higher standard. Some vessels operating to United Kingdom ports already meet that standard.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of whether the Pride of Cherbourg, the Pride of Hampshire, the Havelet and the Sea France Matisse will comply with the 1996 Stockholm agreement on ferry safety by 1 April 1997. [18770]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* The Government are implementing the Stockholm agreement by the Merchant Shipping (Ro-Ro Passenger Ship Survivability) Regulations 1997 which will come into force on 1 April. We will publish an updated list of ferries operating to and from UK ports once the regulations come into force, which will clearly indicate the compliance date for each ferry.

The timescale for implementation agreed internationally means that those ferries further from standard must be modified sooner than those closer to it. The regulations provide that those ferries furthest from the standard must comply with it not later than at their first periodical survey following 1 April 1997. There is a duty on shipowners to ensure that their ships comply by the relevant deadline in each case and the regulations contain penalties for non-compliance.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all ferry accidents reported to UK authorities since 1987 indicating *(a)* the nature of the accident, *(b)* the ferry company involved and *(c)* the date; and if he will make a statement. [18684]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The Marine Accident Investigation Branch, which was established in 1989, investigates accidents to United Kingdom ships or other vessels in United Kingdom territorial waters. If appropriate, a report of the investigation is published. There have been five published reports of investigations of accidents involving ferries since 1989, as follows:

Nature of accident	*Ferry company*	*Date of accident*
Grounding	Sealink	19 September 1989
Fatal accident	North Sea Ferries	5 February 1992
Fire	Sally Line	25 August 1994
Machinery damage	P and O European Ferries	25 September 1994
Stranding	Stena Line	19 September 1995

Other accidents to ferries which have been subject to inspectors' investigations since the establishment of MAIB's database in 1991 are listed hereafter.

Nature of accident	*Ferry company*	*Date of accident*
Fire	Sealink Stena	23 March 1991
Loss of cargo	Swedish Gulf Shipping	4 May 1991
Fatal accident	P and O European Ferries	20 June 1991
Collision	Wightlink Ltd.	30 June 1991
Machinery failure	Hoverspeed Ltd.	4 October 1991
Fire	Sally Line Ltd.	20 October 1991
Collision	P and O European Ferries	8 December 1991
Accident to person	Caledonian MacBrayne	31 March 1992
Collision	North Sea Ferries	10 April 1992
Collision	P and O European Ferries	8 June 1992
Accident to person	P and O European Ferries	5 July 1992
Machinery failure	Red Funnel	18 August 1992
Fire	Wightlink	15 October 1992
Heavy weather damage	Stena Sealink	17 January 1993
Collision	Caledonian MacBrayne	11 February 1993
Accident to person	Commodore Shipping	17 April 1993
Machinery failure	Caledonian MacBrayne	30 August 1993
Collision	P and O/Brittany Ferries	25 September 1993
Fire	Hoverspeed Ltd.	21 March 1994
Accident to person	Red Funnel	8 November 1994
Accident to person	Stena Line Ltd.	8 December 1994
Accident to person	P and O European Ferries	7 March 1995
Grounding	Channiland	17 April 1995
Fire	Sealink Transmanche	21 August 1995
Heavy weather damage	Sea Containers Ltd.	27 September 1995
Heavy weather damage	P and O European Ferries	14 December 1995
Fatal accident	P and O European Ferries	17 February 1996
Heavy weather damage	P and O European Ferries	21 February 1996
Accident to person	North Sea Ferries	28 October 1996

Other more minor incidents have also been reported to MAIB during the period.

Air Traffic Services (Contracts)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what additional payments have been made by National Air Traffic Services to the new en-route centre contractor since the original contract was signed; to what they related; and when they were made; [19401]

(2) if he will make a statement on the extent to which the full range of functions specified in the original contract for the new en-route centre will be available when it becomes operational; and what compensation will be sought from the contractor for restrictions in that availability; [19403]

(3) if he will list the contract change orders which have been agreed between the Civil Aviation Authority and National Air Traffic Services and the contractor involved with the new en-route centre since the contract was signed. [19402]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* I have asked the chairman of the CAA to reply direct to the hon. Member on this matter.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

UNHCR

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he is giving to the general programmes budget for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 1996. [20008]

Dr. Liam Fox: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has approved a grant of £5 million for UNHCR's general programmes budget for 1997. The UK is one of the foremost national donors of UNHCR; last calendar year, our contributions, both indirect payments and assistance in kind, exceeded £30 million.

Red Cross

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assistance has been provided by the Government to the International Committee of the Red Cross to support its humanitarian work. [20009]

Dr. Liam Fox: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has recently announced a new contribution of £5 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross. This contribution will support programmes which include protection and assistance for victims of conflicts, the dissemination of international humanitarian law, and the provision of humanitarian relief and medical assistance to conflict affected groups.

PRIME MINISTER

Interception of Communications and Security Service Tribunals

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Prime Minister what was the cost in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97 of operating the *(a)* Interception of Communications Tribunal and *(b)* Security Service Tribunal; how many cases have been dealt with by each of these bodies during these periods; and in how many cases complaints have been upheld by the tribunals involved. [19381]

The Prime Minister: The available information is as follows. The outturn for expenditure in 1995–96 for the tribunals and commissioners appointed under the Interception of Communications Act 1985, the Security Service Act 1989 and the Intelligence Services Act 1994 is £47,000. The provision for 1996–97 is £67,000. The Interception of Communications Tribunal completed investigation of 63 complaints in the calendar year 1995 and 34 in 1996. In the same periods, the Security Service Tribunal completed investigation of 25 and 26 complaints respectively. On no occasion did the Interception of Communications Tribunal conclude that sections 2 to 5 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 had been contravened. The Security Service Tribunal made no determination in favour of a complainant.

Official Transport

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Prime Minister what guidelines govern the use by Ministers of official transport in undertaking party political activities. [19404]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Ministers for whom the security authorities exceptionally consider it essential may use their official cars for all journeys by road, including those for party purposes. Otherwise, official transport should not be used for journeys on party business, such as constituency visits or attendance at party meetings; though there is no objection to a Minister using an official car if the meeting involving party business takes place immediately between two official engagements in the course of their working week.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 March. [118595]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Primer Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 March. [18597]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition, to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Interception of Communications

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Prime Minister how many warrants were issued under the Interception of Telecommunications Act 1985 in 1996 by the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Home Affairs covering *(a)* mail interceptions and *(b)* telephone interceptions. [19529]

The Prime Minister: The number of warrants issued in 1996 under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 by the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland are as follows:

	Letters	*Telecommunications*
Home Secretary	69	1,037
Secretary of State for Scotland	0	228

Albania

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *156*, if he will commission an independent expert valuation of the provenance and estimated worth of gifts received from the President of Albania. [19747]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my reply of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *156*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Roads (Water)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what responsibility DOE (NI) has for protecting road users from hazardous road conditions caused by water flowing on to roads from fields and approach roadways to premises in rural areas. [18270]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. Roy Beggs, dated 4 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your recently tabled PQ enquiring about responsibility for protecting road users from icy conditions on roads in rural areas as a result of water flowing onto them from adjoining lands.

Roads Service has no statutory responsibility to treat roads affected by frost or ice. However, as a service to the public, some 6,750 km (27%) of the public road network receives salt treatment when ice or snow is forecast. Responsibility for water flowing from adjacent land onto a road rests with the owner or occupier of the land in question. Where this occurs, Roads Service has powers to serve a notice on the relevant person requiring him or her to do such works as are reasonably practicable to remedy the situation.

I do appreciate the particular difficulties which can arise when water flowing from private land freezes in wintry conditions. If any particular site is giving you concern please do not hesitate to contact the Divisional Roads Manager for the area who will be glad to have the matter investigated.

I do hope you find this information helpful.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) intends to introduce the nursery vouchers scheme to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [18476]

Mr. Ancram: No date has been set for the introduction of the pre-school voucher scheme in Northern Ireland. It is the Government's intention to implement the scheme when resources permit.

Government Training Centres

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the trainee intake at *(a)* Enniskillen, *(b)* Londonderry, *(c)* Omagh and *(d)* Newry training centres in each of the years 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97; and how many of the trainees who enrolled in each year, in each centre, were normally resident in the Republic of Ireland; [18566]

(2) what is the estimated annual cost of a training place at each Government training centre in Northern Ireland; [18565]

(3) how much was paid to trainees at Government training centres in Northern Ireland in respect of board and lodging charges in each of the last five years for which records are available. [18567]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Roy Beggs, dated 10 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency (T and EA), to reply to your questions about the Agency's Training Centres.

Parliamentary Question 418 (Ref: 18566)

Trainee intake figures for 1992/93 and 1993/94 cannot be made available, other than at disproportionate cost, in a form which permits meaningful comparison between Training Centres or with subsequent years. For those 2 years the information available is based on funding provided for numbers of trainee-weeks. To ensure consistency therefore I am providing recruitment figures for the last 3 years which are as follow:

Centre	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Enniskillen	105	155	159
Springtown	319	321	313
Maydown	161	261	136
Omagh	152	178	198
Newry	169	197	214

Any attempt on the part of the Agency to estimate how many of the trainees were normally resident in the Republic of Ireland would be purely speculative. In order to be eligible for entry to the Youth training Programme and subsequently the Jobskills Programme, trainees were required to be resident in Northern Ireland at the time of their application.

Parliamentary Question 420 (Ref: 18565)

The estimated annual cost of a training place in the Training Centre Network for the 1996–97 financial year is £5,261. Funding and apportionment arrangements are such that it is not possible to provide separately the cost of a training place at each Training Centre at other than a wholly disproportionate cost. Financial information systems being installed will enable the Agency to provide this information in the future.

Parliamentary Question 421 (ref: 18567)

The following amounts were paid in respect of board and lodging charges in each of the last five years:

1992–93: £102,453

1993–94: £144,915

1994–95: £125,123

1995–96: £66,889

1996–97: £61,664 (provisional)

I hope you find the information useful.

Housing Executive Dwellings

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will ensure that any repair work following a fire in one of its dwellings brings that dwelling up to the current standard of building regulations; [18971]

(2) if the building regulations apply to dwellings constructed *(a)* by or *(b)* on behalf of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. [18968]

Mr. Moss: I am advised by the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that the answer is yes.

Mr. Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what investigations the Housing Executive carries out to determine whether dwellings erected by it, or on its behalf, comply with building regulations. [18969]

Mr. Moss: I am advised by the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that all dwellings erected either by or on behalf of the Housing Executive are subject to on-site inspections by the building control department of the relevant district council at specified intervals during construction, to ensure compliance with the building regulations.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many hospitals have reported cases of MRSA in Northern Ireland in the past 12 months; how many cases there were in total; and in how many cases MRSA was the cause of or contributed to death; [19849]

(2) what measures are being taken to prevent the spread of MRSA outside hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [19850]

Mr. Moss: Information relating to the number of cases of MRSA in hospitals in Northern Ireland is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Last year the Department issued for distribution to residential and nursing homes a booklet entitled "Guidelines on the Control of Infection in Residential and Nursing Homes" which contained a section on MRSA. On 7 February 1997 two publications dealing specifically with MRSA were issued to a wide range of medical and nursing personnel. These were a "Patient Information" leaflet and a booklet called "Guidelines for Residential and Nursing Home Staff for Management of Residents with Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus".

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Bahrain

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what inquiries officials at the British embassy in Bahrain have undertaken into the detention of Mr. Yasser A. Al-Sayegh; and if he will make a statement. [19017]

Dr. Liam Fox: Mr. Al-Sayegh has been in detention since 5 December 1996 for possessing and distributing illegal pamphlets. Mr. Al-Sayegh is a dual British-Bahraini national, living and working in Bahrain where he has a family. The Bahraini authorities do not recognise dual nationality and denied the British embassy consular access in February. The embassy has no jurisdiction to intervene in his case.

Treaties

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the treaties ratified by Her Majesty's Government during 1996, giving the date of signature for each. [19221]

Dr. Liam Fox: A list of the treaties ratified during 1996 with signature dates will be deposited in the Libraries of the House shortly.

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department established its Internet site; what representations he has received and what data he has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19146]

Mr. Hanley: "FCO On-Line", the worldwide web service of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (diplomatic wing), was launched on 1 May 1995. Updated several times daily, it is now one of the most heavily accessed sites in Whitehall distributing many thousands of documents a week to a world audience. Over 1,000 pages of information are available, including speeches, statements, press releases, consular and travel advice, foreign policy briefing papers, visa forms and more. Recent additions include sound and video files. Anecdotal evidence shows a high level of use by many international organisations worldwide, including London embassies.

A growing number of British missions overseas now have their own web sites, offering public information, sometimes in the vernacular, to a regional audience. These are all referenced on the FCO homepage.

The Overseas Development Administration is a major partner of the successful "OneWorld OnLine" web site, which hosts organisations concerned with human development and global justice.

The addresses are as follows:

FCO: http://www.fco.gov.uk/

ODA: http://www.oneworld.org/oda/

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19344]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large numbers of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for this Department to calculate systematically the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Entry Clearance (Shakil Hamid)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action was taken by the first secretary (immigration) and consul at the British high commission in Islamabad on receipt of letters dated 25 October 1996 and 20 November 1996, from Kenningham Underwood Armstrong, solicitors at Bradford, about the entry clearance application on behalf of Shakil Hamid; when a decision is to be taken on this application; when replies will be sent to the solicitors; and if he will make a statement. [19737]

Dr. Liam Fox: I have asked our high commission in Islamabad to provide a detailed account of the position. Thereafter, I will send the hon. Member a substantive reply as soon as possible.

Albania

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *314*, if he will commission an independent expert valuation of the provenance and estimated worth of gifts from the President of Albania. [19746]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Gifts received by Ministers in their official capacity are dealt with in accordance with the procedures set out in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". The details are not made public. There is no case for an independent valuation.

Entry Clearance (Taqir Mahmood)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision by the British embassy in Islamabad on the application by Taqir Mahmood (Ref. IMM/B2368) to join his wife in the United Kingdom will be made; by what date the documents requested by the post of the sponsor in the United Kingdom were received; and if he will make a statement. [19738]

Dr. Liam Fox: I have asked our high commission in Islamabad to provide me with a detailed account of the position. Thereafter, I will send the hon. Member a substantive reply as soon as possible.

Entry Clearance (Mr. Javed Iqbal)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date a recommendation was received at the British post in Islamabad from the Home Office in London concerning the issuing of entry clearance to Mr. Javed Iqbal (Ref: TH/21422/96) following the upholding of his appeal against refusal to grant him entry to the United Kingdom; on what dates the post referred inquiries about this case to the Home Office in London; and if he will make a statement. [19744]

Dr. Liam Fox: I have asked our high commission in Islamabad to provide me with a detailed account of the position. Thereafter, I will send the hon. Member a substantive reply as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many four-year-olds who have already received three terms of pre-school education in phase one of the voucher scheme have now been sent vouchers in respect of provision for a fourth term. [19011]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Following formal consultation with admission authorities, including local authorities, on the arrangements for national implementation of the nursery education voucher scheme there will be uniform dates by which children become eligible for vouchers. These differ from those used in the first phase.

As a consequence of the change, some children would be left without a voucher for the term before they reach compulsory school age if they were not issued with a fourth voucher. This transitional issue affects an estimated 700 four-year-olds in the phase one local education authority areas in the summer term of 1997. A similar effect will apply for the autumn term of 1997 and the spring term of 1998, involving some 6 per cent. of the estimated number of children eligible to receive three vouchers.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in her Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if she will make a statement. [19346]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large numbers of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for the Department to calculate systematically the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

European Social Fund

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funding has been allocated to the United Kingdom under the European social fund for the period 1994 to 1999. [19077]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The total amount allocated to the United Kingdom from the structural funds over the period 1994 to 1999 is £9,530 million and we expect that £4,344 million of this will be allocated to the European social fund: the precise allocation to the ESF will be known when the current negotiations on the objective 2 programme for 1997–99 have been completed. These figures are based on 1994 prices and an exchange rate of 1.39 ECU to £1.

Pupil to Teacher Ratios

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the pupil to teacher ratio in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each of the last five years. [19678]

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to statistical bulletin 11/96 which shows pupil teacher ratios in maintained schools by local education authority area in England in January 1996. A copy of the bulletin is in the Library.

Primary School Classes

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the number and proportion of children in primary school classes or *(a)* up to 25 pupils, *(b)* 26–30 pupils, *(c)* 31–35 pupils, *(d)* 36–40 pupils and *(e)* 41 and over pupils (i) in each LEA and (ii) nationally. [19259]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Numbers and percentages of pupils in one teacher classes by size in maintained primary schools in each local authority area in England
January 1996

	Up to 25		26–30		31–35		36–40		41+		
	Number of pupils	Percentage[1]	Number of pupils	Percentage[1]	Number of pupils	Percentage[1]	Number of pupils	Percentage[1]	Number of pupils	Percentage[1]	Total pupils
Corporation of London	23	21.5	84	78.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	107
Camden	1,597	18.7	6,487	76.0	410	4.8	37	0.4	0	0.0	8,531
Greenwich	6,380	36.1	9,868	55.9	1,412	8.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	17,660
Hackney	4,494	33.1	8,427	62.0	664	4.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	13,585
Hammersmith	1,935	24.6	4,880	62.2	1,036	13.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	7,851
Islington	3,107	23.3	9,243	69.3	982	7.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	13,332
Kensington and Chelsea	2,099	42.4	2,668	53.9	187	3.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	4,954
Lambeth	6,358	40.9	8,327	53.6	857	5.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	15,542
Lewisham	6,462	36.7	10,244	58.1	917	5.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	17,623
Southwark	5,957	31.0	11,223	58.4	1,979	10.3	72	0.4	0	0.0	19,231
Tower Hamlets	4,103	27.6	9,928	66.7	822	5.5	37	0.2	0	0.0	14,890
Wandsworth	4,766	33.0	7,264	50.5	1,969	13.7	342	2.4	62	0.4	14,423
Westminster	2,873	41.8	3,457	50.3	508	7.4	36	0.5	0	0.0	6,874
Barking	3,580	23.6	9,984	65.8	1,331	8.8	272	1.8	0	0.0	15,167
Barnet	4,784	22.8	14,343	68.4	1,648	7.9	152	0.7	48	0.2	20,975
Bexley	2,674	12.9	9,162	44.4	8,673	42.0	148	0.7	0	0.0	20,657
Brent	4,758	25.3	11,797	62.7	2,053	10.9	111	0.6	95	0.5	18,814
Bromley	2,401	10.3	9,151	39.1	11,664	49.8	186	0.8	0	0.0	23,402
Croydon	3,418	13.1	16,235	62.5	6,083	23.4	258	1.0	0	0.0	25,994
Ealing	5,653	25.2	11,302	50.3	5,246	23.4	218	1.0	44	0.2	22,463
Enfield	2,057	9.5	10,659	49.4	8,804	40.8	36	0.2	0	0.0	21,556
Haringey	3,654	21.8	12,130	72.5	948	5.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	16,732
Harrow	2,128	13.5	9,784	62.1	3,797	24.1	36	0.2	0	0.0	15,745
Havering	3,489	17.6	10,615	53.7	5,443	27.5	185	0.9	50	0.3	19,782
Hillingdon	5,444	29.1	8,447	45.1	4,361	23.3	418	2.2	41	0.2	18,711
Hounslow	3,336	20.2	7,483	45.4	4,996	30.3	637	3.9	41	0.2	16,493
Kingston upon Thames	869	8.6	2,160	21.3	6,610	65.3	438	4.3	47	0.5	10,124
Merton	2,392	18.7	6,459	50.4	3,560	27.8	344	2.7	51	0.4	12,806
Newham	3,111	12.9	18,694	77.3	2,177	9.0	152	0.6	52	0.2	24,186
Redbridge	1,930	11.2	6,205	36.1	8,518	49.5	542	3.2	0	0.0	17,195
Richmond upon Thames	2,453	23.7	5,609	54.1	2,309	22.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	10,371
Sutton	2,599	20.1	6,067	47.1	3,868	29.9	367	2.8	0	0.0	12,921
Waltham Forest	4,216	23.6	10,387	58.1	3,282	18.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	17,885
Birmingham	16,684	17.1	55,058	56.5	24,041	24.7	1,444	1.5	157	0.2	97,384
Coventry	5,839	21.7	13,476	50.0	7,108	26.4	530	2.0	0	0.0	26,953
Dudley	6,528	26.6	11,420	46.5	5,389	21.9	454	1.8	775	3.2	24,566
Sandwell	4,666	16.4	11,991	42.1	10,269	36.1	1,460	5.1	83	0.3	28,469
Solihull	3,427	18.0	7,247	38.0	7,488	39.3	915	4.8	0	0.0	19,077
Walsall	7,622	32.8	8,390	36.1	6,351	27.3	845	3.6	45	0.2	23,253
Wolverhampton	6,186	28.3	8,902	40.7	5,684	26.0	845	3.9	233	1.1	21,850
Knowsley	4,335	24.1	8,399	46.7	4,599	25.6	603	3.4	52	0.3	17,988
Liverpool	12,584	27.2	21,664	46.8	11,461	24.8	590	1.3	0	0.0	46,299
St. Helens	4,643	31.4	4,563	30.9	4,360	29.5	1,120	7.6	83	0.6	14,769
Sefton	5,701	22.7	8,763	34.9	9,677	38.5	993	4.0	0	0.0	25,134
Wirral	9,168	31.1	13,357	45.3	6,505	22.0	482	1.6	0	0.0	29,512
Bolton	5,160	21.9	6,712	28.5	8,924	37.8	2,260	9.6	535	2.3	23,591
Bury	2,538	15.8	6,551	40.8	6,125	38.1	843	5.3	0	0.0	16,057
Manchester	10,716	25.2	22,143	52.0	7,968	18.7	1,137	2.7	582	1.4	42,546
Oldham	3,490	16.1	8,785	40.5	8,440	38.9	816	3.8	178	0.8	21,709
Rochdale	2,032	10.5	8,992	46.5	7,687	39.7	588	3.0	41	0.2	19,340
Salford	6,098	26.7	9,754	42.7	5,750	25.2	933	4.1	314	1.4	22,849
Stockport	5,191	20.6	11,735	46.6	7,045	28.0	1,085	4.3	117	0.5	25,173
Tameside	2,534	11.7	7,670	35.3	10,552	48.6	956	4.4	0	0.0	21,712
Trafford	3,013	15.7	6,801	35.4	8,286	43.1	1,103	5.7	0	0.0	19,203
Wigan	5,001	19.2	9,970	38.3	8,702	33.4	2,258	8.7	127	0.5	26,058
Barnsley	3,618	17.7	8,203	40.0	7,926	38.7	599	2.9	152	0.7	20,498
Doncaster	5,227	19.1	12,525	45.8	7,870	28.8	1,739	6.4	0	0.0	27,361
Rotherham	5,984	25.7	11,590	49.7	5,310	22.8	422	1.8	0	0.0	23,306
Sheffield	9,897	24.8	18,895	47.3	9,684	24.2	1,268	3.2	229	0.6	39,973
Bradford	6,693	20.0	15,247	45.7	9,852	29.5	1,554	4.7	43	0.1	33,389
Calderdale	3,737	20.2	8,406	45.5	5,990	32.4	296	1.6	45	0.2	18,474
Kirklees	5,614	17.3	12,451	38.4	12,402	38.2	1,854	5.7	139	0.4	32,460
Leeds	11,605	19.1	27,756	45.6	18,345	30.2	2,866	4.7	244	0.4	60,816
Wakefield	5,060	17.9	12,583	44.4	9,071	32.0	1,550	5.5	52	0.2	28,316
Gateshead	5,463	32.1	9,101	53.5	2,327	13.7	116	0.7	0	0.0	17,007
Newcastle upon Tyne	4,528	22.1	9,174	44.8	5,737	28.0	1,006	4.9	49	0.2	20,494
North Tyneside	3,604	23.3	6,944	45.0	4,322	28.0	525	3.4	50	0.3	15,445
South Tyneside	3,765	25.6	6,878	46.8	3,331	22.6	637	4.3	99	0.7	14,710
Sunderland	11,028	40.1	12,345	44.9	3,963	14.4	185	0.7	0	0.0	27,521
Isles of Scilly	151	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	151
Avon	14,741	19.0	36,166	46.6	25,060	32.3	1,543	2.0	44	0.1	77,554
Bedfordshire	10,321	26.5	16,829	43.1	9,269	23.8	2,116	5.4	482	1.2	39,017
Berkshire	13,121	21.9	28,517	47.6	16,895	28.2	1,368	2.3	46	0.1	59,947
Buckinghamshire	14,055	23.2	23,689	39.2	18,981	31.4	3,400	5.6	372	0.6	60,497

Numbers and percentages of pupils in one teacher classes by size in maintained primary schools in each local authority area in England January 1996

	Up to 25		26–30		31–35		36–40		41+		
	Number of pupils	Percentage[1]	Number of pupils	Percentage[1]	Number of pupils	Percentage[1]	Number of pupils	Percentage[1]	Number of pupils	Percentage[1]	Total pupils
Cambridgeshire	11,265	19.8	27,535	48.4	17,039	30.0	1,026	1.8	0	0.0	56,865
Cheshire	17,936	20.8	36,276	42.0	28,174	32.6	3,909	4.5	142	0.2	86,437
Cleveland	15,662	26.7	29,231	49.7	11,239	19.1	2,630	4.5	0	0.0	58,762
Cornwall	9,028	22.7	15,827	39.8	13,611	34.2	1,284	3.2	41	0.1	39,791
Cumbria	11,381	28.2	17,594	43.6	10,050	24.9	1,221	3.0	111	0.3	40,357
Derbyshire	12,675	16.0	25,416	32.0	30,873	38.9	9,622	12.1	722	0.9	79,308
Devon	19,060	23.6	33,458	41.5	25,046	31.1	2,904	3.6	128	0.2	80,596
Dorset	8,134	18.4	16,377	37.1	18,294	41.4	1,274	2.9	86	0.2	44,162
Durham	8,718	16.7	23,700	45.3	17,894	34.2	1,820	3.5	167	0.3	52,299
East Sussex	9,688	19.6	18,801	38.0	19,915	40.3	1,056	2.1	0	0.0	49,460
Essex	28,872	22.9	62,239	49.5	33,937	27.0	695	0.6	109	0.1	125,852
Gloucestershire	9,703	21.9	20,387	46.0	13,616	30.7	630	1.4	0	0.0	44,336
Hampshire	24,974	19.2	60,358	46.3	42,406	32.6	2,485	1.9	47	—	130,270
Hereford and Worcester	14,782	30.4	20,658	42.4	12,087	24.8	988	2.0	150	0.3	48,665
Hertfordshire	20,122	24.9	37,216	46.1	22,667	28.1	729	0.9	0	0.0	80,734
Humberside	15,732	19.8	35,897	45.2	23,422	29.5	4,181	5.3	229	0.3	79,461
Isle of Wight	2,112	29.3	2,858	39.6	2,128	29.5	115	1.6	0	0.0	7,213
Kent	23,398	17.9	63,110	48.3	43,200	33.0	923	0.7	89	0.1	130,720
Lancashire	21,128	17.4	46,439	38.2	46,181	38.0	7,877	6.5	41	—	121,666
Leicestershire	18,945	25.1	34,810	46.1	19,238	25.5	2,322	3.1	224	0.3	75,539
Lincolnshire	12,811	25.6	23,292	46.5	12,778	25.5	1,142	2.3	42	0.1	50,065
Norfolk	18,798	31.2	28,213	46.8	12,444	20.7	737	1.2	43	0.1	60,235
North Yorkshire	17,114	29.5	22,316	38.4	16,543	28.5	1,980	3.4	140	0.2	58,093
Northamptonshire	12,915	26.1	25,440	51.5	10,477	21.2	570	1.2	42	0.1	49,444
Northumberland	4,426	22.6	6,686	34.1	7,033	35.9	1,445	7.4	0	0.0	19,590
Nottinghamshire	15,849	18.7	35,891	42.4	28,198	33.3	4,521	5.3	212	0.3	84,671
Oxfordshire	10,824	26.2	19,825	48.1	9,401	22.8	1,207	2.9	0	0.0	41,257
Shropshire	8,605	24.5	13,078	37.3	12,117	34.5	1,206	3.4	102	0.3	35,108
Somerset	8,758	23.9	14,180	38.8	12,840	35.1	768	2.1	41	0.1	36,587
Staffordshire	21,087	23.4	36,813	40.9	26,272	29.2	5,352	5.9	539	0.6	90,063
Suffolk	16,330	37.4	19,351	44.4	7,468	17.1	472	1.1	0	0.0	43,621
Surrey	21,148	29.7	35,924	50.4	13,837	19.4	315	0.4	45	0.1	71,269
Warwickshire	9,193	21.3	16,405	38.0	16,008	37.1	1,514	3.5	44	0.1	43,164
West Sussex	13,742	25.4	25,959	47.9	14,114	26.1	333	0.6	0	0.0	54,148
Wiltshire	10,168	20.7	23,856	48.5	14,355	29.2	773	1.6	0	0.0	49,152
England	891,551	22.5	1,813,871	45.7	1,130,762	28.5	120,354	3.0	9,435	0.2	3,965,973

[1] Pupils in one teacher classes of size expressed as a percentage of all pupils in one teacher classes.
— Less than 0.05 per cent.

Nursery Classes

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in how many cases in each of the last five years she has given notice that the addition of a nursery class to a county school requires her approval. [19260]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *415*, if she will indicate, in respect of each of the outstanding nursery proposals from county schools if *(a)* she has given notice under section 37(3)(a) of the Education Act that the proposal requires her approval or *(b)* objections have been made under section 36 of the Education Act. [19261]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following list shows outstanding proposals for new nursery classes in respect of county schools for which *(a)* the Secretary of State has given notice under section 37(3) of the Education and Act that the proposal requires her approval or *(b)* statutory objections have been received. The list does not include outstanding proposals that have not been called in or attracted statutory objections—some of these are still within the two-month statutory objection period.

Proposals where Secretary of State has given notice that her approval is required

LEA	*School name*
Essex	Kings Ford County Infant School
Essex	Northlands County Primary School
Essex	Hazelmere Infant School
Essex	Montgomery Infant School
Hertfordshire	Priors Wood School
Hertfordshire	Panshanger School
Hertfordshire	Abel Smith JMI School
Hertfordshire	Killigrew Infant School
Hertfordshire	Goldfield Infant School
Hertfordshire	Leavesden Green JMI School
Hertfordshire	Grove Road Primary School
Hertfordshire	Eastbury Farm JMI School
Hertfordshire	Woodside JMI School
Hertfordshire	Mayfield Infant School
Hertfordshire	Wheatcroft JMI School
Hertfordshire	Springmead JMI School
Hertfordshire	Kimpton JMI School
Hertfordshire	Templewood JMI School
Hertfordshire	Abbotts Langley School
Hertfordshire	Fairfields JMI School
Hertfordshire	Gade Valley JMI School
Hertfordshire	HollyBush JMI School
Hertfordshire	Micklem JMI School
Hertfordshire	Mill Mead JMI School
Hertfordshire	Millbrook JMI School
Hertfordshire	Sheredes JMI School
Hertfordshire	The Reddings JMI School
Hertfordshire	Ryde JMI School

Proposals where Secretary of State has given notice that her approval is required

LEA	*School name*
Hertfordshire	Studlands Rise JMI School
Liverpool	Belle Vale County JMI School
Proposals where objections have been made	
Hertfordshire	Cassiobury Infants School
Hertfordshire	Russell JMI School

Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *415*, in respect of each of the proposals to open new primary and infant schools that she has received but not yet approved, what is the target time for considering such a proposal and how long she has had to consider each proposal. [19262]

Mr. Robin Squire: The target time for reaching a decision on proposals for the establishment of schools is five months from the date of publication of the proposals. The following lists shows outstanding proposals for new primary schools in respect of county, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and grant-maintained schools in order of date of publication. Most of the proposals outstanding for longer than five months are awaiting further information or action from promoters or other interested parties.

LEA	*School name*	*Publication date*
County schools		
Gloucestershire	Bishop Cleeve Primary School	29 December 1994
Hampshire	Flying Bull Primary School	7 July 1995
Kent	New Swanscombe Primary School	1 February 1996
Hereford and Worcester	New County School	22 August 1996
Sandwell	New County School	19 September 1996
Liverpool	New County School	3 October 1996
Liverpool	New County School	3 October 1996
Liverpool	New County School	3 October 1996
Liverpool	New County School	3 October 1996
Coventry	(New) Spon Gate Primary School	10 October 1996
Coventry	(New) Mount Nod Primary School	10 October 1996
Cambridgeshire	New County School	30 October 1996
Sandwell	New County School	6 December 1996
Sandwell	New County School	12 December 1996
Enfield	New County School	18 December 1996
Essex	New County School	19 December 1996
Berkshire	James Elliman School	20 December 1996
Cheshire	Oakwood Avenue County Infant and Junior School	24 January 1997
Essex	New County School	31 January 1997
West Sussex	New County Primary School	21 February 1997
Redbridge	New County Primary School	27 February 1997
Voluntary aided schools		
Cambridgeshire	New VA School	7 September 1995
Kent	St. Mary's Island	2 August 1996
Milton Keynes	New VA School	10 October 1996
Hampshire	St. Marks VA CE Primary School	18 October 1996
Tameside	New VA School	7 November 1996
Bolton	New VA School	8 November 1996
Hertfordshire	New VA School	30 January 1997
Cheshire	New VA School	21 February 1997
Voluntary controlled schools		
Oxfordshire	Long Hanborough CE VC Primary School	22 December 1995
Liverpool	New CE VC Primary School	6 December 1996
Cheshire	St. Mary's CE Controlled School	10 January 1997
Grant maintained schools		
Brent	Torah Temimah Primary School	1 August 1996
Barnet	Menorah Foundation Primary School	24 October 1996
Barnet	Mathilda Marks-Kennedy Primary School	7 November 1996
Hertfordshire	New GM School	12 December 1996
Birmingham	Al-Furqan Primary School (GM)	7 January 1997
Brent	Islamia Primary School	9 January 1997

School Inspections

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will require Ofsted to inform hon. Members of the date of inspections of schools in their constituencies. [19597]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance has been issued to staff of the Benefits Agency in relation to the application of regulation 9 of the Jobseeker's Act Regulations 1996; and what level of remuneration for employment set by an applicant in applying for jobseeker's allowance would result in their application being refused. [19527]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 11 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the guidance that has been issued to staff in the Benefits Agency in relation to the application of Regulation 9 of the Jobseeker's Act Regulations 1996 and on what level of remuneration for employment set by the applicant in applying for Jobseeker's Allowance would result in their application being refused.

I should first explain that Regulation 9 of the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations is not a matter for the Benefits Agency. The Employment Service is responsible for ensuring that jobseekers satisfy the labour market conditions for receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance. Jobseekers are generally required to be available for any work immediately, and for a minimum of 40 hours a week. For a

"permitted period" of up to 13 weeks they can, however, limit their availability to their usual occupation and at the rate of pay they used to receive. After the permitted period, they can continue to impose restrictions on the type of work they will accept, initially including the rate of pay, providing they can show that they have reasonable prospects of securing employment notwithstanding those restrictions. Regulation 9 provides that no restriction on the level of remuneration is allowed once a jobseeker has been claiming for more than six months.

This means that if a jobseeker insists on specifying a rate of remuneration after the six month period has expired, their claim will be referred to the independent adjudicating authorities for a decision on their entitlement to benefit. The importance of making sure that the jobseeker is insisting on stipulating a rate of remuneration, and not just stating a preference, is included in our guidance to Jobcentres. If the jobseeker is merely stating a preference this would not amount to a restriction unless that was all they were prepared to accept.

I hope this is helpful.

Latin and Ancient Greek

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many and what percentage of *(a)* comprehensive and *(b)* grant-maintained schools currently offer (i) Latin and (ii) ancient Greek as *(A)* compulsory, *(B)* a GCSE and *(C)* an A-level option; and if she will make a statement; [19886]

(2) what assessment she has made of the decline in the availability of Latin and ancient Greek tuition in comprehensive and grant-maintained schools; and if she will make a statement. [19887]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department does not collect information as to which schools, or which types of school, offer Latin and ancient Greek. The following table shows the numbers and percentages of *(a)* local education authority-maintained comprehensive, *(b)* LEA-maintained selective, *(c)* grant-maintained comprehensive and *(d)* grant-maintained selective schools which entered pupils for GCSE and GCE A Level examinations in these subjects in 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available.

Except for the routine collection of examination entry data, my right hon. Friend has made no assessment of the availability of these subjects in schools. They are not required to be taught under the national curriculum, but schools are free to offer them once they have satisfied the statutory national curriculum requirements, if they have the necessary resources and if the demand is there.

	Number of schools	*Percentage of schools*
LEA Comprehensive		
GCSE Latin	239	10.0
GCSE Greek	10	0.4
GCE A Level Latin	58	2.4
GCE A Level Greek	5	0.2
Total schools	2,398	
LEA Selective		
GCSE Latin	45	61.6
GCSE Greek	10	13.7
GCE A Level Latin	28	38.4
GCE A Level Greek	5	6.9
Total schools	73	
GM Comprehensive		
GCSE Latin	68	14.1
GCSE Greek	9	1.9
GCE A Level Latin	19	4.0
GCE A Level Greek	3	0.6
Total schools	481	
GM Selective		
GCSE Latin	57	60.6
GCSE Greek	14	14.9
GCE A Level Latin	37	39.4
GCE A Level Greek	8	8.5
Total schools	94	

School League Tables

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans her Department has to investigate claims that school league tables are misleading indicators of educational achievement; and if she will make a statement. [19880]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend consults each year on the indicators to be included in school performance tables. The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority has confirmed that key stage 2 data are appropriate for use in tables, and a large scale independent evaluation by the University of Bath reported general satisfaction with the 1995–96 testing arrangements.

Early Retirement (Teachers)

Mr. Rendal: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the number of identified incompetent headteachers and teaching staff who have been granted pension enhancement in return for their early retirement since 1990. [19705]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department does not collect information on the reasons why individual teachers are granted enhancements to their pensions.

Education Council

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what items were on the agenda for *(a)* discussion, and *(b)* decision, at the meeting of Education Ministers of member states of the European Community held in Amsterdam on 3 March. [19743]

Mr. Paice: The informal meeting of EC Education Ministers on 2 and 3 March, at which I represented the UK, discussed a Netherlands presidency paper on information and communications technology and teacher training and the European Commission Green Paper, "Education, Training Research: The Obstacles to Transnational Mobility". No decisions were taken at the meeting.

Residential Visits

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the number of school children who have been on residential visits in the last year. [19702]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department does not collect this information.

School Governing Bodies

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by what means the competence of school governing bodies is monitored. [19703]

Mr. Robin Squire: Under the Ofsted inspection framework registered inspectors comment on the overall management of schools, including aspects of school governance. Significant national trends are reported in HM chief inspector's annual report. At local level governors are directly accountable to parents and the local community, both through their published annual report, and the meeting they have to hold annually with parents.

There are 350,000 school governors in England and Wales working as unpaid volunteers. The Government welcome the considerable contribution they are making to the education system.

Teachers (Disciplinary Procedures)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* headteachers and *(b)* teaching staff have been suspended and subsequently dismissed without proper procedures being used since 1990. [19704]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department does not collect this information. My right hon. Friend occasionally receives representations from teachers and other staff in schools about their employers' actions, including questions about the use of dismissal procedures.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list by participating school in Nottinghamshire the number of pupils and cost of the assisted places scheme for the last three years for which figures are available. [19735]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is given in the following table:

Assisted places scheme in Nottinghamshire

School name		*Academic year 1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Nottingham High School	Number of assisted pupils	170	171	174
	Cost of places £000s	445	466	498
Nottingham High School for Girls (GPDST)	Number of assisted pupils	210	204	197
	Cost of places £000s	514	526	529
Worksop College	Number of assisted pupils	25	25	27
	Cost of places £000s	113	122	131

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement about the level of parental contributions to the fees of pupils in the assisted places scheme in the next academic year. [20007]

Mrs. Gillan: Remission of tuition fees under the assisted places scheme is dependent on the level of fees at participating schools and the amount parents can afford to contribute. Subject to parliamentary approval of regulations to be laid in due course, the parental contribution scales will be adjusted for the school year 1997–98 to allow for inflation, so that the cost to parents remains broadly the same in real terms. Where the relevant income for the appropriate financial year does not exceed £10,135, the tuition fees will be wholly remitted so that the pupil receives a free place. The new scales are set out in the following table.

1997–98

Percentage

Part of relevant income to which percentage applies	*One assisted pupil*	*Each of two assisted pupils*	*Each of three assisted pupils*
That part which exceeds £9,969 but does not exceed £10,840	9	6.75	5.25
That part (if any) which exceeds £10,840 but does not exceed £11,725	12	9	7
That part (if any) which exceeds £11,725 but does not exceed £13,481	15	11.25	8.75
That part (if any) which exceeds £13,481 but does not exceed £16,186	21	15.75	12.25
That part (if any) which exceeds £16,186 but does not exceed £19,712	24	18	14
That part (if any) which exceeds £19,712	33	24.75	19.25

HEALTH

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of beds and wards closed, and admissions and operations postponed or cancelled, as a result of outbreaks of MRSA in the last year. [18712]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will call for a report on the recent incidence of MRSA among patients at Walsgrave hospital, Coventry, with particular reference to the manner in which the hospital has complied with the 1986 national guidelines on MRSA infection control systems. [19596]

Mr. Horam: Guidance on the control of methicillin-resistant staphylococcos aureus in hospitals was issued in September 1994 and work is currently underway to revise the guidance. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Gary Reay, chairman of the Walsgrave Hospitals NHS trust for information on the local application of these guidelines.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of screening all hospital patients for MRSA; [19888]

(2) what assessment he has made of the factors which have led *(a)* some hospitals to screen for MRSA and *(b)* others not to. [19852]

Mr. Horam: Cost-effective strategies for screening are outlined in the guidelines on control of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus which were issued to the NHS in 1994 under cover of EL(94)74. Implementation of screening policies is for local determination based on local circumstances.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what antibiotics are available to combat MRSA; and how many hospitals currently hold supplies of these. [19845]

Mr. Horam: Antibiotics effective in combatting methicillin-resistent staphylococcus aureus will be dependant on the particular strain of MRSA. Two of the strains associated with a large number of MRSA occurrences can be combated by a number of antibiotics such as rifampicin, fusidic acid and tetracycline. The glycopeptide antibiotics—vancomycin and teicoplanin—are effective against all strains of MRSA. The range of antibiotics held by hospitals and the control over their use are a matter for local decision.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of treating those infected with MRSA in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [19862]

Mr. Horam: MRSA infection can take the form of many different diseases from trivial skin infections to pneumonia or septicaemia. No estimates have been made of the costs of treating MRSA nationally.

Negligence Claims

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the total amounts paid out by *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* health authorities, in response to negligence claims in each of the last 10 years; and if he will list the amounts by region. [18768]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to replies given to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 6 March 1995, columns *41–42*, and 17 May 1996, column *586*, and to the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) on 28 November 1996, columns *371–72*. These replies still give the current figures for clinical negligence for health authorities.

Further to the reply given to the hon. Member for Darlington on 4 December 1995, column *44*, with regard to expenditure by trusts, the tables show the information given in that reply broken down by region.

Clinical negligence claims settled in the year by NHS trusts

£ thousand

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Northern	0	0	38
Yorkshire	2	3	48
Trent	8	5	10
East Anglian	0	0	0
North West Thames	133	140	203
North East Thames	0	31	64
South East Thames	0	28	370
South West Thames	137	21	35
Wessex	0	0	119
Oxford	0	0	24
South Western	0	99	155
West Midlands	0	0	25
Mersey	0	299	304
North Western	0	0	19
Total England	280	626	1,414

Source:
NHS trust TAC summarisation schedules.

Clinical negligence claims settled in the year by NHS trusts, 1994–95

	1994–95 £000
Northern and Yorkshire	241
Trent	100
Anglian and Oxford	229
North Thames	858
South Thames	642
South and West	841
West Midlands	26
North West	370
Total England	3,307

Source:
NHS trust TAC summarisation schedules.

Brain Scans

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many brain scans have gone missing at NHS hospitals in each year since 1992. [19297]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Prescriptions (Information)

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what systems he has put in place for ensuring the coherence and consistency of written information provided to patients through patient packs, through *(a)* pharmacies and *(b)* the Prodigy prescribing pilot system. [19100]

Mr. Malone: The information to be supplied with medicines, in the form of labels and patient information leaflets, is set out in regulations, and all such information is approved by the Medicines Control Agency before use. Information must be consistent with the summary of product characteristics and written in clear and comprehensible terms.

The Prodigy pilot system provides general information to patients about their condition, the main treatment options and sources of further support. In general, this is intended to supplement the more detailed statutory information accompanying individual medicines. Where the Prodigy leaflets refer to specific medicines, we will ensure that the information is consistent with the statutory patient information leaflets.

NHS Numbers

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the provision of a tracing service for the NHS number; and if he will make a statement. [19101]

Mr. Horam: A tracing service for the new national health service number has been in operation since November 1996. The service is provided by the NHS central register at Southport. Since its introduction, the tracing service has been used by 159 NHS trusts to find the NHS number for 67 million patient records.

Blind and Partially Sighted People

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are registered *(a)* blind and *(b)* partially sighted. [19081]

Mr. Burns: Latest centrally available figures, as published in "Registered blind and partially sighted people at 31 March 1994, England", copies of which are available in the Library, show that at 31 March 1994, there were *(a)* 149,700 people registered with local authorities as blind and *(b)* 115,700 registered as partially sighted.

Complaints and Disciplinary Issues

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to address the criticisms by the Council of Tribunals of the way in which the new arrangements for complaints and disciplinary issues in the NHS were dealt with by his Department. [19291]

Mr. Malone: The new arrangements for complaints and discipline in the NHS were successfully introduced in April 1996 and the Council on Tribunals welcomed the separation of complaints handling from discipline issues. The complaints procedure is now more accessible, equitable and rapid; most complaints are being resolved at local level without the need for further investigation. The disciplinary procedure enables health authorities to deal efficiently and flexibly with possible breaches of family health service practitioners' terms of service. The new arrangements are being kept under review.

Medicines Control Agency

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the Medicines Control Agency indicating *(a)* the organisations which they represent, *(b)* if they are scientific or lay members and *(c)* how many are employed by, or consultants to, pharmaceutical companies. [19685]

Mr. Malone: The Medicines Control Agency is an agency of the Department of Health, all of whose staff are employees of the Department of Health on standard civil service terms and conditions. The agency has 420 staff, of whom half are scientifically qualified. None are employed by, or are consultants to, pharmaceutical companies.

Cataracts

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients *(a)* by region and *(b)* nationally received hospital in-patient or day care for cataracts in each of the last five years. [19318]

Mr. Horam: The latest available information for finished consultant episodes is set out in the table. Information on numbers of patients is not available centrally.

Primary diagnosis of cataract
Finished consultant episodes—cataracts, England

	1990–91		*1991–92*		*1992–93*		*1993–94*		*1994–95*	
	OA	*DC*	*OA*	*DC*	*OA*	*DC*	*OA*	*DC*	*OA*	*DC*
Northern RHA	7,075	197	6,992	568	7,774	1,073	6,993	2,939	5,326	4,818
Yorkshire RHA	5,853	154	6,782	411	7,907	881	7,939	1,588	8,748	2,402
Trent RHA	7,308	846	8,294	974	8,245	1,148	9,585	1,613	9,606	2,567
East Anglian RHA	3,916	358	4,160	1,258	4,313	1,603	4,139	2,020	5,300	3,789
North West Thames RHA	5,422	579	6,858	1,041	6,359	1,632	5,996	2,224	4,342	2,974
North East Thames RHA	5,133	426	4,986	783	5,311	747	4,879	1,045	8,147	5,520
South East Thames RHA	6,869	671	7,374	894	8,163	1,703	8,196	2,241	7,940	3,554
South West Thames RHA	5,955	913	6,630	1,451	6,142	2,224	5,686	3,477	4,554	5,523
Wessex RHA	6,315	538	6,425	1,216	6,227	1,514	6,632	2,299	6,650	4,229
Oxford RHA	3,542	497	4,143	516	4,271	540	4,815	785	5,088	1,489
South Western RHA	6,690	856	7,905	1,276	8,064	2,015	8,100	3,589	8,647	4,697
West Midlands RHA	10,799	499	10,401	942	10,860	1,421	11,715	2,702	11,147	5,049
Mersey RHA	5,612	306	5,470	1,006	5,613	1,251	5,609	1,797	5,646	2,594
North Western RHA	6,400	1,479	9,819	2,564	10,074	2,775	9,692	3,988	10,694	9,190
SHAs	4,424	277	4,044	1,598	3,723	1,679	3,605	1,879	—	—
England	93,316	8,595	100,284	16,498	103,045	22,205	103,581	34,188	101,804	58,396
Total number of ordinary admissions and day cases	101,911		116,782		125,250		137,768			160,200

Notes:

Figures are rounded and may not total. Data in this table is grossed for both coverage and unknown invalid clinical data. Finished consultant episodes are defined as the period that a patient spends with the continuous care of a specific consultant in a specific health care provider (which may be more than one hospital within that health care provider).

Special Health Authorities (SHAs) were abolished on 1 April 1994.

OA = ordinary admissions.

DC = day cases.

Source:

Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES).

Oral Cancer

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients *(a)* by region and *(b)* nationally received hospital in-patient or day care for oral cancer in each of the past five years. [19317]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available in precisely the form requested. The figures given in the tables are the latest available estimated information taken from the hospital episode statistics, which are based on a count of finished consultant episodes. Since an individual patient may have more than one consultant episode in any one year, the figures do not equate to the number of patients.

Primary diagnosis: oral cancer (ICD9 codes 140–149) Estimated number of finished consultant episodes (FCEs), by ordinary admissions and day cases and region of treatment, NHS hospitals, England

Data year 1994–95

	Ordinary admissions	Day cases	Total
Northern RHA	590	75	664
Yorkshire RHA	488	45	532
Trent RHA	726	74	800
East Anglian RHA	300	49	349
North-west Thames RHA	661	119	780
North-east Thames RHA	541	38	579
South-east Thames RHA	429	40	469
South-west Thames RHA	290	29	319
Wessex RHA	453	106	559
Oxford RHA	295	27	322
South Western RHA	408	29	437
West Midlands RHA	878	74	953
Mersey RHA	675	22	697
North Western RHA	865	221	1,086
England	7,598	948	8,547

Data year 1993–94

	Ordinary admissions	Day cases	Total
Northern RHA	639	69	708
Yorkshire RHA	648	67	715
Trent RHA	681	46	726
East Anglian RHA	294	44	338
North-west Thames RHA	414	84	499
North-east Thames RHA	488	35	522
South-east Thames RHA	406	17	423
South-west Thames RHA	319	23	342
Wessex RHA	354	90	444
Oxford RHA	249	12	261
South western RHA	412	17	429
West Midlands RHA	889	88	978
Mersey RHA	705	32	737
North Western RHA	671	134	805
SHAs	238	90	328
England	7,406	849	8,255

Data year 1992–93

	Ordinary admissions	Day cases	Total
Northern RHA	602	70	672
Yorkshire RHA	674	63	738
Trent RHA	818	41	859
East Anglian RHA	310	118	428
North-west Thames RHA	426	88	515
North-east Thames RHA	617	61	678
South-east Thames RHA	421	20	441
South-west Thames RHA	293	22	314
Wessex RHA	470	27	497
Oxford RHA	247	14	260
South Western RHA	348	19	367
West Midlands RHA	902	44	946
Mersey RHA	674	34	708
North Western RHA	526	87	613
SHAs	270	10	280
England	7,599	717	8,316

Data year 1991–92

	Ordinary admission	Day cases	Total
Northern RHA	599	38	637
Yorkshire RHA	617	48	665
Trent RHA	775	31	807
East Anglian RHA	283	86	369
North-west Thames RHA	582	93	675
North-east Thames RHA	552	51	603
South-east Thames RHA	518	22	540
South-west Thames RHA	258	27	285
Wessex RHA	450	20	470
Oxford RHA	269	6	275
South Western RHA	377	36	413
West Midlands RHA	968	47	1,016
Mersey RHA	584	19	602
North Western RHA	792	144	935
SHAs	282	21	303
England	7,906	690	8,596

Data year 1990–91

	Ordinary admission	Day cases	Total
Northern RHA	559	21	579
Yorkshire RHA	444	48	491
Trent RHA	729	34	764
East Anglian RHA	260	43	303
North-west Thames RHA	415	29	444
North-east Thames RHA	581	24	605
South-east Thames RHA	518	19	537
South-west Thames RHA	199	30	229
Wessex RHA	351	16	367
Oxford RHA	214	5	220
South Western RHA	469	26	495
West Midlands RHA	749	25	774
Mersey RHA	567	25	592
North Western RHA	844	124	968
SHAs	84	0	84
England	6,982	468	7,450

Notes:

Figures are rounded and may not total.

Data in this table is grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

Source:

Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES).

Human Embryos

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many human embryos have been created since the passage of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1991; how many have been destroyed; how many have been frozen; and how many have been used to secure live births. [19528]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave on 25 March 1996, columns *421–23*. These remain the latest available figures.

The number of babies born from IVF treatments between 1 August 1991 and 31 December 1994 was 12,743, which includes 1,339 from frozen embryo replacement.

Diabetics (Prescription on Needles)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent consideration he has given to providing needles used in conjunction with a pen injection device on prescription to patients with diabetes; [19620]

(2) if he will estimate the cost to public funds of making needles used in conjunction with a pen injection device available on prescription to patients with diabetes. [19621]

Mr. Malone: We are currently considering whether insulin injection pen needles should be prescribable by general practitioners on the national health service and we are considering evidence of cost to public funds.

Royal London Hospital Air Ambulance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the *(a)* greatest, *(b)* lowest and *(c)* average call-out cost of the Royal London hospital air ambulance since it became operational; and if he will make a statement. [19861]

Mr. Horam: Information on the helicopter emergency medical service's call-out costs is not collected centrally.

It is for health authorities to decide the most effective way of providing emergency services for local people.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will fund further research into the possible link between the incidence of ME in rural communities and the use of organophosphate sheep dips. [19110]

Mrs. Browning: I have been asked to reply.

Following a recommendation of the Veterinary Products Committee, the Government set up the medical and scientific panel as a sub-committee of the VPC to advise, among other matters, on any additional work that may be needed to elucidate the potential long-term effects on humans of organophosphorus sheep dips. With the advice of the panel, the Government awarded £500,000 to the Institute of Occupational Health in Edinburgh for such research. The results of that study are expected to be completed in April 1999. Meanwhile my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will study any reports he receives on possible higher than average levels of ME in rural communities.

WALES

South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning funding of the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee; and if he will make a statement. [19044]

Mr. Hague: I have received a number of representations about the funding of the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee; I have also met representatives of the committee.

Sea fisheries committees are committees of local government, and their funding arrangements are a matter for member authorities of each committee.

Oral Cancer

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients received hospital in-patient or day care for oral cancer in each of the last five years. [19319]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the following table:

Patients receiving in-patient or day care treatment for oral cancers[1]

	Number
1991–92	566
1992–93	580
1993–94	574
1994–95	505
1995–96[2]	561

[1] Spells in hospital are counted separately, so an individual may be included in the figures more than once.
[2] Provisional.

Cataracts

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients received hospital in-patient or day care for cataracts in each of the last five years. [19320]

Mr. Gwilyn Jones: The information requested is given in the following table:

Patients receiving in-patient or day case treatment for cataracts[1]

	Number
1991–92	7,739
1992–93	10,651
1993–94	10,367
1994–95	11,699
1995–96[2]	12,722

[1] Spells in hospital are counted separately, so an individual may be included in the figures more than once.
[2] Provisional.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost to the NHS of treating those infected with MRSA in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [19870]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many registered cases of MRSA there have been in each NHS trust area in each of the last five years; how many of these resulted in death; and if he will make a statement. [19873]

Mr. Jones: Information on the number of registered cases in each NHS trust is not available centrally. The available data on the number of reported cases for Wales as a whole are shown in the following table. Reliable information on deaths is not centrally available.

Laboratory confirmed cases of MRSA in Wales[1]

	Number
1994	535
1995	443
1996[2]	2,667

Source:
CDSC Welsh Unit MRSA Surveillance Programme in Wales.

Notes:

[1] Completeness of reporting by laboratory is variable. Data may include some GP referrals. The number indicated are patients identified with MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus). Only a proportion of these will have clinical illness (estimated at 50 per cent.) due to MRSA infection. The remainder will be carriers of the organism.

[2] Provisional. In 1996, increased emphasis was placed on reporting and additional features were requested.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the last outbreak of MRSA occurred in a Welsh hospital; how many people *(a)* were affected and *(b)* died; and if he will make a statement. [19871]

Mr. Jones: The most recent information reported to the Welsh nosocomial infection study/hospital outbreak reporting scheme indicates that three hospitals recorded MRSA outbreaks in January 1997 affecting a total of 11 patients. It should be noted that participation by laboratories is voluntary and that not all returns for January have been received. Data on deaths are not collected centrally under this scheme.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment his Department has made of the cause of the recent MRSA outbreaks in Welsh hospitals; what proposals he has to reduce the number of cases; and if he will make a statement. [19872]

Mr. Jones: Information on the source of outbreaks of hospital acquired infections is not held centrally. Extensive guidance on infection control procedures has already been issued to the NHS in Wales. Initiatives underway, to ensure that cases of hospital acquired infection, including MRSA, are kept to a minimum, include a three-year study on nosocomial infections being undertaken by the Public Health Laboratory Service (Wales) and the MRSA surveillance project being undertaken by the communicable disease surveillance centre (Welsh unit).

These studies will provide valuable information for use in determining future action to reduce the incidence of MRSA.

Examination Results

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one and (ii) two or more live foreign language GCSEs in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19865]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The breakdown requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information for pupils—at school, aged 15 to 31 August 1996—entering at least one modern foreign language GCSE in 1996 is as follows:

Pupils entered for at least one modern foreign language GCSE: 17,075

Pupils achieving at least one grade A* to C in a modern foreign language: 9,289

Number who achieved grade A*–C as a percentage of the number entered: 54 per cent.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one and (ii) two or more science GCSEs in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19863]

Mr. Evans: The breakdown requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information for pupils (in school, aged 15 at 31 August 1995) entering at least one science GCSE in 1996 is as follows:

Pupils entered for at least one science GCSE: 31,744

Pupils achieving at least one grade A* to C in science: 15,666

Number who achieved grade A*–C as a percentage of the number entered: 49 per cent.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved grade A to C in (i) history; (ii) geography and (iii) Latin (1) GCSEs and (2) A-levels in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19867]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is, in respect of children at school, as follows:

	Subject		
	History	*Geography*	*Latin*
GCSEs			
Number of 15 year olds entered[1]	11,058	16,596	188
Number who achieved grade A*–C	6,516	8,849	165
Number who achieved grade A*–C as a percentage of the total number entered	59	53	88
A levels			
Number of 16, 17 and 18 year olds entered[1]	1,717	1,741	13
Number who achieved grade A–C	1,004	986	11
Number who achieved grade A–C as a percentage of the total number entered	58	57	85

[1] Ages are as at 31 August 1995.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one (ii) two and (iii) three or more live foreign language A-levels in 1996; and if he will make a statement; [19866]

(2) how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three or more science A-levels in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19864]

Mr. Evans: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of *(a)* comprehensive and *(b)* grant-maintained schools in Wales offer (i) Latin and (ii) ancient Greek as a (A) GCSE and (B) A-level option; and if he will make a statement. [19868]

Mr. Evans: The available information is given in the following table and relates to the number and percentage of schools entering pupils for examinations in Latin in 1996. There were no entries for ancient Greek from LEA maintained or grant-maintained secondary schools at GCSE or A-level in 1996.

	LEA-maintained secondary schools		*Grant-maintained secondary schools*	
Subject	*Number of schools with entries in 1996*	*Number of schools with entries for Latin as a percentage of all LEA-maintained secondary schools with entries in any subject at the relevant level*	*Number of schools with entries in 1996*	*Number of schools with entries for Latin as a percentage of all grant-maintained secondary schools with entries in any subject at the relevant level*
Latin				
GCSE	10	4.7	1	9.1
A-level	1	0.6	—	—

Local Government Finance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were for *(a)* each unitary authority and *(b)* Wales as a whole for each year since 1992 in constant 1997 prices (i) total actual spending, (ii) the amount and percentage of total spending accounted for by (1) central Government funding and (2) local taxation and (iii) any other source of revenue; and if he will estimate the figures for the current unitary authority areas where boundaries have changed since 1992. [19860]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information is given in the following tables. There are no estimates for the financing of spending in the current unitary authority areas prior to 1996–97.

Local authority revenue expenditure at constant 1996–97 prices[1]

		Funded by			*Total spending*		
	Total revenue expenditure	*Central government*[2]	*Local taxation*[3]	*Other*[4]	*Central government*[2]	*Local taxation*[3]	*Other*[4]
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*	*£ million*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*
1992–93	2,923	2,683	253	–13	92	9	0
1993–94	2,810	2,567	291	–49	91	10	–2
1994–95	2,896	2,604	310	–17	90	11	–1
1995–96[5]	3,026	2,587	340	99	85	11	3
1996–97[5]	3,038	2,595	379	64	85	12	2
Local authority revenue expenditure 1996–97							
Blaenau Gwent	72.9	65.4	5.6	1.9	90	8	3
Bridgend	117.1	99.4	17.7	0.0	85	15	0
Caerphilly	155.3	137.3	16.7	1.3	88	11	1
Cardiff	270.7	230.4	33.2	7.1	85	12	3
Carmarthenshire	163.4	138.4	24.6	0.3	85	15	0
Ceredigion	68.1	58.0	9.8	0.3	85	14	0
Conwy	95.1	80.4	12.2	2.5	85	13	3
Denbighshire	86.3	74.2	11.6	0.5	86	13	1
Flintshire	122.0	102.4	19.6	0.0	84	16	0
Gwynedd	118.4	99.0	15.5	3.9	84	13	3
Isle of Anglesey	64.3	55.6	7.4	1.3	86	12	2
Methyr Tydfil	60.2	54.4	5.9	0.0	90	10	0
Monmouthshire	67.0	54.9	11.0	1.1	82	16	2
Neath Port Talbot	152.6	118.1	17.8	16.7	77	12	11
Newport	132.1	107.7	12.2	12.2	82	9	9
Pembrokeshire	104.7	91.4	13.2	0.0	87	13	0
Powys	121.7	104.8	15.6	1.3	86	13	1
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	232.7	206.9	23.0	2.7	89	10	1
Swansea	210.5	180.0	24.0	6.5	85	11	3
Torfaen	82.7	74.8	7.9	0.0	90	10	0
The Vale of Glamorgan	102.1	84.2	15.4	2.6	82	15	3
Wrexham	107.0	90.3	14.4	2.3	84	13	2
All authorities[6]	2,706.7	2,307.9	334.3	64.5	85	12	2

[1] Includes police authorities.
[2] Includes re-distributed non-domestic rates and council tax reduction scheme grant.
[3] Net of council tax benefit grant, which is included under central government funding.
[4] Includes use of reserves and other adjustments.
[5] Budgets
[6] Differs from the total for Wales due to police authorities not being included.

Public Bodies (Expenditure)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what were the total costs for each of the last three years for which figures are available of the advisory bodies listed in "Public Bodies 1996", separately identifying *(a)* the remuneration costs of members and *(b)* the administration costs; and what was the total expenditure of each body; [19667]

(2) what were the total costs for each of the last three years for which figures are available of the executive bodies listed in "Public Bodies 1996", separately identifying for each *(a)* the remuneration costs of members and *(b)* the administration costs; and what was the total expenditure of each body. [19670]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: "Public Bodies" is an annual publication. Information for the last three years is contained in "Public Bodies" 1994, 1995 and 1996, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the total costs for each of the last three years for which figures are available of the health authorities in Wales listed in "Public Bodies 1996", separately identifying *(a)* the remuneration costs of members and *(b)* the administration costs; and what was the total expenditure of each authority. [19668]

Mr. Jones: The information is in the following table.

£ thousand

	1993–94			*1994–95*			*1995–96*		
	Remuneration costs of members	*Administration costs*	*Total expenditure*	*Remuneration costs of members*	*Administration costs*	*Total expenditure*	*Remuneration costs of members*	*Administration costs*	*Total expenditure*
Health Authorities									
Clwyd	280	1,450	169,827	273	1,079	179,100	369	846	190,535
Dyfed	198	2,486	110,845	204	889	107,174	444	741	161,649
Gwent	280	3,199	192,974	287	583	200,440	298	745	205,647
Gwynedd	340	8,556	116,184	272	514	118,890	429	414	119,769
Mid Glamorgan	277	11,046	249,251	288	6,522	258,110	246	6,268	272,643
Pembrokeshire	105	53	49,372	105	12	50,482	0	0	0
Powys	273	311	61,583	249	319	59,732	460	239	60,723
South Glamorgan	228	16,454	233,866	210	15,942	239,270	514	1,160	228,302
West Glamorgan	333	8,991	155,334	315	5,952	157,602	345	5,225	179,995
Total	2,314	52,546	1,339,236	2,203	31,812	1,370,800	3,105	15,638	1,419,263
Family health services authorities									
Clwyd	148	739	75,180	109	806	80,681	172	707	87,011
Dyfed	106	723	59,734	109	793	72,073	276	631	80,924
Gwent	87	917	77,363	89	1,136	82,636	125	1,106	93,288
Gwynedd	99	584	39,560	102	597	46,876	106	559	51,539
Mid Glamorgan	103	1,010	87,324	97	1,031	94,420	339	981	102,768
Powys	96	362	24,581	93	340	27,614	90	325	33,302
South Glamorgan	106	992	62,988	104	954	72,886	191	900	82,636
West Glamorgan	93	638	70,741	91	686	75,586	108	671	82,384
Total	838	5,965	497,471	794	6,343	552,772	1,407	5,880	613,852

Sources:
Financial returns and annual accounts of health authorities and family health services authorities.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the total costs for each of the last three years for which figures are available of the NHS trusts referred to in "Public Bodies 1996", separately identifying *(a)* the remuneration costs of members and *(b)* the administration costs; and what was the total expenditure of each trust. [19669]

Mr. Jones: The information is in the following table.

£ thousand

	1995–96			*1994–95*			*1993–94*		
	Remuneration costs of members	*Administration costs*	*Total operating expenses*	*Remuneration costs of members*	*Administration costs*	*Total operating expenses*	*Remuneration costs of members*	*Administration costs*	*Total operating expenses*
Bridgend and District NHS Trust	351	3,572	66,199	351	3,298	61,299	330	3,251	58,385
Cardiff Community NHS Trust	364	3,895	55,043	—	—	—	—	—	—
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	284	2,687	38,974	292	2,391	36,834	285	2,325	35,410

£ thousand

	1995–96			1994–95			1993–94		
	Remuneration costs of members	Administration costs	Total operating expenses	Remuneration costs of members	Administration costs	Total operating expenses	Remuneration costs of members	Administration costs	Total operating expenses
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust	266	1,346	23,514	246	1,224	22,724	250	1,204	21,936
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust	340	3,629	62,757	371	3,521	62,150	291	3,421	59,030
Derwen NHS Trust	281	1,219	22,399	297	1,357	22,102	—	—	—
East Glamorgan NHS Trust	272	2,953	48,610	284	2,657	45,245	—	—	—
Glan Glwyd NHS Trust	289	3,472	60,159	278	3,254	55,323	269	3,237	53,291
Glan Hafren NHS Trust	402	5,801	91,306	367	5,512	88,524	340	5,223	85,567
Gwent Community NHS Trust	369	3,454	59,345	327	3,452	55,815	301	3,149	54,608
Gwynedd Community NHS Trust	258	2,832	48,198	227	2,555	45,625	—	—	—
Gwynedd Hospitals NHS Trust	408	3,969	58,075	287	3,949	56,475	—	—	—
Llandough Hospital NHS Trust	358	3,858	56,685	355	3,366	48,100	350	3,233	43,509
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS Trust	333	1,478	30,451	308	1,489	29,339	281	1,576	28,449
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance NHS Trust	279	185	8,199	233	188	7,562	—	—	—
Morriston Hospital NHS Trust	352	3,851	69,364	295	3,160	57,660	—	—	—
Nevill Hall NHS Trust	335	2,253	41,405	289	2,120	38,616	—	—	—
North Wales Ambulance NHS Trust	223	438	12,689	225	332	11,904	—	—	—
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	358	3,202	41,199	363	3,037	39,874	373	3,346	39,487
Powys Healthcare NHS Trust	343	2,437	41,728	317	2,364	40,133	312	2,397	39,679
Rhondda Healthcare NHS Trust	274	2,021	30,133	291	2,132	27,900	—	—	—
South East Wales Ambulance NHS Trust	280	491	18,408	211	345	17,241	240	276	15,774
Swansea NHS Trust	353	2,911	55,902	331	2,743	51,239	305	2,653	49,175
University Dental Hospital of Wales NHS Trust	167	574	7,938	—	—	—	—	—	—
University Hospital of Wales NHS Trust	378	14,845	162,654	—	—	—	—	—	—
Velindre Hospital NHS Trust	252	916	13,004	218	554	9,850	—	—	—

£ thousand

	1995–96			1994–95			1993–94		
	Remuneration costs of members	Administration costs	Total operating expenses	Remuneration costs of members	Administration costs	Total operating expenses	Remuneration costs of members	Administration costs	Total operating expenses
West Wales Ambulance NHS Trust	166	792	10,582	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wrexham Maelor NHS Trust	353	2,751	54,222	339	2,594	49,916	327	2,481	46,215
Total	8,688	81,832	1,289,142	7,102	57,594	981,450	4,254	37,772	630,515

Notes:
1. Cardiff Community, University Dental Hospital of Wales, University Hospital of Wales and West Wales Ambulance NHS Trusts were not operational in 1994–95.
2. The trusts in note 1 plus Derwen, East Glamorgan, Gwynedd Community, Gwynedd Hospitals, Mid Glamorgan Ambulance, Morriston Hospital, Nevill Hall, North Wales Ambulance, Rhondda Healthcare and Velindre Hospital were not operational in 1993–94.
Sources:
Financial Returns and Annual accounts of NHS Trusts.

Organic Farming

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of farms in Wales are currently classified as organic; and if he will make a statement. [19856]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: According to the "UK Register of Food Standards", in February 1997 there were 97 organic farms in Wales. This is less than 0.5 per cent. of the total number of farms.

Food Poisoning Deaths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of E. Coli poisoning have *(a)* been recorded and *(b)* resulted in death in each NHS trust in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [19869]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of cases of E. Coli poisoning is not available for NHS trusts. The number of reported cases for each health authority area is given in the following table. Reliable information on the number of deaths is not available centrally.

Reported cases of E.coli poisoning in Wales[1]

	[2]1992	[2]1993	[2]1994	[2]1995	1996
Bro Taf	11	3	4	6	9
Dyfed Powys	14	12	9	10	5
Gwent	6	12	6	3	4
Morgannwg	5	1	4	4	4
North Wales[3]	3	5	6	58	16
Wales	39	33	29	81	38

Source:
Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre Wales.
Notes:
[1] Data are reported cases of Verotoxigenic Escherichia coli 0157 (VTEC 0157).
[2] For figures before 1996—Bro Taf = Mid and South Glamorgan; Dyfed Powys = East Dyfed, Pembrokeshire and Powys; Morgannwg = West Glamorgan; North Wales = Clwyd and Gwynedd.
[3] The Figure ro 1995 includes specimens from the north Wales nursery outbreak examined using more sensitive methods.

DEFENCE

Eurofighter

10. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current estimate of the time for completion of the Eurofighter project; and if he will make a statement. [18044]

27. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Eurofighter will be ready for service. [18061]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We expect production of Eurofighter for the RAF to continue until around the year 2014. The first aircraft is scheduled to be delivered to the Royal Air Force at the end of 2001.

Wrens

11. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to allow Wrens to serve on submarines. [18045]

Mr. Soames: We have no plans at present for Wrens to serve in submarines.

Army (Expenditure)

12. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for expenditure on the Army over the next three years. [18046]

Mr. Soames: We currently spend some £7 billion a year on the Army and, consistent with our policy of stable funding for defence, we expect to maintain spending at around this level over the next three years.

Gulf War Syndrome

13. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Gulf war syndrome. [18047]

Mr. Soames: Some of the British troops who served during the Gulf war have subsequently developed a range of illnesses. The Government fully understand the health concerns of Gulf veterans and, governed by the best available medical advice, we treat these concerns with the grave seriousness and attention that they rightly demand.

Deterrence Capability

14. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the importance to the deterrent capability of United Kingdom forces of spending above the European average. [18048]

Mr. Portillo: A reduction in UK defence expenditure to the current NATO European average would involve cuts of around £5 billion per year. This would have a devastating effect on the capability of our armed forces and on their ability to deter aggression.

Defence Expenditure

15. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on defence expenditure in the next two years. [18049]

Mr. Portillo: Under the latest spending plans, defence expenditure will be £21,822 million in 1997–98 and £22,276 million in 1998–99. These plans reflect the Government's commitment to strong, capable and properly resourced armed forces.

Army Training Regiment

16. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Army training regiment; and if he will make a statement. [18050]

Mr. Soames: We envisage a continuing role for the army training regiments in providing initial training for recruits.

Vetting Procedures (Senior Officers)

17. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to revise the vetting procedures for senior officers. [18051]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no plans to revise the vetting procedures for senior officers.

Defence Exports

18. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent measures his Department has taken to support exports by British defence companies. [18052]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department's Defence Export Services Organisation continues to provide British defence exporters with the strongest possible Government support, within the framework of our defence, security and foreign policies.

Cyprus

19. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current role of Her Majesty's forces in respect of the UN presence in Cyprus. [18053]

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom contingent of some 388 service personnel is playing a prominent role in the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus.

Nimrod

20. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investment he estimates will be made in upgrading Nimrod aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [18054]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Following the announcement on 25 July last year that British Aerospace had won the competition to supply the RAF's replacement maritime patrol aircraft, a contract was signed with BAe on 2 December 1996 for 21 Nimrod 2000 aircraft and a package comprising training, logistic support and post design studies. The procurement costs are estimated to be in the order of £2 billion.

RAF Equipment Upgrades

21. **Sir Michael Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what major equipment upgrades the RAF will be receiving over the next two years. [18055]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Over the course of the next two years the RAF will take delivery of upgraded Tornado attack and fighter aircraft, new C-130J transport aircraft, additional Chinook helicopters and the advanced short-range air-to-air missile. These and other important programmes represent significant enhancements to the RAF's capabilities.

NAAFI Services

22. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received recently concerning NAAFI services; and if he will make a statement. [18056]

Mr. Soames: I have received a number of letters from NAAFI employees concerning the award of the food services contract and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence met a delegation of NAAFI employees from the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union, led by the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle).

The contract awarded to Booker Food Services Group represents best value for money for the Department. NAAFI will now concentrate on its core businesses of providing shops and clubs. Recent innovations in these areas have been very successful and have been enthusiastically accepted by the armed forces. I have every confidence that NAAFI will continue to provide a quality service for service personnel for the foreseeable future.

Low Flying

23. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the management of low flying training in the United Kingdom. [18057]

Mr. Soames: The management of military low flying training in the United Kingdom is kept under continuous review to ensure that the amount carried out is strictly limited to that necessary for aircrew to achieve and maintain operational effectiveness and that this essential activity is conducted as safely as possible with the minimum of disturbance to the public.

Trafalgar Class Submarine

24. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the procurement of the second batch of Trafalgar class submarine; and if he will make a statement. [18058]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Negotiations continue with GEC-Marconi. Subject to a satisfactory conclusion, I hope to make an announcement around Easter.

Challenger 2 Tanks

25. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Challenger 2 tanks he expects will be delivered to the Army in the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [18059]

Mr. Arbuthnot: An order for a further 259 Challenger 2 main battle tanks was placed with Vickers plc in July 1994, bringing the total ordered to 386. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence informed the House on 24 October 1996, *Official Report*, columns 7–8, that the in-service date for Challenger 2 would be June 1998. Thirty-six tanks have already been delivered and I expect the remainder to have been delivered to the Army by February 2002.

Front-line Infantry

26. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many front-line infantry there are currently; and what estimate he has made of the number required to fulfil the Army's existing responsibilities. [18060]

Mr. Soames: As at 1 February 1997, the strength of the front line infantry, including the Gurkhas and Royal Irish Regiment, general service, was 24,200 officers and soldiers against a corresponding establishment of 26,200.

Horizon Frigate

28. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Horizon frigate will come into operational service. [18062]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The common new generation frigate will have major operational importance. It remains our intention to bring the vessel into service as soon as practicable, which is planned to be 2004.

Defence Industries (Employment)

29. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the number of people employed in the United Kingdom defence industries. [18063]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We estimate that in 1994–95—the latest year for which figures are available—my Department's contracts for equipment and other goods and services sustained some 270,000 jobs in the United Kingdom. We estimate that a further 90,000 United Kingdom jobs depended on defence exports.

Army Fighting Capability

30. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what upgrades are planned in the Army's fighting capabilities over the next two years. [18064]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Over the next two years we plan to bring into service with the Army a number of major new equipments, including the Challenger 2 main battle tank, additional Rapier Field Standard C fire units, the Phoenix unmanned air vehicle, the Bridging for the Nineties family of bridges, the Shielder vehicle-launched scatterable anti-tank mine system and the truck utility light/truck utility medium. The Army's deployability and manoeuvrability will be improved by the acquisition of a second ro-ro transport for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and new C130J transport aircraft and additional Chinook helicopters for the Royal Air Force. At the same time, as announced last month, we are planning to improve Army manning, including through a new Army Foundation college, and to strengthen key units at the higher end of the readiness spectrum.

Airwork Ltd.

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's claim for compensation for damage caused to Tornado F3 aircraft by Airwork Ltd. [20069]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A negotiated settlement has been reached in respect of my Department's claim for structural damage to Tornado F3 aircraft while being modified by Airwork Ltd. during 1992–93. I am pleased to report that, of the 16 aircraft involved, 11 have been repaired and delivered back to the RAF and the remainder will be delivered progressively over the next few weeks, with the last due for delivery in May this year. One aircraft was lost in the crash off Blackpool in September 1996, the cause of which was not related to the modification programme on which Airwork had been engaged. The F3 aircraft were repaired by replacing the damaged centre fuselages with those from surplus F2 aircraft which had been earmarked for disposal. This was to ensure that the aircraft were returned to operational service as soon as possible.

In choosing to replace the centre fuselage, the aircraft have been given valuable additional fatigue life. The overall cost of this work has been around £20 million. Taking this improvement into account, together with the costs which might have been incurred had arbitration been pursued, we have agreed that the Bricom Group, which owned Airwork at the time of the damage, will pay £5 million to the Ministry of Defence in settlement of our claim.

Equipment Expenditure

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the expenditure on equipment in each of the last five years for each of the armed services. [19679]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 28 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *386*.

Gibraltar

Mr. Harry Greenway : To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many troops are expected to be stationed in Gibraltar over the next five years; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [18596]

Mr. Soames: Current UK force levels in Gibraltar were determined in the Review of the Gibraltar Garrison and announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Henley) when Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 7 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *262-63*. The review identified the core activities central to our defence responsibilities there. At present, there are some 660 service personnel stationed in Gibraltar, including about 160 members of the Gibraltar Regiment. On current plans, there will be about 50 fewer personnel stationed in Gibraltar in five years' time. These projected force levels enable us fully to carry out our core tasks. They are a clear manifestation of Her Majesty's Government's continuing commitment to the people of Gibraltar.

Over the same period, the cost of the Gibraltar garrison will reduce to less than £50 million per annum, compared with expected costs of some £63 million for the current financial year.

British Defence Doctrine

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to his Department of producing the document, "British Defence Doctrine"; who will receive the receipts from the sale of the publication; what factors determined the pricing of the book; how many copies were produced; what is the role of the Royal United Services Institute in the publication; and if he will make a statement. [19628]

Mr. Soames: "British Defence Doctrine" was produced at a direct cost to my Department's budget of £134,801. This includes the cost of the dedicated team set up to write the document. A total of 35,000 copies of the book have been produced, 33,000 of which are for internal MOD use. The other 2,000 are for sale to the public. We have agreed with the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies that it will sell these additional copies through its existing book option scheme, its Whitehall series of publications and other marketing avenues. It is involved solely in the marketing of the book and has had no involvement with the editorial content. Receipts from those copies available for sale to the public will be split equally between my Department, to offset the cost of producing the additional copies for public sale, and the Royal United Services Institute, to offset its costs of marketing and selling the book. In determining the price for the book an assumption on likely sales was based on sales to date of "The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine" and a price set that was assessed as being reasonable and in line with similar publications.

Merchant Vessels

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of merchant vessels chartered for use in military exercises or operations involving United Kingdom forces, indicating the flag nationality of those vessels and the total cost of these charters, for each of the last seven years. [19619]

Mr. Soames: Total figures for the period before 1992 could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost. The number of merchant vessels chartered for use in military exercises/operations involving United Kingdom forces over the period 1992–1997 are as follows:

1992

Thirty five vessels were chartered—20 Danish, seven German, two Norwegian, two Swedish, one Dutch, one Luxembourg, one Bahamian, one Italian—at a total cost of £12,067,580.

1993

Twenty six vessels were chartered—nine Swedish, nine Danish, three Norwegian, two German, one French, one Luxembourg, one Spanish—at a total cost of £5,495,841.

1994

Ten vessels were chartered—seven Danish, one Norwegian, one German, one Spanish—at a total cost of £2,169,569.

1995

Thirty five vessels were chartered—nine Danish, four Spanish, four German, three Maltese, three Norwegian, two Swiss, two Greek, two Ukrainian, one British, one Polish, one Panamanian, one Italian, one Finnish, one Dutch—at a total cost of £9,779,266.

1996

Forty three vessels were chartered—seven Norwegian, seven Ukrainian, four Danish, four German, four Bahamian, four Swiss, two Panamanian, two maltese, two Finnish, two Polish, one Swedish, one Liberian, one Italian, one Cypriot, one Spanish—at a total cost of £15,569,937.

1997 (up to 28 February)

Three vessels have been chartered so far—two Danish and one Swiss—at a total cost of £631,966.

Note:

Some vessels may have been chartered on more than one occasion.

Trident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the warhead for the Trident system is of fixed or variable yield. [19224]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The UK has some flexibility in the choice of yield for the warheads on its Trident missiles.

AWE Aldermaston

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current status of the A90 building at AWE Aldermaston; and on what date it is expected that this building will become fully operational. [19220]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The A90 building at AWE is now fully operational in its production role, enabling plutonium production to cease at the original facilities. Other equipment and processes in A90, not directly linked with production, are being progressively brought into use.

Nuclear Depth Bombs

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all nuclear depth bombs removed from service have been dismantled. [19222]

Mr. Arbuthnot: All such weapons have been withdrawn from service and the dismantling process is continuing satisfactorily.

NATO

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards the conclusions of the US Department of State report on the enlargement of NATO, with particular reference to the responsibility for bearing the costs associated with improving NATO's regional reinforcement capabilities. [19107]

Mr. Soames: We are aware of the recent report to Congress by the US Administration on the enlargement of NATO, and believe that it provides a useful assessment of the issues. Rapid reinforcement is already a fundamental tenet of NATO doctrine. The Government have invested significantly, and will continue to invest, in the required capabilities, but we do not expect the enlargement of NATO of itself to require any significant changes to the level of this investment.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the financial cost to Britain of NATO expansion up to the year 2000. [19108]

Mr. Soames: No decisions have been taken on which countries will accede to NATO membership, when and on what terms. The costs of enlargement, which will fall both on the countries which join and on the existing members of the alliance and will be incurred over a long period, will depend on those decisions but are not expected to be unaffordable. We expect the accession of new members to result in a proportionate reduction in the UK share of NATO common budgets.

Fast Jets

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of fast jets which are not combat ready because *(a)* of failings in the maintenance programme and *(b)* they are awaiting spares. [19301]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The RAF has sufficient aircraft available to meet all its operational commitments. These commitments are given the highest priority in terms of logistic support, which can affect overall serviceability rates. On occasion, specific technical and industrial problems have also, temporarily, affected serviceability amongst the fast jet fleets.

Barracks (Acquisitions)

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what price the developers Dukeminster paid to acquire the three Walmer and Deal barracks sites, which were made redundant due to the closure of the Royal Marines school of music; and for what type of development the land will be used. [19014]

Mr. Soames: The overriding concern for the development of the barracks will be to provide an economically sustainable future for the site. The prospective developers, in conjunction with other interested parties and the local planning authority, are considering a range of options which will form the basis of a development plan for the site. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, I am withholding information regarding the proposed sale price under exemption 7 of the code of practice on access to Government information.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what response he has made to the representations made in recent months on behalf of the Marconi Defence Systems Ltd. subsidiary group within GEC plc for inclusion in significant high-technology defence contracts; and if he will list the recent contract awards in which Marconi Stanmore and the other subsidiaries have been so included. [18274]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Other than the representation that my hon. Friend made in July 1996 about the advanced air launched anti-armour weapon, SR(A)1238, to which I replied on 24 July 1996 my Department is not aware of any other representations. During the last three months, the various companies within GEC-Marconi Ltd. have received about 400 contracts from MOD and DERA, ranging from a few hundred to several million pounds in value. As there are so many contracts and as details of the nature of individual contracts are not held centrally, to research the requested information and list those over a certain value could be carried out only at disproportionate cost.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 6 March *Official Report*, column *710* on the MRSA outbreak at Cambridge Military hospital, what antibiotic was used following the screening for MRSA in 1994. [19900]

Mr. Soames: The antibiotic used at the Cambridge military hospital was Bactroban nasal. This is a nasal ointment comprising 2 per cent. Mupirocin in a white soft paraffin basis.

Medium-Support Helicopter Fleet

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for training for the medium-support helicopter fleet. [20068]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am pleased to announce that a medium support helicopter aircrew training facility is to be provided under the Government's private finance initiative, and that a consortium led by CAE Electronics of Canada, containing the UK companies Vega and Serco, has been selected as the preferred bidder. This will provide a training service for our Chinook HC Mk 2 and 3, Merlin HC Mk 3 and Puma HC Mk 1 helicopter crews based on dynamic mission simulators, together with computer-based training and support, housed in a single facility at RAF Benson in Oxfordshire. We plan to let a contract for at least 20 years with CAE for this service on the successful completion of final negotiations, which we hope to complete in the next few months.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Government Records

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about the efficiency and effectiveness of records storage keeping and storing in Government departments. [20062]

Mr. Freeman: The efficiency unit and Public Record Office recently undertook a joint study of records storage and management within government. I have placed a copy of their report in the Library of the House.

Custody Services

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has made a decision on the sale of custody services. [20060]

Mr. Freeman: I announced on 16 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *310*, that I had granted Apax Partners and Co., the proposed acquiror of the support services division of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency—DSSD, exclusive access to further information about custody services, with a view to their supporting a final bid for the business. I also announced that their final bid would be compared with the option of retaining the business in the public sector. The offer for custody services from DSSD/Apax did not represent better value for money than retention in the public sector.

The custody services will, alongside the special services group, remain part of the Security Facilities Executive, the future of which I announced on 3 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *602*. A competition will be held in due course for a new chief executive, whose remit will include the development of a robust commercial strategy for improving the competitiveness of the business.

Civil Servants (London Supplement)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the annual cost of paying a London supplement to civil servants working in London in the last year for which figures are available. [17686]

Mr. Freeman *[pursuant to his answer, 27 February 1997, c. 287–88]:* I regret that the date that I gave for the delegation to Departments and agencies of authority to determine pay and allowances was incorrect. The correct date was 1 April 1996.

Next Steps Agencies

Ms Eagle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to increase the number of next steps agencies. [15537]

Mr. Bates *[pursuant to his answer, 24 February 1997, c. 123]:* I regret that the information that I gave on the number of agency launches expected in April and the list that I placed in the Library were incorrect. Preparations are in hand for the launch of 10 new agencies and the relaunches of two existing agencies being expanded to take on additional functions. The correct list is as follows:

Functions being prepared for launch as next steps agencies in April 1997

Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency

Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science

Defence Estates Organisation

Defence Medical Training Agency

Defence Vetting Agency

Employment Tribunals Service

Farming and Rural Conservation Agency

Fisheries Research Services

Forestry Commission Research Agency

Government Car and Despatch Agency

The Army Individual Training Organisation is being expanded to take in Army recruiting and the RAF Training Group Defence Agency is being expanded to take in RAF recruiting and selection.

I have arranged for the earlier list to be withdrawn from the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate he has made of the additional numbers of severely disabled people who would be eligible for assistance from *(a)* the independent living fund and *(b)* direct payments from their local authority if the £500 upper limit was (i) raised to £1,000 and (ii) abolished entirely; and what would be the additional cost of assistance in each case; [16299]

(2) how many people have been refused consideration for payments from the independent living fund as a result of their care needs being assessed as over the £500 limit during *(a)* 1994–95, and *(b)* 1995–96; [16298]

(3) what would the upper limit for payments from the independent living fund be if it had been uprated by *(a)* prices and *(b)* earnings since its introduction; and what would be the extra cost of payments from the fund in each case. [16300]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

We intend to bring the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 into force on 1 April 1997. No upper or lower limits for the cost of care packages under the direct payments scheme have been set.

In 1994–95 and 1995–96, the independent living fund declined 13 and 28 applications respectively where the total cost of the care package exceeded £500.

If the current upper limit of £300 for payments by the fund set on 1 April 1993 had been increased in line with pries, it would now be £324 and £333 if it had been increased in line with average earnings. The annual estimated extra cost would be £100,000 and £135,000 respectively for 1996–97.

Notes:

1. Source: Independent living fund—100 per cent. count subject to change.

2. Calculated according to the retail prices index, earnings and average earnings index for all full-time employees; movement in RPI September 1993 to September 1995; movement in average earnings index for 1993–1996. In both cases the upper limits for independent living fund payments are assumed as adjusted from April 1996. All figures are rounded to the nearest £1.

Benefits Agency (Reorganisation)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received *(a)* in support of and *(b)* against the proposals for reorganisation of the Benefits Agency offices in Wales set out in "Blueprint for the Future"; and if he will make a statement. [18247]

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received 17 representations—11 from hon. Members and six from outside organisations, all of which are against the proposals.

Child Support

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the total payments to mothers by absent fathers in *(a)* the last full year before the coming into operation of the Child Support Agency and *(b)* the most recent year for which figures are available. [18470]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: In 1992–93, the last full year before the Child Support Agency came into operation, maintenance worth around £220[1] million was collected to offset payments of income support. It is not possible to identify how much of this maintenance was paid in respect of children as opposed to spouses.

During 1995–96, the last full year for which figures are available for the Child Support Agency, the agency collected or arranged over £300 million in child maintenance alone. It is on course to collect or arrange child maintenance of over £380 million in the current financial year.

Note:

[1] If parents come to a mutually acceptable arrangement over child maintenance, and prescribed social security benefits are not being claimed, the Child Support Agency will not be involved. No estimate is available of the amounts of maintenance involved.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of the court system in respect of child support in the last full year before the coming into operation of the Child Support Agency. [18468]

Mr. Mitchell: The latest available figures prior to the establishment of the Child Support Agency are for the period 1989–90 where the direct administrative costs of the court system attributable to child support maintenance were estimated to be around £20 million. Detailed information is not available separately on legal aid costs for child and spousal maintenance proceedings in the High Court and county courts but the annual gross cost of legal aid in matrimonial proceedings was around £80 million in 1989–90.

Benefit Offices (Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his target date for the Benefits Agency to submit to him its proposals on the future of benefit offices in Wales following the evaluation exercise on the public response to the consultation document, "BA Wales—Blueprint for the Future"; if he will make it his policy not to take any decisions on the future of these resources until the evaluation exercise has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [18580]

Mr. Roger Evans: In order that all submissions and representations can be given full consideration and are properly evaluated, it is not appropriate at this time to place a deadline on the submission of revised proposals as to what, if anything, will be implemented.

The evaluation process is now under way. All representations will be taken into account before any decisions are made.

Basic Pension Plus Proposal

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what are the costs of implementing the basic pension plus proposal for each year from 1998 to 2040, in today's prices; [19639]

(2) if he will estimate the cost of the £9 rebate in the basic pension plus proposal for each year from 1998 to 2040 in today's prices; [19643]

(3) how much will be spent on *(a)* the basic pension guarantee and *(b)* income support for each year from 2040 to 2060; [19640]

(4) when, under the basic pension plus proposal, he estimates total expenditure on the basic state pension will start falling; and how large the reductions in spending on the basic state pension are for each year after that. [19625]

Mr. Heald: The net effects on revenues of basic pension plus will rise on average by £160 million in each year following implementation, reaching a maximum of about £7 billion a year by 2040 or later. Thereafter, there would be a rapid decline in expenditure on state pensions.

Initially, the £9 rebate will represent half or more of the total cost of new rebates under basic pension plus, depending on the starting age limit, falling gradually to a little over a third by 2040.

The first people to retire under basic pension plus will do so after 2040. Basic pension guarantee payments will build up thereafter to a broadly assumed level of £10 billion a year by 2070. We do not expect income support expenditure to rise as a result of basic pension plus.

Under basic pension plus, expenditure on state retirement pension will start to fall when people in the new scheme start to retire after about 2040. Savings will build rapidly and will reach about £40 billion a year in the longer term.

It would not be appropriate to give precise figures for each year, since the exact costs will depend on when the scheme is introduced, what the initial age limit is, and other details to be considered during the consultation.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the expected income under the Government's basic pension plus proposal, on retirement for an individual who works for *(a)* 44 years, *(b)* 34 years and *(c)* 24 years, for (i) a male and (ii) a female on (1) average and (2) half average earnings; and if he will express these figures as a percentage of average earnings in 2040. [19641]

Mr. Heald: The precise details of the new basic pension plus are yet to be decided. The figures in the table are for illustration only. They assume retirement soon after 2040 and they give the pension payable around 2040, in 1996–97 prices, on the assumptions listed. The figures are calculated on the basis of the minimum contributions only and that the yield on investment does not exceed that assumed by the Government Actuary in setting rebates.

	Pension per week £	*Pension as a percentage of final earnings*
Males on average male earnings		
24 years contributions	125	12.3
34 years contributions	153	15.1
44 years contributions	184	18.1
Females on average female earnings		
24 years contributions	121	16.5
34 years contributions	145	19.7
44 years contributions	168	22.9
Males on half average male earnings		
24 years contributions	104	20.4
34 years contributions	121	23.9
44 years contributions	138	27.2
Females on half average female earnings		
24 years contributions	89	24.3
34 years contributions	101	27.4
44 years contributions	112	30.5

Notes:

1. The figures shown in the table depend significantly on the assumptions made in the calculations. In particular they will depend on the real rate of investment return, the real state of earnings growth, the expenses, precisely when in the working life the contributions are made and the rate at which the lump sum at retirement can be converted into pension.

Assumptions:

1. Real investment returns of 4.25 per cent. per annum in excess of prices.
2. Real earnings increases of 2 per cent. per annum in excess of prices.
3. Expenses of 6 per cent. of each contribution, 0.8 per cent. of the fund each year and 2 per cent. of the fund at retirement.
4. The pension in payment will increase in line with prices each year.
5. Average earnings for males on full-time adult earnings in 1996–97 are £400 a week.
6. Average earnings for females on full-time adult earnings in 1996–97 are £290 a week.
7. The accrued lump sum at retirement at age 65 can be converted into an annual pension equal to 7 per cent. of the lump sum.
8. Any shortfall between the current basic state pension and the pension provided by the accumulation of the £9 per week rebate is made up by the guarantee. For this purpose it has been assumed that in all cases there will be a sufficient record based on actual or credited contributions to entitle the person to the full rate of basic state pension of £61.15 per week.
9. Where 44 years contributions are made it is assumed that the missing five years are all at the youngest ages.
10. Where 34 years contributions are made it is assumed that the 15 missing years comprise 10 at the youngest ages and 15 at the oldest ages.
11. Where 24 years contributions are made it is assumed that the 25 missing years comprise 15 at the youngest ages and 15 at the oldest ages.
12. Where the person has been assumed not to be working in the final years up to age 65, the pension as a percentage of earnings has still been expressed as a percentage of the earnings at age 65 rather than the earnings when the person ceased working.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social, Security if he will estimate *(a)* the state earnings-related pension scheme pension payable on retirement to an individual who works for (i) 44 years, (ii) 34 years and (iii) 24 years, on average male earnings and *(b)* the basic state pension plus SERPS payable on retirement to an individual who works for (1) 44 years, (2) 34 years and (3) 24 years, on average male earnings. [19645]

Mr. Heald: Since no-one who has already worked for 44 years has a full entitlement to SERPS, it is assumed that the question relates to the pension payable to someone starting their working life around the year 2000. Accordingly, the table sets out the pension payable after 2040, in 1996–97 prices, on the assumptions listed.

	Basic pension per week £	*SERPS pension per week* £	*Total of basic pension plus SERPS per week* £
Males on average male earnings			
24 years contributions	61.15	57.20	118.35
34 years contributions	61.15	81.80	142.95
44 years contributions	61.15	106.80	167.95
Females on average female earnings			
24 years contributions	61.15	54.40	115.55
34 years contributions	61.15	75.20	136.35
44 years contributions	61.15	94.80	155.95

Assumptions:

1. Real earnings increases of 2 per cent. per annum in excess of prices.
2. Average earnings for males on full-time adult earnings in 1996–97 are £400 a week.
3. Average earnings for females on full-time adult earnings are £290 a week.
4. Where less than 44 years contributions have been paid it has been assumed that sufficient credits will be available to secure the full basic state pension of £61.15 a week.
5. Where 44 years contributions are made it has been assumed that the five missing years are all at the youngest ages.
6. Where 34 years contributions are made it has been assumed that the 15 missing years comprise 10 at the youngest ages and five at the oldest ages.
7. Where 24 years contributions are made it has been assumed that the 25 missing years comprise 15 at the youngest ages and 10 at the oldest ages.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumptions he has made about the number of people who will be members of basic pension plus in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2010, *(c)* 2020, *(d)* 2030 and *(e)* 2040. [19647]

Mr. Heald: In drawing up our proposals, it has been assumed that basic pension plus will apply to all new entrants to the labour market and those aged up to their early twenties once the scheme begins. Over a working

lifetime, the whole of the labour force will be covered. The precise details of the scheme will be decided in light of the consultation on the Green Paper.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the pension generated by the basic pension plus for *(a)* men and *(b)* women will be based on the same actuarial assumption; and if the same assumptions will apply to the £9 a week rebate to pay for the basic state pension and the 5 per cent. rebate on earnings subject to national insurance contributions to pay for the second tier pension. [19649]

Mr. Heald: Annuities bought from any funds accumulated under basic pension plus would be subject to the same annuity rates for men and women.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the additional tax payable over a 44-year working life under the tax regime set out in the basic pension plus proposal. [19638]

Mr. Heald: Future tax rates are a matter for the Government of the day and we shall be consulting on the pensions tax regime proposed under basic pension plus.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average pensioner income on retirement for the most recent year, expressed in cash terms at today's prices, and as a percentage of average earnings. [19642]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The pensioners' incomes series 1994–95 shows that the average gross weekly income, before housing costs, for recently retired pensioner units is estimated at £235.60, in July 1994 prices. This figure is equivalent to £248.70 in July 1996 prices, which is 70 per cent. of the average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees in July 1996.

Sources:

The pensioners' income series 1994–95 and the "Abstract of Statistics for Social Security Benefits and Contributions and Indices of Prices and Earnings", 1996 edition.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £0.10 and 1 per cent.

2. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age or a couple where the man defined as the head is over SPA. A recently retired pensioner unit is defined as a pensioner unit where the head of the benefit unit is less than five years older than SPA.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the Government Actuary's advice on *(a)* the £9 a week rebate and *(b)* the 5 per cent. rebate proposed in the basic pension plus proposal. [19644]

Mr. Heald: The Government Actuary's advice on the rebates for basic pension plus is incorporated in the technical note and is consistent with his review of certain contracting-out terms, Cm 3221.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the projected national insurance rates until 2050 under *(a)* the most recent Government Actuary projections taking into account the effects of the Pensions Act 1995 and *(b)* the basis pensions plus proposal. [19646]

Mr. Heald: The most recent projections on national insurance rates are contained in table 3 of "Pension Bill 1994. Report by the Government Actuary on the Financial Provisions of the Bill on the National Insurance Fund", Cm 2714.

It will be for the Government of the day to decide the future balance between different taxes, charges and borrowing.

The proposals will not require a change in the rates of national insurance contributions especially since existing tax rates would yield far more than they do now.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ask the Government Actuary to cost the additional net increase in public expenditure for the period during which workers are building up the contributions to their own accounts under his proposed benefit pension plus proposal. [19660]

Mr. Heald: We have already done so. The results are in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's announcement of 5 March 1997 and "Basic Pension Plus—A technical note", copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he asked the Government Actuary to cost the impact on public expenditure of his basic pension plus proposal before they were published. [19661]

Mr. Heald: The figures on the impact of basic pension plus on public expenditure in the technical note, a copy of which is available in the Library, are based on projections by the Government Actuary.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what rate of return on investments in state pension funds under his new proposals is predicted by the Government Actuary; on what basis this prediction is made; and how increases in this expected rate of return affect national insurance contribution rebates. [19623]

Mr. Heald: The Government Actuary's assumed rates of return on investments for basic pension plus are a real rate of 4.25 per cent. per annum net of prices pre retirement, and 3.75 per cent. per annum net of prices post retirement. These assumptions are as in his calculation of age-related rebates for Appropriate Personal Pensions, as set out in "Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes Review of Certain Contracting-Out Terms", Cm 3221, which sets out the factors taken into account in setting these assumptions.

Mrs. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the assumed level of charges which the Government Actuary used in calculating the expected returns in relation to the Government's basic pension plus proposal. [19624]

Mr. Heald: The Government Actuary's assumed level of charges is the same as allowed for in the Government Actuary's calculation of the rebates from SERPS which come into force next month, Cm 3221—i.e. 6 per cent. of the rebate, a 0.8 per cent. reduction in the annual rate of return before retirement, and a 2 per cent. loading on the annuity purchase price.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *561*, if he will make it his policy either to answer questions regarding appeal tribunals or to refer them to the president of the Independent Tribunal Service for reply. [19907]

Mr. Roger Evans: No. I refer the hon. Member again to the reply that I gave him on 4 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *561*.

It will depend upon the terms of the particular question. Matters within the statutory responsibilities of the president of the Independent Tribunal Service should be raised with him directly. Matters on the Government's policy in relation to the Independent Tribunal Service will continue to be answered by Ministers.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many medical members of disability appeal tribunals are involved in examining claimants for the purpose of entitlement to disability living allowance or attendance allowance. [19855]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is obtainable only by matching the Independent Tribunal Service's records of medical members of disability appeal tribunals against current information held by the Benefits Agency medical services.

The results of such an exercise indicate that 232 medical members of disability appeal tribunals are approved by the Benefits Agency medical services for the purposes of examining claimants in connection with claims to disability living allowance or attendance allowance.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pigs (Export)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of his Departments' export health certificates for pigs which were issued as for production or breeding during 1996 listed an abattoir as the final destination. [17841]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Live Animal Exports (Computer Data)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what data is collated via the computer system created by his Department under the auspices of the European Commission regarding the number of veal calves exported in each year from 1990 to 1996. [18206]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The purpose of the Animo computer system, which became operational in Great Britain in November 1993, is to send messages to other member states informing them that animals have been certified for export and are expected to be consigned to their territory. We are able to extract from the system statistical information on the number of animals certified for export, but by its nature this information does not always accord with the actual numbers of animals consigned from Great Britain.

Beekeeping

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from beekeepers about the threat posed by varroa; and if he will make a statement. [18799]

Mr. Boswell: We take the threat to honey bees from varroa most seriously and this is a matter upon which we have received a number of representations from beekeepers. The Ministry continues to work closely with beekeeping organisations to control the impact and spread of varroa.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what grants are available to beekeepers *(a)* to test their bees for varroa and *(b)* to treat bees with Bayvarol. [18797]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry provides a free diagnostic and information service for varroa, with the cost of treatment being borne by beekeepers. In addition the Ministry funds around £200,000 of research and development work relating to varroa.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussion he has had with EU representatives about United Kingdom beekeepers through the EC Council regulation COM(96)596. [18798]

Mr. Boswell: The Commission's proposals for a regulation concerning honey and beekeeping have been discussed in Brussels both at working group level and in the Special Committee for Agriculture. They have yet to be discussed in the Council of Ministers.

Lindane

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what mechanisms were put in place to monitor the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* quantity of use of lindane since its relicensing in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19292]

Mrs. Browning: A full review of the agricultural uses of lindane was completed by the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides in 1996. The committee concluded that when approved pesticides containing lindane were used properly they posed no unacceptable risk. The committee therefore recommended, and Ministers accepted, that approvals should continue.

Monitoring of all agricultural pesticides including lindane continues to be carried out by the working party on pesticide usage surveys. Monitoring indicates purpose of use, as well as quantity used, and covers all sectors of agriculture in a four-year rolling cycle, though arable crops are surveyed every other year. The results are published in the MAFF publications series; the arable survey—which covers most lindane uses—for 1996 is due to be published this autumn.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will commission research into the threat to human health from the use of lindane; and if he will make a statement. [19293]

Mrs. Browning: Lindane is used in both agriculture and non-agricultural pesticides. To allow authorisation of such compounds, companies must supply comprehensive

scientific information for evaluation by the Government's independent advisers. In the case of lindane, there is also considerable information available from other sources.

The pesticidal uses of lindane have recently been comprehensively reviewed on the basis of these data. Human health issues were fully considered by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and specific aspects by the Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment and the Committee on Mutagenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment. Following advice from the committees, Ministers concluded that when approved pesticides containing lindane were used in accordance with their conditions of approval they posed no unacceptable risk.

Roslin Institute

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the impact of recent reductions in the budgets of projects relating to *(a)* animal welfare, *(b)* pig genome mapping and *(c)* development potential of quiescent cells derived from sheep embryos, foetuses and adults on the work of the Roslin Institute. [19019]

Mrs. Browning: Some reduction in MAFF funding of work at Roslin Institute is a necessary consequence of recent modest reductions in our overall research budget and also of changes in the funding arrangements for Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council institutes. We have, in addition, as part of our ongoing effort to ensure that the work we support is relevant to our current needs, redirected funding in certain areas:

(a) following a review of our research on poultry welfare all contractors were invited to bid for new work. While the size of the overall programme has not been significantly changed, allocation of funds in accordance with our priorities has resulted in a loss of funding to Roslin Institute;

(b) funding for work on the pig genome has lead to notable successes such that it now attracts considerable industry support, hence there is less need for MAFF funding;

(c) the project on sheep cloning has achieved its aims.

However, most of the funds released from the last two projects have been redirected towards other work at the Roslin Institute.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what factors governed the length of notice given by his Department of recent funding reductions at the Roslin Institute. [19020]

Mr. Boswell: Every effort is made to give contractors as much notice as possible of planned changes to the funding of their programmes. MAFF wrote to the Roslin Institute in June 1996 and suggested that it should look for 50 per cent. co-funding for a range of its livestock science projects due to end between March and June 1997. Discussions with contractors on the programme of work on the welfare of poultry began with a formal review in 1995.

Milk

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in kilolitres the quantities of *(a)* plain whole milk, *(b)* flavoured whole milk, *(c)* plain semi-skimmed milk, *(d)* flavoured semi-skimmed milk, *(e)* plain whole-milk yoghurt for which claims have been made from Great Britan under the EC school milk subsidy scheme for (i) the spring term 1996 and (ii) the summer term 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19230]

Mr. Baldry: The quantities claimed under the EC school milk subsidy scheme from Great Britain are as follows:

(Kilolitres)

	Spring term 1996	*Summer term 1996*
Plain whole milk	16,987.216	13,641.030
Flavoured whole milk	406.861	185.677
Plain semi-skimmed milk	1,210.478	494.483
Flavoured semi-skimmed milk	211.418	59.950
Plain whole milk yoghurt	15.199	4.792
Total	18,831.172	14,385.932

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department established its internet site; what representations he has received and what data he has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19150]

Mr. Boswell: The Department introduced a dedicated world wide web site on the Internet in October 1996, following experience gained over the previous two years in publishing information via the CCTA Government Information Service. MAFF's web pages have been accessed over 90,000 times since the service was introduced, and over 550 new pages have been added. The Department encourages feedback and suggestions for improvement to the site, and has provided an E-mail address for this purpose. A number of comments on the content and structure of the site have been received, and these are being addressed as part of the continuing effort to improve and extend the service.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines he has issued on the use of goads in slaughterhouses. [19575]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Guidance on the use of sticks and goads in slaughterhouses was given in the code of practice on the welfare of red meat animals at slaughter which came into operation on 1 January 1993, having been laid before Parliament. Revised codes are in preparation. Any problems in individual premises are followed up by Meat Hygiene Service staff with the operator concerned.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines he has issued since 14 December 1995 relating to the necessity of sterilising slaughtering implements in slaughterhouses. [19550]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* None since 14 December 1995. Detailed guidelines on the necessity of sterilising slaughtering implements in

slaughterhouses are contained in the Meat Hygiene Service operations manual, issued in April 1995 to all official veterinary surgeons and plant operators. Any premises in which improvements are needed are followed up on an individual basis by Meat Hygiene Service staff with the operator concerned.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines he has issued since 14 December 1995 concerning ventilation in sheep lairages at slaughterhouses. [19570]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* None since 14 December 1995. Guidance on ventilation in lairages at slaughterhouses is given in the code of practice on the construction and layout of red meat slaughterhouses in relation to animal welfare which came into operation on 1 January 1993, having been laid before Parliament. Revised codes are in preparation. Guidance on welfare matters generally is given in the Meat Hygiene Service operations manual, issued in April 1995 to all official veterinary surgeons and plant operators. Any premises in which improvements are needed are followed up on an individual basis by Meat Hygiene Service staff with the operator concerned.

Red Meat (Hygiene Report)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to implement the recommendations of the hygiene advice team report on red meat. [19548]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 6 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns *1023–35*.

Livestock Diseases Prevention

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will undertake further research into methods of livestock production which reduce disease levels without the use of drugs; and if he will make a statement. [19215]

Mrs. Browning: One of the Department's research objectives is to promote disease control in livestock through methods other than treatment with veterinary medicines. The sustainable livestock production research programme, jointly funded by Government and industry, includes work to improve the efficiency of control of diseases in farm animals and therefore to reduce the amount of veterinary medicines used. In addition, there is ongoing research into organic livestock production methods.

Veterinary Drugs

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department will undertake urgently research into cross-resistance between enrofloxacin and ciprofloxacin; and if he will make a statement. [19287]

Mrs. Browning: Information on work at the Central Veterinary Laboratory on cross resistance between enrofloxacin and ciprofloxacin in salmonella was published in *The Veterinary Record* in May 1989 and in *The Lancet* in July 1990. The independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee keeps the issue of antibiotic resistance under review.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received over the therapeutic use of enrofloxacin to control respiratory disease in poultry; and if he will make a statement. [19285]

Mrs. Browning: I am unaware of any representations received about the therapeutic use of enrofloxacin to control respiratory disease in poultry.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons and in what circumstances tylosin is available without the need for a prescription; and if he will make a statement. [19282]

Mrs. Browning: Tylosin is authorised for use throughout the European Union as a zootechnical feed additive under directive 70/524/EEC. It is an aid to improving growth rate and feed conversion efficiency in pigs. In the UK, the sale and supply of products containing tylosin are subject to the provisions of the Medicines (Veterinary Drugs) (Pharmacy and Merchants' List) Order 1992, as amended. Seven products containing tylosin as the active ingredient may be made available through veterinarians or pharmacists or certain agricultural merchants registered with, and inspected by, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. Sales are restricted to persons whom the seller knows, or has reasonable cause to believe, to be persons who keep animals for business purposes.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the use of growth-promoting antibiotics in lactating cows. [19290]

Mrs. Browning: No antibiotic growth promoter is authorised for use in lactating dairy cows. The current authorisation for avoparcin as a milk enhancer will be withdrawn, together with all other feed additive uses of avoparcin, by 1 April 1997.

Mr Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what data his Department collates on changes in the purpose for which antibiotics in agriculture are used, and if he will make a statement; [19216]

(2) what statistics are collated by his Department on the quantities of each antibiotic used in agriculture; and if he will make a statement. [19283]

Mrs. Browning: The Government do not hold such data or statistics.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the use of (i) virginiamycin, (ii) zinc bacitracin, (iii) bambermycin, (iv) spiramycin and (v) avoparcin in lactating cows; and what representations he has received on their use. [19289]

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry does not commission research into the use of antibiotics in veterinary medicine. No veterinary medicinal product is authorised for use in the UK unless it first satisfies statutory criteria for safety, quality and efficacy. Data submitted in support of applications for authorisation are assessed by the veterinary medicines directorate and all antibiotics for the

treatment of food producing animals in the UK are also very carefully considered by the independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee.

With the exception of avoparcin, none of the antibiotics listed is authorised for use in lactating cows. Authorisations for avoparcin are to be withdrawn by 1 April 1997.

I have twice met the technical manager of Roche Products Ltd., which manufactures avoparcin.

Drug-resistant Food Poisoning Outbreaks

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list with dates each known outbreak of drug-resistant campylobacter food poisoning linked to British poultry; and if he will make a statement. [19288]

Mr. Horam: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not routinely recorded.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has evaluated into farm animals as a source of vancomycin-resistant enterococcal infection in man; what assessment he has made of this research; and if he will make a statement. [19360]

Mrs. Browning: The "Report of the Scientific Committee for Animal Nutrition (SCAN) on the Possible Risk for Humans on the Use of Avoparcin as Feed Additive", dated 21 May 1996, lists the relevant information. A copy of the report is available in the Library of the House. The UK's independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee has considered the SCAN's report and agrees with its conclusions.

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total acreage of land in the United Kingdom currently in set-aside; and what has been the total cost to public funds of payments to farmers for land in set-aside during 1996. [19486]

Mr. Baldry: The total acreage of land currently in set-aside will not be known until later this year In 1996 the total acreage of land in the United Kingdom set aside under the arable area payments scheme was 1,209,915 acres and payments to claimants in respect of that set-aside totalled £156,627,421 up to the end of February 1997.

Organic Farming

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many and what percentage of farms are currently classified as organic; and if he will make a statement. [19857]

Mr. Boswell: There were 646 registered organic units in England as at February 1997. These constitute less than 0.5 per cent. of the total number of agricultural holdings in England, although it is not possible to make an exact comparison because the figures are produced on different bases.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 March 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons (Random Drugs Tests)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the random drug tests carried out in prisons in England and Wales were positive in *(a)* April to June 1996, *(b)* July to September 1996 and *(c)* October to December 1996. [19037]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 12 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the proportion of random drug tests which have been positive.

There are some doubts and questions about the integrity of some Mandatory Drugs Testing data, largely relating to the second confirmation test, which is undertaken when the results of the initial, screening test are challenged by prisoners. We do not anticipate that the impact of any inaccuracies on the overall figures to be particularly large or have a vast effect. However, the matter is being examined urgently, both by Prison Service staff and by independent researchers. Once the review work is completed we will provide the requested figures which I expect we shall be able to do in the course of April 1997.

Prison Suicides

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) of 4 February, *Official Report*, columns *552–53*, what was the number and rate per 100,000 prisoners of self-inflicted deaths at prison establishments *(a)* in 1992–93 and *(b)* for the first nine months of 1996–97 at an estimated annualised rate. [19038]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 12 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your Question about the number of self-inflicted deaths at prison establishments in 1992–93, and in the first nine months of 1996–97. You have also asked for these figures to be expressed at an estimated annual rate.

In 1992–93 there were 43 self-inflicted deaths with an average prison population of 43,913. This represents a rate of 98 self-inflicted deaths per 100,000 prisoners.

During the first nine months (April–December) of the financial year 1996–1997 there were 49 self-inflicted deaths. Based on current projections for 1996–97, this represents a rate of 115 self-inflicted deaths per 100,000 prisoners.

Full Sutton Prison (Disturbance)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the causes of the disturbance at Full Sutton prison in January 1997; and if he will make a statement. [19039]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 12 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the disturbance at Full Sutton Prison.

A wide ranging inquiry into this disturbance was commissioned on 22 January. The terms of reference were "To inquire into the circumstances surrounding the disturbance at HM Prison Full Sutton on Monday 19 January and Tuesday 20 January 1997. To identify lessons to be learned and make recommendations as appropriate".

The inquiry has now completed its work and will report to the Director General shortly.

Prisons Board

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the changes in the membership of the prisons board and *(b)* the changes in job titles and main responsibilities, with dates of the changes, since 1 April 1993. [19040]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 12 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the changes in the members of the Prisons Board and the changes in their job titles and responsibilities, with dates of the changes since April 1993.

The requested information is provided in the attached table.

Prisons board from 1 April 1993

Post (date of change if any)	*Postholder (date of change if any)*	*Main responsibilities (date of change if any)*
Director General	Derek Lewis (April 1993–October 1995) Richard Tilt (acting October 1995–April 1996, confirmed April 1996–present)	Agency Chief Executive.
Director of Health Care	Dr. Rosemary Wool (April 1993–April 1996) Dr. Mike Longfield (acting April 1996–present)	Responsible for medical policy and (from April 1994) health and safety policy.
Director of Finance	Tony Butler (acting April 1993–December 1993) Brian Landers (December 1993–August 1996) Julian Le Vay (acting August 1996–November 1996) Syd Norris (November 1996–present)	Responsible for financial management and planning.

Prisons board from 1 April 1993

Post (date of change if any)	*Postholder (date of change if any)*	*Main responsibilities (date of change if any)*
Director of Inmate Administration (until April 1994)	Ian Dunbar (April 1993–April 1994)	Operational responsibility and financial support for midlands establishments, policy responsibility for inmate administration.
Director of Custody (April 1993–May 1995)	Philippa Drew (April 1993–May 1995)	Operational responsibility and financial support for establishments in south, policy responsibility for security (until January 1995), lifers and parole (until April 1994). Operational responsibility was increased April 1994 to absorb prisons from Director of Inmate Administration.
Director of Operations South (May 1995–present)	Alan Walker (May 1995–present)	Operational responsibility and financial support for establishments in south.
Director of Personnel and Services (April 1993–94)	Tony Butler (April 1993–April 1994)	Responsible for personnel matters, health and safety, other support services, and competition policy.
Director of Personnel (April 1994–present)	Tony Butler (April 1994–May 1995) Liz Grimsey (acting May 1995–October 1995) David Scott (October 1995–present)	Responsible for personnel matters.
Director of Services (April 1994–March 1997)	Richard Tilt (April 1994–May 1995) Tony Butler (May 1995–June 1996)	Responsible for regime, parole and other support services and competition policy. Responsible for Security January–May 1995. Administration policy added March 1997.
Director of Services and Administration (March 1997–present)	Hugh Taylor (August 1996–present)	
Director of Inmate Programmes (April 1993–April 1994)	Tony Pearson (April 1993–April 1994)	Operational responsibility and financial support for prisons in north, policy responsibility for inmate regimes and programmes.
Director of Programmes (April 1994–May 1995)	Tony Pearson (April 1994–May 1995)	Operational responsibility increased April 1994 to absorb prisons from Director of Inmate Administration.
Director of Operations North (May 1995–present)	Tony Pearson (May 1995–October 1995) Alastair Pupps (acting October 1995–May 1996, confirmed May 1996–present)	Operational responsibility for establishments in north and financial support.
Director of Security and Programmes (May 1995–present)	Richard Tilt (May 1995–October 1995) Tony Pearson (October 1995–present)	Responsibility for security, regimes and (until March 1997) prisoner administration policy.
Non-executive Directors	Geoffrey Keays (November 1993–October 1995) Urmilla Bannerjee (November 1993–October 1995) Bill Bentley (April 1993–present) Sir Duncan Nichol (April 1994–present)	Act as independent advisers to the Director General.

Prison Service Advisory Board

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the membership of the proposed Prison Service advisory board. [19041]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Plans for the advisory board are well advanced, but my right hon. and learned Friend has decided to defer the establishment of the board until the outcome of the director general's review of the organisation and management of the Prison Service is known.

Long Lartin Prison

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Long Lartin prison was opened as a dispersal prison; and how many escapes have taken place from Long Lartin since then. [19042]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A.J. Pearson to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 12 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about Long Lartin Prison.

Long Lartin opened as a Category C prison in January 1971. It became a dispersal prison the following year in 1972. Since becoming a dispersal prison Long Lartin has never had an escape.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the German Government relating to the granting of bail to Roisin McAliskey; through what channels; and when they were received. [19045]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* None, other than the original request for Roisin McAliskey's detention and extradition, which was received through diplomatic channels on 17 December 1996. It is the responsibility of the Crown Prosecution Service to represent the case for extradition and bail

before the courts on behalf of the German prosecutor, and there has been no change in the position on bail, which is, ultimately, a matter for the courts.

Asylum Seekers (Sudan)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people from Sudan have applied for asylum in each of the past five years; and how many have been *(a)* granted asylum, *(b)* given leave to remain and *(c)* removed from the United Kingdom. [19602]

Mr. Kirkhope: During 1996, 280 applications for asylum in the United Kingdom were lodged by nationals of Sudan. During the same time period, 55 Sudanese nationals were granted asylum and 10 were refused asylum but granted exceptional leave. Information on those granted leave to remain in the United Kingdom under a different section of the immigration rules, after having previously applied for asylum, is not available. Provisional information shows that seven Sudanese asylum seekers were removed, or departed voluntarily, from the United Kingdom during 1996.

Information on asylum applications lodged in the United Kingdom during earlier years is given in table 2.1 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom, 1995", issue 9/96, a copy of which is available in the Library. Historical information on those granted asylum or exceptional leave, and on those asylum seekers removed, is given in tables 3.1, 3.2 and 10.1 of the same publication.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if he will make a statement. [19342]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make it clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large numbers of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for my Department to calculate systematically the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

Bookmakers Committee

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a decision on the reconstituting of the Bookmakers Committee to the Levy Board. [19915]

Mr. Kirkhope: We are currently considering the responses to our earlier consultation exercise and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Police Scientific Development Branch

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will place in the Library a memorandum concerning the prior options review of the Police Scientific Development Branch. [20347]

Mr. Howard: I have today placed in the Library a memorandum setting out the rationale underlying the decision I announced on 29 January, that the Police Scientific Development Branch should remain in the public sector as an integral part of the Home Office.

Whitemoor Prison (Escapes)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on how the memory for the automatic record facility on the 20 to 30 second replay prior to the perimeter fence alarm activation had been completely cleared. [16863]

Miss Widdecombe: At the time of the escape from Her Majesty's prison Whitemoor on 9 September 1994, once an activation of the perimeter fence alarm had been responded to by an operator in the emergency control room, the alarm system was wiped clear. This included the memory of the images received by the nearest camera connected to the alarm system in the 20 to 30 second period before the alarm was activated.

American Prison Ship (Purchase)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to this answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *212*, relating to the purchase of a prison ship, what assessment he has made of *(a)* the safety of its moorings, *(b)* security arrangements to avoid prisoners fleeing (i) by land and (ii) by sea and *(c)* problems faced by prisoners suffering ill health exacerbated by being on board ship; and what local representations he has received. [19112]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question on the issues of safety, security and health associated with the purchase of a prison ship.

As a purpose-built prison barge, the floating prison has no means of propulsion. It will be secured in accordance with the Queen's Harbourmaster's requirements. Before the ship is fully operational, safe systems of work will be ensured, complying with applicable health and safety legislation, and contingency plans will be in place to manage the range of operational and security problems which might confront any prison.

To ensure security against attempts by prisoners to escape, all areas to which prisoners have access on the ship are securely barred. The intended immediate dock site is encircled by a security fence as is usual at all category C establishments. Senior Prison Service governors visited New York in December to view the vessel and confirm its suitability as a floating prison.

Health care will be provided to prisoners on the floating prison as in any other prisons.

The Prison Service's application for planning consent has been considered by Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and referred to the Secretary of State for the Environment for a decision. Weymouth Civic Society has voiced concerns, through Ian Bruce MP, on the visual and environmental impact of the floating prison. There have also been concerns expressed by members of the public.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a public inquiry into the location of the proposed prison ship; and if he will make a statement. [19113]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 12 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about a public enquiry into the location of the proposed prison ship.

The Prison Service considers that the former Royal Navy dock at Portland would be a suitable berth for the prison ship. The planning application submitted by the Prison Service to Weymouth and Portland Borough Council was considered by both the planning committee and a full meeting of the council and has now been referred to the Secretary of State for the Environment for his decision. It is for him to decide the procedure for determining the application.

Fixed Penalty Notices (Ethnic Monitoring)

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he issues to constabularies in respect of requirements on those issued with a fixed penalty notice to provide information on their ethnic origin; what assessment he has made of the relevance of such information to the police; and if he will make a statement. [19087]

Mr. Maclean: The police service has, since 1 April 1993, been required to record the ethnic appearance of those stopped and searched under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. That was extended to arrests, cautions, and the victims and suspects in homicide cases, from 1 April 1996. This information will be published in the autumn. There are presently no plans to extend further the ethnic monitoring of police activity. Forces which wish to gather information in further areas of activity, however, are free to do so.

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department established its Internet site; what representations he has received and what data he has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of information via the site. [19144]

Mr. Howard: My Department established an Internet site for its research and statistical department in March 1995, and a home page for the Department generally in March 1996. Home Office press notices, and those of the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the Police Complaints Authority, became available on a linked server provided by the Central Office of Information in April 1995.

Feedback is received by those responsible for the content of the site through electronic mail, and taken into account when updating or developing the site. The Central Computing and Telecommunications Agency extracts data on the use made of the site from the server log weekly, and sends it to my Department where it is collated and analysed.

A programme has been carried out to raise awareness of the Internet as a medium for publication of information and a number of additional documents are being added to the site according to a planned schedule. As part of this programme, the site is being extensively reorganised and the home page address will shortly move to http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk in order to improve access to and navigation of these documents.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19386]

Mr. Howard: The available information about costs specifically attributable to customer charters and standards is as follows:

Home Office Department	*Document*	*Cost*	*Number of copies*
Prison Service	Citizens Charter statement of standards 1993	No separate record of costs of publication/circulation or number of copies produced	
United Kingdom Passport Agency	Charter Standard Statement issued 1994, revised 1995 and 1996	'£5,892 over 3 years	15,000 copies over 3 years
	Citizens Charter Noticeboard 1994, 1995, 1996	'£3,214 over 3 years	Six (one in each Passport Office)
Immigration and Nationality Directorate Immigration Ports Directorate	Statement of Principles and Service	'£438	150 posters
Immigration and Nationality Directorate Finance and Services Directorate	Leaflet: The work of Immigration and Nationality Directorate'	£12,945	50,000 leaflets
Procedures and Victims Unit	Victims Charter 1996	£87,000	94,000 copies
TOTAL Quantifiable Costs		£109,489	

' Costs of design, printing and distribution. Costs of drafting not separately identifiable.

Charters and service standards are often reproduced in annual reports and various other documents, but the costs of doing so are not separately identifiable.

Immigration

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications by spouses to enter the United Kingdom have been refused under the primary purpose rule in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [19500]

Mr. Kirkhope: The latest available information for the Indian sub-continent is given in the table. Corresponding information for non-ISC posts is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Initial refusals of entry clearance on primary purpose grounds for spouses in the Indian sub-continent, 1993–95

Numbers[1]

	Husbands		*Wives*	
	Solely on primary purpose grounds	*Partly on primary purpose grounds*	*Solely on primary purpose grounds*	*Partly on primary purpose grounds*
1993	800	970	180	130
1994	750	940	270	180
1995	640	1,130	240	300

[1] All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Albania

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider using his powers under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 to declare Albania a country in which there has been a fundamental change of circumstances. [19592]

Mr. Kirkhope: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to declare that Albania has undergone a major upheaval such that we would not seek to return people there for the time being. Most of Albania remains unaffected by the disturbances, which are mainly confined to its southern towns.

CS Gas

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance to Metropolitan police officers on the use of CS spray; and if he will ensure that future revisions of the guidance are placed in the Library as a matter of course. [19651]

Mr. Maclean: The Metropolitan police use guidelines issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers. Copies of the guidelines were placed in the Library in response to a question from the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on 17 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *513*.I will arrange for revisions to the guidelines to be placed in the Library as and when they are made.

Asylum Seekers (Hunger Strikes)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the longest period of time for which any of the hunger strikers currently detained in Rochester prison has been on hunger strike; and if he will make a statement; [19899]

(2) how many people are currently being held in Rochester prison who are seeking asylum in the United Kingdom; of these how many are at present on hunger strike; and if he will make a statement. [19898]

Miss Widdecombe: On Friday 7 March, a total of 195 persons were detained at Her Majesty's prison Rochester solely under Immigration Act powers. Of these, 152 had, at some time, claimed asylum. There were no immigration detainees refusing prison prepared meals.

During the most recent occasion when persons detained under Immigration Act powers refused food, the longest period of time an individual refused prison prepared meals was 46 days.

Police (Disciplinary Penalties)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have exercised their right to appeal to the Home Secretary against disciplinary penalties imposed by their chief constables during each of the last 10 years; and with what result. [19650]

Mr. Maclean: This information is published in the annual Home Office statistical bulletin entitled "Police Complaints and Discipline England and Wales". The statistics before 1990 were published in Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary's annual reports. Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Next Steps Review

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the next steps review. [20266]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Government have today published the 1996 next steps review, Cm 3579, which has been laid in both Houses. This review, the seventh in the series, brings together performance and trend information on 109 executives agencies and the executive units of HM Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue operating in 1995–96 and details of next steps developments up to the end of 1996.

The publication sets out some impressive results flowing from the Government's managerial reforms of the civil service. It also shows that there is scope for further improvement and describes the Government's approach for bringing this about, through better assessment and benchmarking of the performance of agencies and their targets, the identification and spread of best managerial practice, including that in the private sector, and action on the areas needing attention.

The 1996 next steps review opens up for scrutiny a wealth of data and comment on the executive work of the civil service and provides a valuable source document and commentary on management issues.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Solicitors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many solicitors now have rights of audience in the higher courts; [18903]

(2) how many solicitors have applied for rights of audience in the higher courts since the coming into force of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. [18913]

Mr. Streeter: I am informed by the Law Society that, out of a total of 803 solicitors who have so far applied, 438 have been awarded higher courts qualifications and 239 are in the process of having their applications determined.

Legal Services (Contracts)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the proposals to establish fixed-price contract systems for the provision of legal services, will take effect. [18909]

Mr. Streeter: Pilots for family mediation and civil and criminal advice and assistance will start later this year. But to provide the majority of legally aided services almost exclusively through fixed-price contracts will require legislation. In addition the Government are committed to piloting the proposals and proceeding with caution to ensure that the contracting system works. We would expect fixed-price contracts to cover the majority of legally aided services in three to four years time.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice members of his Department received from representatives of the Spangenberg group on a contract system based on fixed-price contracts during their visit to north America. [18910]

Mr. Streeter: Officials from my Department have visited the Spangenberg Group, a private consultancy, among other sources of advice on contracting legally aided services. The Spangenberg Group has wide knowledge and experience of ways of maintaining quality while controlling cost in the delivery of criminal defence services. It has passed a great deal of information to my Department on the subject.

County Court Fees

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received on the impact of the County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996 (SI 1996 No. 3189) on those in debt. [18873]

Mr. Streeter: According to our records 53 representations have been received by Ministers specifically relating to the County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996, two in the form of parliamentary questions and 51 letters from Members of Parliament.

Magistrates Courts Committees

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the status of the Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull magistrates courts committees. [20348]

Mr. Streeter: Whilst my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor and I continue to support the policy of amalgamating magistrates courts committees, where to do so would be likely to contribute to an overall increase in administrative efficiency for committees concerned, a number of points have been raised in the recent consultation exercise which require further consideration. In order for full consideration to be given to these matters my right hon. and noble Friend and I have decided that it would be appropriate to direct the chief inspector of Her Majesty's magistrates court service inspectorate to report, by the end of July 1997, on whether the proposed amalgamation of Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull magistrates courts committees, in accordance with the proposals set out in the consultation document, and in the light of the comments made in consultation, would be likely to contribute to an overall increase in the efficiency of the administration of magistrates courts for the area. In the circumstances, it is not appropriate that an immediate decision is reached at this time and the timetable proposed in the draft amalgamation order is therefore no longer appropriate.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Television Licences

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) when she plans to announce changes in the requirements for television licences for caravans; [18762]

(2) when she plans to announce changes to the television licence rules in respect of the sheltered housing schemes which fail to qualify for television licence concessions because some units within the scheme were purchased under the right-to-buy provision before the accommodation was designated as sheltered housing. [18764]

Mr. Sproat: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply of 12 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *188–89*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire).

Executive Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department estimates it cost to establish each executive agency associated with her Department. [16966]

Mr. Sproat *[pursuant to his reply 25 February 1997, Official Report, column 146]:* Regrettably, the reply was incorrect. The correct information is as follows: Although the Historic Royal Palaces agency is now associated with my Department, it was set up by the Department of the Environment prior to the establishment of the Department of National Heritage in April 1992. My Department established The Royal parks agency on 1 April 1993, continuing the earlier work undertaken by the Department of the Environment. Some administrative costs were incurred by my Department between April 1992 and 1 April 1993 but I regret detailed information is not available.

Channel 5

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if Channel 5 will be able to be received throughout Pendle; and if she will make a statement. [19579]

Mr. Sproat: Copies of maps showing the predicted initial coverage of Channel 5 broadcasts from terrestrial transmitters were placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 23 October 1996. The closest transmitter to the hon. Member's constituency which will transmit Channel 5 is

Winter Hill. It is estimated that this transmitter will not provide a service throughout the Pendle constituency. However, some residents in the south-west of the constituency who are on the edge of the predicted coverage area may receive an acceptable service.

The Government have always acknowledged that viewers in several parts of the country will not be able to receive Channel 5. It is, however, open to Channel 5 Broadcasting Ltd. to enhance its coverage in future by other delivery means, including cable, satellite and digital terrestrial transmissions.

Football Clubs

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement in respect of the moratorium imposed by the Football Trust on grant aid to football clubs arising out of the Taylor report; and if she will make a statement. [19519]

Mr. Sproat: I have recently met representatives of the Football Trust to discuss its future funding programme. I am hopeful that a solution will be found soon that will enable the trust's grants programme to be resumed. The Government remain committed to delivering on schedule the essential football ground safety improvements agreed following the Taylor report.

International Olympic Committee

Mr. Legg: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she will next visit the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee. [20264]

Mr. Sproat: I am visiting the International Olympic Committee on 13 March at the invitation of its President, Mr. Samaranch. My main aim is to ensure that the case for British sport and our commitment to attracting major international events, not least the Olympic games, is fully understood at the highest levels of major international sports organisations. I shall also be using the opportunity to stress the whole range of radical sporting initiatives which this Government have taken, including: the proposed British Academy of Sport; national lottery revenue support to develop sporting excellence and capital support for updating facilities, including the proposed new English national stadium at Wembley and facilities in Manchester for the 2002 Commonwealth games. To underline the importance of this visit, Mr. Craig Reedie, chairman of the British Olympic Association, and a member of the United Kingdom Sports Council, will accompany me.

Churches and Cathedrals (National Lottery Funding)

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many churches and cathedrals have received funding from the national lottery; and what is the total amount of such funding. [18291]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* Seventy awards totalling £11,561,976 have been announced for the restoration and refurbishment of churches and cathedrals.

National Lottery Awards (Crewe and Nantwich)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the total amount paid out in national lottery awards to projects and charities in the constituency of Crewe and Nantwich since the inception of the national lottery indicating what percentage of the total amount awarded this represents. [18637]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* A total of £969,320 has been paid out to projects in Crewe and Nantwich. This represents 62 per cent. of the total awards of £1,556,221 announced for the constituency.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of bills to her Department were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied in the last year for which figures are available. [18815]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* My Department has signed up to the CBI prompt payment code and is committed to the payment of invoices within agreed contractual provisions or within 30 days of the presentation of a valid invoice or delivery, if later. Whilst the information requested is not available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, on the basis of a sample of invoices received by the Department of National Heritage during the 1995–96 financial year, 91 per cent. were paid within the contract terms or 30 days.

Television Violence

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations she has had with *(a)* Independent Television Commission and *(b)* the Broadcasting Standards Commission concerning the levels of violence on television following the killings at Dumblane. [19098]

Mr. Sproat: The Government have long been concerned about violence on television and the protection of young people from unsuitable material. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State regularly meets the ITC and the Broadcasting Standards Council and has frequently highlighted public concerns on this issue. Last autumn, she asked both bodies, together with the BBC, to report action taken on violence and future proposals, and in December she met the bodies' chairmen to review their reports and agree further initiatives.

The ITC, BSC and BBC are establishing an industry working party to implement plans, following those initiatives, to improve the information available to the public and to review and publicise guidelines to be applied in dealing with the portrayal of violence. On 5 March this year my right hon. Friend opened a conference for broadcasters on violence, hosted by the BSC, at which there was detailed discussion of the issues to be covered as this work progresses.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many answers to parliamentary questions by Ministers in her Department in the last 12 months have exceeded the advisory cost limit; and if she will make a statement. [19341]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Where the cost of answering a particular parliamentary question is estimated to exceed £450, it is the general practice for Departments to make clear that the question could be answered only by incurring disproportionate cost. Given the large numbers of questions tabled, it would be unreasonable for my Department to systematically calculate the exact cost of answering every single parliamentary question.

National Lottery

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list, in rank order, for each county or region an amount per head of population spent *(a)* weekly, *(b)* monthly, *(c)* annually and *(d)* in total on the national lottery. [19554]

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the current amount of interest earned by Camelot in relation to the prize shortfall mechanism as set out in section 5 of the licence; and if he will make a statement. [19069]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* These are operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have, therefore, asked the director general of the national lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Members, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

ENVIRONMENT

Sheltered Housing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines his Department gives in respect of the construction standards for sheltered housing; and what funding his Department provides for the refurbishment of sheltered housing. [19218]

Mr. Clappison: My Department issues no guidelines in respect of the construction standards for sheltered housing. Guidelines for provision for elderly people are however included in the scheme development standards which the Housing Corporation requires as a condition of social housing grant. For local authorities, funds for the refurbishment of sheltered housing are included within their annual capital guideline but the proportion spent on these works cannot be separately identified. Housing Associations are primarily responsible for meeting the costs of refurbishment of their sheltered housing, however, in 1995–96, £7.4 million was allocated by the Housing Corporation for the re-improvement of properties of this type.

Utility Disconnections

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number of households where *(a)* one and *(b)* two of the gas, electricity and water utilities, is currently disconnected. [19636]

Mr. Clappison: The Office of Water Services collects and publishes data on total water supply disconnections in England and Wales twice yearly, covering the periods from 1 April–30 September and 1 October–31 March. At 30 September 1996, 449 properties disconnected during the preceding six months remained disconnected. Thirty-six properties disconnected during this period are known to have been empty.

Information on numbers of households remaining disconnected from gas and electricity services is not centrally available.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19394]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department of the Environment is mainly a policy Department, which provides few services direct to the public. We have issued only a small number of customer charters and standard statements. The information requested in respect of these is as follows:

	Estimated total costs (£)	*Approximate number of copies issued*
Council tenants charter	274,500	935,000
Planning charter standards	55,000	60,000
Charter standard statement for geographical information	24,000	11,000

Royal Seaforth Terminals

Mr. Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many accidents were recorded at the Royal Seaforth container terminal and Royal Seaforth forest products terminal in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996. [19436]

Sir Paul Beresford: The number of accidents recorded by the Health and Safety Executive as occurring at the Royal Seaforth container terminal and Royal Seaforth forest products terminal in 1995–96 was one and in 1996–97 there were eight.

Mobile Telephones

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to extend the period within which applications for antennae for mobile telephone transmission are considered; and if he will make a statement. [19840]

Sir Paul Beresford: Outside the national parks and other protected areas, the erection of masts of up to 15 m high by licensed telecommunications operators is permitted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, subject to the operator applying for the local planning authority's determination as to whether its prior approval to the siting and appearance of the proposed development will be required. We are not currently considering any change to the 28-day period within which the authority should notify the operator of its determination and either give or refuse approval.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review planning guidance in respect of applications for sites and antennae required for mobile telephone use; and if he will make a statement. [19838]

Sir Paul Beresford: Planning policy guidance note 8—revised December 1992—sets out policy guidance on planning for telecommunications development, including radio masts and towers and antennas required for mobile telephone systems. We have no immediate plans to amend planning policy guidance note 8 but have supplemented the guidance with a code of best practice on planning procedures for telecommunications masts, published in March 1996.

National Air Quality Strategy

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the final national air quality strategy; and if he will make a statement. [20066]

Mr. Gummer: Following extensive consultation on proposals for a UK national air quality strategy, and careful consideration of the responses, the Government have decided to press ahead with steps to achieve by 2005 major reductions in the principal air pollutants which threaten health in the UK.

During a three-month consultation period, the Government received around 450 responses, 210 of them from local authorities. Most offered broad support for the general principles and approach proposed by the Government. They recognised the need for a strategic, integrated approach which is health-based and objective-led. While some responses urged even tighter objectives, and others raised concerns about the impact of costs on industry, a clear majority endorsed them and accepted that the target of achievement by 2005 was appropriate.

The strategy sets out standards and objectives for the control and reduction of the eight main health-threatening air pollutants in the UK—nitrogen dioxide, particles, ozone, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, lead, benzene and 1.3 butadiene. The standards are health-based, on recommendations either by a panel of independent medical and scientific experts, or the World Health Organisation. Achievement of the objectives set out in the strategy should minimise the impact for air pollutants on human health in the UK.

The strategy is the first of its kind in Europe. It will offer everyone, even those most sensitive to air pollution, a very high level of protection. The objectives are ambitious and in some cases go beyond what is likely to be achieved by measures currently in place. However, the Government believe that protection of human health should be paramount and it will introduce further measures if necessary to achieve its pollution control objectives.

Air quality in the UK has improved considerably since the 1950s and 1960s. However, advances in scientific knowledge since then have led to a better understanding of the health effects of major air pollutants, and provided new technologies to tackle these. The Government have committed themselves, therefore, through the strategy, to the improvement of localised areas of poor air quality, to the reduction of any remaining significant risks to health, and to ensuring consistently good air quality throughout the country by 2005.

The strategy sets out the contribution key sectors, including industry, transport and local government will need to make towards the achievement of the objectives. It brings together the existing systems for controlling pollution and introduces a new system of local air quality management to complement them, and help clear up pollution "hot-spots". Because of remaining uncertainties over the exact reductions in emissions needed or achievable, for some pollutants, some of the objectives remain provisional. The strategy will be subject to periodic reviews, the first in 1999, to assess progress towards meeting the objectives and ensure their continuing relevance and the cost effective of the proposed measures.

The improvements we seek will not come without cost. We are committed to achieving our objectives through the application of the principles of BATNEEC—best available techniques not entailing excessive cost—and BPEO— best practicable environment option. The costs are likely to fall on industry, business, motorist and consumers alike. The Government will ensure, therefore, that the right balance is struck and that pollution control measures are proportionate and represent the most-effective solutions available.

Some contributions to air pollutants in the UK come from outside our borders and their control necessitates common action with our partners in Europe. The strategy is designed to be consistent with forthcoming EC requirements on air quality—and we will continue to work closely with the EU countries to tackle transboundary air pollutants, especially ground-level ozone.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *100*, which formulae for the distribution of grants rely on postcodes. [19631]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not held centrally. A comprehensive answer could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. Information available on the revenue support grant, which may not be comprehensive, is given in the table. A wide range of data are used in the formulae determining the distribution of the revenue support grant. Some data which are collected by other Government Departments use postcodes. These data are aggregated to local authority level before being used in the formulae.

Source data which uses postcodes	*Element of Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) formulae in which it is used*	*Data provided by*
Income support	Education SSA Social Services SSA	Department of Social Security
Unemployment	Police SSA All other services SSA	Office for National Statistics
New earnings survey	Area cost adjustment used in all SSA service blocks except capital financing	Office for National Statistics

Source data which uses postcodes	*Element of Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) formulae in which it is used*	*Data provided by*
Deaths	Social Services SSA All other Services SSA	Office for National Statistics
Population estimates	All SSA service blocks except capital financing	Office for National Statistics

Local Authority Estates (Mapping)

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish his Department's research on mapping local authority estates using the index of local conditions. [20304]

Mr. Curry: The report was published today and copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The desk research had two objectives: to explore the relationship between tenure and social and economic deprivation; and to identify and map the most deprived local authority estates according to the index of local conditions. My Department has commissioned a validation exercise on the results of the desk exercise.

UN General Assembly (Special Session)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals have been put by the United Kingdom to the intersessional meeting of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and the first preparatory conference for the special session of the UN General Assembly; and if he will place in the Library copies of the documentation discussed at this PrepCom which is relevant to the United Kingdom. [19421]

Mr. Gummer: The United Kingdom's general approach to the special session and its preparatory meetings was set out in the consultation paper of 30 December, copies of which were placed in the Library. As a member of the European Union, the United Kingdom contributes actively to the common position of the Union, which enables us to have a significantly greater influence in UN decision making. I have placed copies in the Library of the main statements made by the presidency of the Union, at the recent preparatory meeting, on behalf of the member states, along with the co-chairman's report of the meeting. The UK has increasingly been among the leaders in the EU on environmental matters—not least on biodiversity, climate change, forest protection, and action on the marine environment.

TREASURY

Borrowing Programme

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's borrowing programme for 1997–98.[20265]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government today published the "Debt Management Report" for 1997–98. This report, the third of the series, includes details of the 1997–98 borrowing programme and the Government's remits to the Bank of England and to National Savings for 1997–98. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Pupil Exclusions (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children were excluded from schools in the London borough of Wandsworth in each of the last three years. [19488]

Mr. Forth: A total of 90 pupils were permanently excluded from schools in Wandsworth during the school year 1994–95. Details of exclusions in 1995–96 are currently being collected and will be available later in the year. Information on exclusions in previous years within each local education authority area is not available centrally.

Teachers

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total number of *(a)* males and *(b)* females in the teaching profession in schools in each of the last five years. [19657]

Mr. Forth: Information on teachers employed in maintained schools in England is shown in the following table.

Qualified teachers[1] employed in maintained schools in schools in England: 1992 to 1996

Position as at January

	Males		*Females*	
	Full–time	*Part–time*	*Full–time*	*Part–time*
1992	121,896	9,354	224,664	57,059
1993	121,249	9,031	227,200	56,733
1994	120,070	9,567	229,664	57,931
1995	119,859	9,876	233,858	59,339
1996	117,997	10,324	235,041	60,316

[1] Figures exclude sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from April 1993.

Riddlesdown High School, Croydon

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the legal basis of the development by the Funding Agency for Schools of a sixth form at Riddlesdown high school in Croydon; and what were the costs. [19904]

Mr. Robin Squire: The sixth form education in question is provided by de Stafford college, Surrey on the premises of the Riddlesdown high school, the pupils being registered as pupils of de Stafford. The costs in financial year 1996–97 were £91,830.

School Budgets

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what changes have been made recently in the powers which she has to determine primary and secondary school budgets; and if she will make a statement. [19708]

Mr. Robin Squire: None. The budgets of local education authority maintained primary and secondary schools continue to be determined by the LEA in accordance with the provisions of schemes for the local management of schools approved by the Secretary of State. Grant-maintained primary and secondary school budgets continue to be determined by the Funding Agency for Schools in accordance with the Education (Grant-maintained and Grant-maintained Special Schools) Regulations which are laid before Parliament annually.

Essex Education Expenditure

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total amount of spending on education which has been allocated to Essex county council for the forthcoming year; what was the total for the previous year; and what was the percentage change in *(a)* Essex and *(b)* England. [19709]

Mr. Robin Squire: Essex's 1997–98 education standard spending assessment is £571.764 million. Its 1996–97 education SSA was £566.981 million. After adjustment to take account of the nursery voucher scheme, this represents a year-on-year increase of 3 per cent. The average comparable year-on-year increase in 1997–98 education SSAs in England is 3.4 per cent. It is for local authorities to decide how much to spend on education and other services within the resources that are at their disposal.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the expected change in the numbers of school pupils in Essex in the forthcoming year; and what allowance has been made in the spending assessments for education in Essex to take account of any such changes. [19710]

Mr. Squire: Forecast changes in pupil numbers at national aggregate level are taken into account in setting education standard spending. The distribution of ESS among local authorities as education standard spending assessments is based, however, on latest available actual pupil numbers.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what legal provisions are made available to county councils to seek a review of their standard spending assessments on education; what is the qualifying date for such appeals; and if Essex county council took advantage of these appeal arrangements. [19711]

Mr. Squire: Provisional education standard spending assessments for 1997–98 were announced as part of the local government finance settlement last November. Authorities had the opportunity to make representations about their provisional education SSAs, and in particular the data used to calculate them, up to 3 January 1997. Essex county council made one representation about its pupil numbers which was accepted.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Guatemala

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects funded in Guatemala in 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 through *(a)* aid for co-operation, *(b)* programme aid and *(c)* the Commonwealth Development Corporation. [19700]

Dr. Liam Fox: Projects funded in Guatemala in 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 are as follows;

1994–95

(a) Technical Co-operation

Technical Co-operation Training Programme

Heads of Mission Gift Scheme

Joint Funding Scheme

Agency	*Project title*
Health Unlimited	Relief and training programme in Totonicapan
Womenaid	Education programme in community business management
Christian Aid	Training, development and human rights
Christian Aid	Dispersed/returning refugees
Christian Aid	Human rights accompaniment
Christian Aid	Returning refugees
CAFOD	Community development
CAFOD	Popular education
CAFOD	Radio education
OXFAM	Land for returnees
OXFAM	Women trade unionists
OXFAM	Legal training
OXFAM	Rural electricity supply
OXFAM	Education for Mayan communities
OXFAM	Education programme for grassroots social organisations
OXFAM	Gender education and publications
OXFAM	Gender health and rights
OXFAM	Gender democracy education
OXFAM	Education and training/indigenous rights for Mayans
OXFAM	Educational awareness of peace process
OXFAM	Production and marketing training in indigenous communities
OXFAM	Training for indigenous women
OXFAM	Pig breeding and handicrafts
OXFAM	Land for returnees

(b) Programme Aid

Nil

(c) Commonwealth Development Corporation investments

Corporacion Bananera SA

1995–96

(a) Technical Co-operation

Technical Co-operation Training Programme

Heads of Mission Gift Scheme

Joint Funding Scheme

Agency	*Project title*
Health Unlimited	Relief and training programme in Totonicapan
CARE	Strengthening of family planning services in Mayan community
Christian Aid	Training, development and human rights
Christian Aid	Primary health care training
Christian Aid	Refugee training programme
Christian Aid	Human rights accompaniment
Christian Aid	Returning refugees
Christian Aid	Health and ecology training

Joint Funding Scheme

Agency	*Project title*
Christian Aid	Popular education project
Christian Aid	Women's project
Christian Aid	Women's production and marketing
CAFOD	Community development
CAFOD	Popular education
CAFOD	Radio education
CAFOD	Water supply and health education
OXFAM	Training and production
OXFAM	Popular education methodology workshops
OXFAM	Health workshops
OXFAM	Production and marketing training in indigenous communities
OXFAM	Solar power for returned communities
OXFAM	Support to returned communities in San Juan Incan
OXFAM	Land for returnees
OXFAM	Strategic plan for micro-regional development

(b) Programme Aid

Nil

(c) Commonwealth Development Corporation investments

Derivados De Cana SA

1996–97

(a) Technical Co-operation

Technical Co-operation Training Programme

Heads of Mission Gift Scheme

British Partnership Scheme

Joint Funding Scheme[1]

Agency	*Project title*
Health Unlimited	Relief and training programme in Totonicapan
CARE	Strengthening of family planning services in
International UK	Mayan community
Toybox Charity	The Tower—rehabilitation centre for streetchildren
Christian Aid	Rural communities education and training programme
CAFOD	Popular education
CAFOD	Radio education
CAFOD	Radio production
OXFAM	South—south environmental linking
OXFAM	Workshops on conflict
OXFAM	Institutional training
OXFAM	Social communication for local development
OXFAM	Institutional strengthening—local ngo co-ordination
OXFAM	Refugee return programme
OXFAM	Education and training/indigenous rights for Mayans
OXFAM	Integrated community development programme
OXFAM	Indigenous womens organisations
OXFAM	Study of market for handicrafts
OXFAM	Strategic plan for micro-regional development

[1] The list of Joint Funding Scheme projects for 1996–97 does not include all projects supported under block grants to Agencies as this information will not be available until the first quarter of 1997–98.

(b) Programme Aid

Nil

(c) Commonwealth Development Corporation Investments

Cementos del Progresso

Ivory Coast

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the present political situation in the Ivory Coast; and what action his Department is taking to ensure that the human rights of the students of the FESCI Union are not being abused. [19609]

Dr. Liam Fox: Cote d'Ivoire is a politically stable democracy with a multi-party national assembly.

President Bedie recently signed a decree releasing all students detained during recent disturbances and announced the creation of a committee to oversee discussions with the student body.

The British embassy in Abidjan closely monitors human rights.

Nigeria

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the detection of Mu'allim Ibrahim Al-Zakzaky in Nigeria. [19608]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have received representations about the detention of Mu'allim Ibrahim Al-Zakzaky in Nigeria. Our high commission in Lagos is monitoring his case. We have urged the Nigerian authorities, at the highest level, to release all those detained without charge and have made clear that such detentions are totally unacceptable.

Ethiopia

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the British Government have taken to encourage the respecting of human rights in Ethiopia. [19674]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Ethiopian Government have signed up to the main UN human rights instruments. We look to them to live up to their obligations.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Ethiopia about human rights. [19673]

Dr. Fox: Good governance issues, including human rights, represent part of our on-going policy dialogue with the Government of Ethiopia.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current human rights situation in Ethiopia. [19672]

Dr. Fox: We are concerned about the human rights situation in Ethiopia and take every opportunity to stress to the Government, at the highest levels, the importance of making real progress in this area.

Sudan

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid arrangements are being made for assistance to reach opposition controlled areas of Sudan; and if he will make a statement. [19601]

Dr. Fox: The UK bilateral Government-to-Government aid programme to Sudan was suspended in 1991. Since then the United Kingdom has provided over £100 million of emergency assistance bilaterally and through the EU to the Sudanese people, including refugees. £28 million of this was committed to vulnerable groups in the south affected by the civil war. The provision of emergency assistance is determined by need, access and security. It is not subject to political ethnic or commercial considerations.

Land Mines

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total budget of his Department for the current year for land mine clearance; and if he will make a statement. [19563]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have committed over £3.9 million to new mine clearance activities since 1 April 1996. Final outturn for the financial year 1996–97 will be available in June. Additionally, the UK share of European Community commitments for the calendar year 1996 is nearly £7.5 million.

Police (UK Study Tours)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries whose police officers took part in study tours to the United Kingdom in 1991. [19683]

Dr. Liam Fox: In 1991, the FCO diplomatic wing and the ODA did not keep centrally a record of police officers who took part in study tours. It would involve a disproportionate cost to now collate this information for all such projects.

DEFENCE

Auxiliary Oilers (Contracts)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place a contract for two auxiliary oilers; and if he will make a statement. [20345]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We will be placing a contract today with VSEL for the design and build of two fast fleet tankers, known as "Auxiliary Oilers (AO)", to replace the ageing "O" class fuel replenishment ships Olna and Olwen. The new ships will be called RFA Wave Knight and RFA Wave Ruler, and both are expected to enter service early in the next century. The vessels will be built at VSEL's shipyard in Barrow.

The order was won by VSEL in close competition with BAeSEMA, and the decision was based on what would provide the best value for money for the taxpayer. The new vessels will form part of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, manned by civilian crews, whose role is to support the Royal Navy in its operations world-wide. Their primary role will be to replenish the fleet at sea with petroleum, oils and lubricants, with secondary roles including disaster relief and replenishment of solid stores.

The new ships will be built largely to commercial standards, with some military features, including a flight deck and hanger for one helicopter. The vessels will be built to meet Lloyd's and Marine Safety Agency standards and will be double-hulled to meet the latest international regulations in respect of oil pollution. They will also meet, or be easily adapted to meet, all foreseeable environment regulations.

The order will be worth more than £200 million to VSEL and its sub-contractors, and will help to sustain some 900 jobs. It has been warmly welcomed by the Royal Navy and the RFA, and is good news for the taxpayer, for Barrow, and the many sub-contractors who will be working on the project across the UK.

Nuclear Submarines (Personnel)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many naval personnel serving on board nuclear submarines have been retired from the service after developing cancer since 1967; and what percentage this constitutes of the total complement of personnel. [19581]

Mr. Soames: Information is not available in the form requested. However, an examination of the mortality of Royal Naval submariners 1960–89 has been undertaken by the Environmental epidemiology unit of the University of Southampton, under the auspices of the Medical Research Council. This focused particularly on cancer mortality, and concluded that working in submarines was not associated with any increased cancer mortality.

Territorial Army

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the strength of the Territorial Army on 18 January 1997; and what it will be following his announcement of a reduction in strength in February 1997. [19680]

Mr. Soames: Figures for strength of the Territorial Army are available only for the first of each month. The total strength at 1 January 1997 was 55,899. In order to maintain the reduced requirement for trained personnel this could fall to 54,000 against an unchanged peacetime establishment of 59,000.

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Territorial Army's R8 readiness of six months is compatible with the reduction in funding for units committed to supplying personnel to meet shortfalls in regular airborne strengths. [19689]

Mr. Soames: No Territorial Army units are specifically committed to providing personnel to meet shortfalls in regular airborne units. However, soldiers from TA airborne units are frequently attached to their regular counterparts. There has been no reduction in funding or readiness for any of these TA units.

Military Provost Guard Service

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Military Provost Guard Service will be subject to the recommendations of the Bett review on remuneration. [19728]

Mr. Soames: Members of the Military Provost Guard Service are service personnel and as such they will be subject to the recommendations of the Bett review on remuneration, where appropriate.

Testing and Firing Ranges

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total amount of income received by testing and firing ranges at Shoeburyness in the most recent annual period for which figures are available; and if he will provide a similar figures for other testing and firing ranges under the control of Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. [19712]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Sir Teddy Taylor, dated 12 March 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the income received by the testing and firing ranges of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), since as Chief Executive of DERA, this is a matter for which I am responsible.

The most recent annual period for which income figures are available is 1995/6. The income received by the ranges at Shoeburyness during this period was £25,603k and by the other DERA testing and firing ranges during this period was :

Aberporth: £35,462k

Eskmeals: £5,365k

Kirkcudbright: £3,537k

Larkhill: £3,406k

Pendine: £4,092k

West Freugh: £7,848k

I hope you find this information useful.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the facilities for the testing and firing of ammunition which can be provided in the Shoeburyness ranges and which cannot be provided in any other United Kingdom range; and if he will make a statement on the significance of the uniqueness of those facilities. [19713]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Sir Teddy Taylor, dated 12 March 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your question about those facilities for the testing and firing of ammunition which can be provided by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) range at Shoeburyness, but which are not provided by any other United Kingdom range, since as Chief Executive of DERA, this is a matter for which I am responsible.

The Shoeburyness range is currently the only facility in the UK for testing and firing of ammunition at which the following activities can be undertaken:

(a) overwater recovery for shells to a range of up to 24 kilometres

(b) long range ground to ground firing up to 17 kilometres

(c) Environmental Test Centre for hazardous stores and weapons

(d) ammunition disposal meeting Environment Agency requirements

(e) fragmentation trials and other explosive trials requiring a danger area above 1800 metres radius

The environmental testing of hazardous stores and weapons and ammunition disposal could be conducted elsewhere given investment in suitable facilities. However, for as long as there is a customer requirement for the range based capabilities in the UK, they are likely to have to be provided at Shoeburyness.

I hope this is helpful.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the likely date of recommendations from DERA about the future of testing and firing ranges; and if he will list his own powers to review such recommendations. [19714]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I hope to be in a position to approve the issue of a consultation document on the way ahead regarding DERA's land ranges within a matter of weeks. On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, I shall be reviewing the recommendations which emerge from the consultation process in the light of what is operationally necessary for the Department and provides the best value for money to the taxpayer.

Compulsory Redundancies

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many compulsory redundancies there have been in each of the three services in each of the last seven years. [19754]

Mr. Soames: The number of redundancies in each of the armed services for each financial year since 1990–91 are as follows:

Year	*RN*	*Army*	*RAF*	*Total*
1990–91	0	0	0	0
1991–92	0	0	0	0
1992–93	400	3,338	219	3,957
1993–94	1,272	6,460	1,310	9,042
1994–95	2,440	7,015	1,639	11,094
1995–96	520	87	2,832	3,439
1996–97	1,880	183	[1]5,414	7,477

[1] This is a provisional figure.

Nuclear Test Programme Records

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the radiation level records of British service personnel compiled during Britain's nuclear test programme on Christmas Island are currently located; if, and on whose authority, any have been destroyed; and what reason was given to the European Commission on Human Rights for not making these records available to them in respect of the recent cases referred to the court regarding radiological exposure of British service personnel. [19889]

Mr. Soames: Records in respect of personnel who had received radiation doses in excess of threshold are held at AWE Aldermaston. As far as can be established, these records are complete, and are available to the individuals concerned. Quite separate from the personnel records, predictions of radiation fields were made prior to each trial. Post trials reports, primarily concerned with device functioning but which also recorded radiation outputs, were also made. Because these reports include information on device design and performance, they remain classified and are retained under section 3(4) of the Public Records Act 1958.

As the Government told the European Commission on Human Rights, the issues of fallout from these tests was dealt with in the summary report from AWE dated October 1993. Information on yields of the tests from which the initial radiation effects can be determined were also contained in this report.

Mr. David Hart

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what current procurement contracts Mr. David Hart provides advice. [19753]

Mr. Portillo: Mr. Hart is currently providing advice to me on the following projects:

ASTOR

Bowman

EF 2000.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Barristers (Fees)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General how much money was paid in fees to barristers for prosecuting cases in crown courts in England and Wales in the last year for which figures are available. [18907]

The Attorney-General: In 1995–96, the Crown Prosecution Service paid barristers a total of £67,357,000 for prosecuting cases in crown courts in England and Wales. The nearest equivalent figure for the Serious Fraud Office is £3,125,000 but this includes work at all stages of its cases except on appeal.

Crown Prosecutors (Salaries)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General how much was paid as salaries to Crown prosecutors for presenting cases in magistrates courts in England and Wales in the last year for which figures are available. [18905]

The Attorney-General: The prosecution process is an integrated process embracing case review, preparation for the court hearing and advocacy. Crown prosecutors carry out the full range of these functions. The total salary costs for Crown prosecutors in 1995–96 was £76,497,201.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when his Department established its Internet site; what representations he has received and what date he has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19152]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office internet site was established in August 1995. Comments on the site were invited for the first six months, and most were favourable. Automatic logging figures indicate that, to date, 34,400 separate accesses have been made, and 252,300 pages have been read. Plans are in had to enhance the Department's Internet site, to give more complete information on the business of the office, including named contacts, publications and press releases with full text access. The site will also include charter standards, complaints procedures, and regulatory forms and guidance.

Licensing (Scotland) Act

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there have been in Cupar sheriff court for contraventions of section 68 of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 in each year from 1979 to date. [19675]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information for the period 1979–1994 is set out in the table. Data for 1995 is not yet available.

Year	*Persons proceeded against*	*Persons with charge proved*
1979	—	—
1980	—	—
1981	1	1
1982	—	—
1983	—	—
1984	—	—
1985	—	—
1986	4	2
1987	3	2
1988	1	1
1989	2	1
1990	—	—
1991	—	—
1992	—	—
1993	3	3
1994	1	1

Community Care

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the regulation of community care services in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [20346]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government are today publishing a White Paper on Social Services in England and Wales. I propose to take action in parallel in a number of areas.

Social work services in Scotland represent a large and growing part of the Government's support for people requiring support and care. Next year Government supported expenditure by local authorities on social work in Scotland will rise above £1 billion for the first time. It is important that these substantial resources are spent well, and that the services they support are of good quality. I therefore intend to strengthen the regulation of community care services and to ensure that local authorities make the most cost effective use of the considerable new resources which have been made available to them since the implementation of the NHS and Community Care Act 1990.

The Government take very seriously the need to regulate care services given to vulnerable people. To that end, it set up in 1995 a working group to make recommendations on improving the regulatory system. I will be issuing for consultation later this month draft revised guidance on registration procedures for residential

care homes, which gives effect to some of the recommendations of the working group. The Government will aim to take forward other recommendations in legislation at the next opportunity. We intend that local authorities' own residential care homes should be subject to the same regulatory regime as at present applies to homes in the independent sector in order that there may be even-handedness between the statutory, private and voluntary sectors. We also intend to review the regulations affecting tribunals which hear appeals against deregistration. The Government accept the need for the effective and economic regulation of domiciliary care provision, and will include the necessary statutory provisions in its intended social services legislation. The Government will also consider the need for regulation of the services made available in supported housing provision.

The Government are announcing today their intention to require health and local authorities in England and Wales to form joint statutory bodies to carry out regulation and arrange for inspection of residential care homes and nursing homes within a single regulatory framework. I share the objective sought by joint regulation and will consider the best means of achieving that aim in Scotland.

Our aim is that residential care should provide the highest standards of care, good value for money, and offer a choice of accommodation to people who need it. I have today issued a direction on information, following consultation, which will aim to make clear to the decision-making committees of local authorities the costs of purchasing care from the local authority, private and voluntary sectors. This will help ensure that the full range of local provision is considered by committees.

The proposals in the English White Paper for the protection and support of children cover similar ground to the main provisions of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, which will come into force on 1 April. My officials will be working closely with local authorities in monitoring the implementation and progress in developing services. The Government are also announcing today a new initiative to ensure that the necessary specialist training is available for social workers practising in complex areas of child care and this will be taken forward on a UK basis.

Scottish Office Quangos

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list (i) the consultancy fees, (ii) the lawyers' fees and (iii) other advisory fees associated with *(a)* the establishment of the Scottish water boards, *(b)* the investigation of the future of CalMac services, *(c)* the investigation of the future of the Forestry Commission and other forestry holdings and *(d)* the investigation of other potential or actual privatisations undertaken by the Scottish Office, in each year since 1992. [19158]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* In connection with establishing the Scottish water authorities, consultancy fees of £101,600, £38,600 and £9,300 were paid in 1992–93, 1994–95 and 1995–96 respectively. These figures do not include the consultancy fees associated with the transfer of assets from the local authorities.

The 1994 consultants' report on highlands and islands shipping subsidies, which included examination of options for private sector participation in the provision of Caledonian MacBrayne services, cost £137,500.

In 1993–94, £307,000 was spent on two consultancies for the forestry review.

In 1995, £60,000 was spent on a consultancy to review the scope for greater private sector involvement in the activities of Highlands Airports Ltd., including the possibility of privatisation.

In none of these cases was expenditure incurred on lawyers fees or other advisory fees.

WALES

EU Funding

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column 689, where the figures for grants and payments made by the European Union to the United Kingdom Government on account of Wales are set out in "Government Expenditure and Revenue, Wales, 1994–95". [18601]

Mr. Hague: General Government expenditure as used in "Government Expenditure and Revenue, Wales 1994–95", includes all total estimated spending on behalf of Wales, including that part of expenditure supported by receipts from European Community institutions.

European Committee of the Regions

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will enlarge Welsh representations on the European Commission committee of the regions. [19206]

Mr. Hague: The level of UK representation on the committee of the regions is governed by the treaty on European Union. The Government have no plans at present to review the distribution of representation within the UK.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children are eligible for inclusion in the nursery voucher scheme in the Cardiff local education authority area. [19286]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Apart from a small number of children who will become five before the start of the term, all children who were born between 1 April 1992 and 31 March 1993 are eligible for vouchers in the summer term 1997. Some 3,500 application forms for vouchers have been issued to parents in the Cardiff local education authority area.

Anglers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many anglers he estimates there are in Wales. [19211]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The number of national rod licences purchased in Wales during 1996–97 is estimated at 61,400. However, licences purchased in England and Wales are valid in both countries. No information is held on numbers of sea anglers.

Rate Support Grant Settlement

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received concerning the impact of his rate support grant allocation on the work of local education authorities in Wales. [19207]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have received many representations about the effect of the 1997–98 local government revenue settlement on the work of LEAs. It is, however, for each local authority to decide how much of its available resources to allocate to individual services such as education taking account of its statutory duties and its perception of local needs and priorities.

Dyfed Powys Consultation Paper

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when Dyfed Powys health authority submitted to his Department its consultation paper, "Effective Care and Healthy Profile: A Consultation Strategy for the next Five Years 1997–2002", and when he approved its publication. [19018]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Department is not required to approve the publication of a document which outlines the authority's proposals for strategic change within its area. Following the end of public consultation—30 April—individual proposals may be put to me for decision.

Blind and Partially Sighted People

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are registered *(a)* blind and *(b)* partially sighted. [19083]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There were an estimated 8,800 persons registered as blind and 8,100 persons registered as partially sighted in Wales on 31 March 1996.

Long-term Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will meet Flintshire county council to discuss long-term unemployment; [19209]

(2) if he will meet Connah's Quay town council to discuss youth unemployment. [19210]

Mr. Hague: I have received no such invitations.

BSE

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on the ban by EU member states on British beef; and if he will make a statement on beef exports from Wales. [19212]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: We have written to Commissioners Fischler and Bonino explaining how the UK has fulfilled the preconditions laid down under the Florence agreement and enclosing our proposals for a UK export certified herds scheme, together with a paper setting out its scientific basis. The scheme would be the first step in lifting the export ban. The Government are pressing for urgent and constructive discussion of our proposals at the relevant Committees.

Schools Staffing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received from each of the teachers' unions concerning staffing in schools and the potential for staff redundancies. [19208]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend has had a number of representations from the teachers' unions. Staffing levels in schools are a matter for local education authorities and governing bodies in the light of their statutory duties and their perception of local needs and priorities.

M4 (Baglan Bridge)

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions Baglan bridge on the M4 has been closed for all traffic in the last 12 months; what was the longest period of closure, and for what reasons it is necessary to include vehicles other than high-sided vehicles in the ban on traffic. [19547]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Over the last 12 months the bridge carrying the M4 over the River Neath has been closed to all traffic on five occasions. The longest closure lasted 15 and three quarter hours. Vehicles other than high-sided vehicles are included in such bans because there are no vehicle segregation facilities.

Power Station Emissions

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research his Department has evaluated on the impact on local communities of emissions from power stations; and if he will make a statement. [19506]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The air quality database for Wales, supported by the Welsh Office, provides information about the impact on air quality of emissions from various sources, including power stations.

Council House Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses have been sold to date; and if he will show their location by local authority and the sums raised by their sale. [19510]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information relating to the period since the introduction of the right-to-buy scheme in October 1980 is provided in the following tables.

Sales of local authority and new town dwellings, by district, October 1980—March 1996

	Number of completed sales			*Receipts from the sale of LA dwellings*[2]
	Right to buy[1]	*Other*	*Total*	*(£ millions)*
Aberconwy	1,853	1	1,854	16.8
Alyn and Deeside	1,790	22	1,812	19.2
Arfon	1,586	11	1,597	17.3
Blaenau Gwent	2,899	20	2,919	27.9
Brecknock	1,636	20	1,656	16.5
Cardiff	8,631	7	8,638	104.6
Carmarthen	505	1,105	1,610	17.3
Ceredigion	1,806	2	1,808	21.9

Sales of local authority and new town dwellings, by district, October 1980–March 1996

	Number of completed sales			Receipts from the sale of LA dwellings[2]
	Right to buy[1]	Other	Total	(£ millions)
Colwyn	16	935	951	9.4
Cynon Valley	1,771	—	1,771	14.2
Delyn	1,425	339	1,764	16.2
Dinefwr	1,034	2	1,036	10.1
Dwyfor	469	20	489	4.1
Glyndwr	1,392	6	1,398	13.6
Islwyn	4,164	—	4,164	38.7
Llanelli	3,886	42	3,928	29.6
Lliw Valley	2,210	—	2,210	19.0
Meirionnydd	998	19	1,017	7.9
Merthyr Tydfil	2,536	58	2,594	21.1
Monmouth	2,322	60	2,382	33.9
Montgomeryshire	1,553	259	1,812	14.3
Neath	2,731	—	2,731	22.6
Newport	4,760	8	4,768	55.9
Ogwr	5,152	50	5,202	52.0
Port Talbot	4,000	1	4,001	34.3
Preseli Pembrokeshire	2,754	15	2,769	28.1
Radnorshire	695	3	698	8.5
Rhondda	908	2	910	6.0
Rhuddlan	1,025	—	1,025	9.6
Rhymney Valley	4,366	—	4,366	37.0
South Pembrokeshire	1,008	82	1,090	12.9
Swansea	4,921	6	4,927	49.7
Taff-Ely	4,356	465	4,821	38.1
Torfaen	4,882	—	4,882	61.5
Vale of Glamorgan	2,994	384	3,378	40.2
Wrexham Maelor	4,319	—	4,319	44.2
Ynys Mon	1,893	—	1,893	18.4
Wales (local authority total)	95,246	3,944	99,190	992.6
Cwmbran[3]	2,594	90	2,684	n/a
Newtown	420	75	495	n/a
Wales	98,260	4,109	102,369	992.6

Source:
Local authority returns.
Notes:
n/a = Not available.
[1] Right to buy legislation was introduced in October 1980.
[2] April 1981–March 1996.
[3] Cwmbran ceased to be designated as a new town on 1 April 1986.

Sales of local authority dwellings, by district, April–December 1996

	Number of completed sales			Receipts from the sale of LA dwellings
	Right to buy[1]	Other	Total	(£ millions)
Blaenau Gwent	94	—	94	n/a
Bridgend	71	—	71	n/a
Caerphilly	89	—	89	n/a
Cardiff	94	—	93	n/a
Carmarthenshire	83	8	91	n/a
Ceredigion	47	—	47	n/a
Conwy	17	—	17	n/a
Denbighshire	19	—	19	n/a
Flintshire	38	—	38	n/a
Gwynedd	29	8	37	n/a
Isle of Anglesey	53	—	53	n/a
Merthyr Tydfil	42	—	42	n/a
Monmouthshire	53	3	56	n/a
Neath Port Talbot	82	—	82	n/a
Newport	100	—	100	n/a
Pembrokeshire	50	—	50	n/a
Powys	71	34	105	n/a
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	42	—	42	n/a
Swansea	102	—	102	n/a
Torfaen	167	—	167	n/a
The Vale of Glamorgan	32	—	32	n/a
Wrexham	75	—	75	n/a
Wales	1,450	53	1,503	n/a

Sales of local authority dwellings, by district, April–December 1996

Source:
Local authority returns.
Notes:
n/a = Not available.
[1] Right to buy legislation was introduced in October 1980.

Pollution

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning illegal industrial practices which damage the environment. [19504]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Environment Agency and local authorities have a range of functions related to the regulation, management and monitoring of the environment and the processes which affect it.

These functions are designed to ensure that acceptable standards of pollution prevention and control are maintained. The agency and local authorities have enforcement powers, including the power to prosecute and to issue a prohibition or revocation notice to close down a process.

Rents to Mortgages Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many rents to mortgages schemes there are; if he will show their local authority designation; and if he will make a statement. [19507]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Rent to mortgage is a statutory scheme available throughout Wales. It is, however, only one of a number of routes into home ownership, including the right to buy, Housing for Wales' homebuy option and similar low cost home ownership schemes run by local authorities. I expect these schemes to help about 3,300 households into home ownership during 1996–97.

Air Pollution

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to reduce air pollution. [19511]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 13 February 1997, *Official Report*, column 292.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his allocations to local authorities for *(a)* the building of council houses and *(b)* the repairs and modernisation of council estates in the current year. [19509]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In 1996–97, £42.6 million was made available for capital expenditure on local authority housing but, within this, there was no specific allocation for the building of council houses. In addition,

£10.6 million was made available under the Estate Partnership programme to tackle the problems of the most deprived estate.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure on the assisted places scheme in Wales in each year since its introduction; and what is the forecast expenditure in 1997–98 and 1998–99. [18664]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Annual expenditure under the assisted places scheme since introduction is as follows:

1981–82: £160,783
1982–83: £274,777
1983–84: £459,626
1984–85: £626,876
1985–86: £842,488
1986–87: £1,110,805
1987–88: £1,394,246
1988–89: £1,435,040
1989–90: £1,589,392
1990–91: £1,756,283
1991–92: £2,064,813
1992–93: £2,457,230
1993–94: £2,621,261
1994–95: £2,771,504
1995–96: £2,904,845
1996–97: £3,781,000 (estimated)

Planned expenditure for 1997–98 and 1998–99 is £4,480,000 and £5,130,000 respectively. The planned provision for 1998–99 will be subject to review in the forthcoming public expenditure survey.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Drug Abuse Resistance Education

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his oral statement of 26 February, *Official Report*, columns 401–2, what action he has initiated on drug education since 26 February. [18961]

Mr. Newton: None. Drug education policy is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. I continue however to take a close interest, and to encourage support for worthwhile projects.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will co-ordinate private sector fund raising to enable DARE to be extended nation wide. [18962]

Mr. Newton: The Government will continue to work with the private sector in support of a range of national and local drugs projects, including via the drugs challenge fund. Decisions on specific drug education programmes remain a matter for individual schools, in partnership with other agencies where appropriate.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will place the extension of the DARE programme on the agenda of the Cabinet sub-committee on drug misuse. [18963]

Mr. Newton: Progress on drugs education matters is regularly reviewed by the Cabinet sub-Committee on drug misuse.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kashmir

14. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current position in the case of Ghazanfer Ali, who was released on bail from prison in Azad Kashmir last November; and if he will make a statement. [18310]

Dr. Liam Fox: Ghazanfer Ali's case was heard by the Shariah bench on 17 February. The bench decided that it should be heard again by the sessions judge on 18 March. I discussed Ali's case with Sultan Mahmoud Chaudhry of Azad Kashmir during my recent visit to Pakistan. I pressed for a speedy and fair trial.

Sri Lanka

20. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's current assessment of civil rights in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [18316]

Dr. Liam Fox: Basic civil rights are enshrined in the Sri Lankan constitution. We hope that the Sri Lankan Government will continue to respect them.

Thailand (Burmese Refugees)

22. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received that the Thai Government are denying refuge for people from Burma; and what diplomatic efforts are being made to ensure the safety of refugees from Burma. [18318]

Mr. Hanley: We are very concerned at reports that refugees have been forcibly repatriated to Burma. Both on a national basis and with our EU partners, we have urged the Thai Government to protect civilians seeking refuge on their territory. We deplore the SLORC policies which are at the root of this humanitarian crisis. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary raised our concerns about the situation in Burma with the Burmese ambassador on 4 March.

NATO Expansion

24. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the proposed expansion of NATO. [18320]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has regular discussions on NATO enlargement with his counterparts from European members of NATO.

China

25. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British relations with China. [18321]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 15 January 1997, *Official Report*, column 299.

28. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the likely effect of the death of Deng Xiao Ping upon United Kingdom financial interests in Hong Kong and China. [18324]

Mr. Hanley: We see no reason to expect any change in the position of the UK's financial interests in either Hong Kong or China as a result of the death of Deng Xiao Ping.

31. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is taken by his Department to promote British-Chinese trade. [18327]

Mr. Hanley: This Department promotes UK-Chinese trade by working in close co-operation with the Department of Trade and Industry; we actively seek trade opportunities for UK companies, promote British products and services, and provide professional advice and practical assistance to British business men, both in the UK and through the commercial section of our embassy in Peking.

Middle East Peace Process

26. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to assist the middle east peace process. [18322]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs).

27. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the middle east peace talks. [18323]

Mr. Hanley: We hope to see early implementation of the provisions of the Israeli/Palestinian interim agreement as reaffirmed in the Hebron agreement in January, and look forward to the start of final status negotiations this month. We also hope to see a resumption of talks between Israel and Syria.

Israel

30. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation he has made to the Israeli President concerning plans to increase Jewish settlement building in the vicinity of east Jerusalem. [18326]

Mr. Hanley: The Israeli authorities are well aware of our view that settlement activity in occupied territory is illegal and an obstacle to peace. We raise this issue with them regularly and at every level, including during the debate at the United Nations last week.

Human Rights Abuses (Monitoring)

32. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the priority that Her Majesty's diplomatic service gives to the monitoring of human rights abuses overseas. [18328]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We give high priority to monitoring human rights violations overseas. Promotion of respect for human rights around the world is a fundamental foreign policy objective.

United Nations (Reform)

33. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy towards reform of the United Nations. [18329]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We support institutional and financial reform of the United Nations. We held useful talks on this subject last month with the new Secretary General, Kofi Annan, whose commitment to reform we welcome. We hope that the long-standing discussion of Security Council enlargement will be resolved as soon as possible.

Disarmament Negotiations

34. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to pursue nuclear disarmament negotiations in respect of progress towards conventional disarmament. [18330]

Mr. David Davis: We remain committed under article VI of the non-proliferation treaty to

"... pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to ... nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

Indonesia

35. **Mr Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Indonesia to discuss British-Indonesian relations and trade; and if he will make a statement. [18331]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has no immediate plans to visit Indonesia, but he has had three useful meetings with the Indonesian Foreign Minister since January 1996.

36. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's relations with Indonesia. [18332]

Mr. Hanley: We value our strong bilateral relationship with Indonesia, a country of 200 million people enjoying fast economic growth. It is an increasingly important partner for us in south-east Asia.

Former Dominions

37. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of relations between the United Kingdom and *(a)* the former dominions and *(b)* the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [18333]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The United Kingdom's relations with these countries remain excellent. We shall continue to attach priority to sustaining our important links with

them. Major programmes are under way in Australia and New Zealand to highlight the importance of our modern as well as our historical relationship with them.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress with the European IGC. [18312]

Mr. David Davis: The intergovernmental conference is progressing well. All member states are working towards a conclusion to the intergovernmental conference at the Amsterdam European Council.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the President of the European Commission to discuss the intergovernmental conference. [18325]

Mr. David Davis: I have no immediate plans to meet the President of the Commission to discuss the intergovernmental conference.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the official visits to Saudi Arabia made by Ministers in his Department since May 1979, stating in each case the dates and purpose of the visit. [19559]

Mr. Hanley: According to our records, the following visits to Saudi Arabia were made by FCO Ministers between 1984 and 1997:

Secretary of State (Lord Howe), January 1984
Minister of State (Mr. Luce), March 1985
Secretary of State (Lord Howe), January 1986
Minister of State (Mr. Renton), February 1987
Minister of State (Mr. Mellor), December 1987
Minister of State (Mr. Waldegrave), October 1988
Secretary of State (Lord Howe), January 1989
Secretary of State (Mr. Hurd), May/June 1990
Secretary of State (Mr. Hurd), September 1990
Secretary of State (Mr. Hurd), February 1991
Secretary of State (Mr. Hurd), May 1991
Minister of State (Mr. Hogg), February 1992
Secretary of State (Mr. Hurd), May 1992
Secretary of State (Mr. Hurd), September 1993
Minister of State (Mr. Hogg), May 1994
Secretary of State (Mr. Hurd), October 1994
Secretary of State (Mr. Rifkind), November 1995
Secretary of State (Mr. Rifkind), July 1996
Minister of State (Mr. Hanley), October 1996

The purpose of these visits was the promotion of bilateral relations and co-operation with Saudi Arabia. The Minister of State's visit in May 1994 also included participation in the EU/Gulf Co-operation Council ministerial meeting.

Records of ministerial visits prior to 1984 are in this Department's archives, and it would incur disproportionate cost to retrieve them.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19391]

Mr. Hanley: The Overseas Development Administration has issued 32,500 copies of its leaflet for overseas pensioners, total cost £16,000.

The legalisation office of this Department's consular division has issued some 21,000 copies of its customer standard document, of which 500 each in Arabic, French and Spanish. Total cost of design, translation and printing was £4,210.

Consular and visa sections of overseas posts display notices, produced locally, informing customers of standards and complaint procedures. To establish their precise cost would involve disproportionate work, but it is minor. In London a fact sheet is available, produced in-house at minimal cost; it is also available on the Internet.

Ascension Island

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will increase the funding granted by Her Majesty's Government to the dependent territories in order that the Government will meet their commitments under the biodiversity convention with particular reference to Ascension Island; and if he will make it his policy that any increased funding is contingent on matching support from non-governmental organisations. [19408]

Dr. Liam Fox: None of the sources of Government funding for environmental projects overseas is dedicated specifically to the dependent territories. This Department's budget for small environmental projects was £380,000 in 1996–97. Bids for funding from this budget are received from all over the world from our overseas missions. Projects from the dependent territories are given priority, but are considered on their merits. In 1996–97 the dependent territories received total funding of £119,485. This included £12,750 for a project to control the spread of the Mexican thorn tree on Ascension Island. Other projects funded recently in the dependent territories, helping us to meet our commitments under the biodiversity convention, include conservation of bats and dolphins in Gibraltar and a biological assessment of saline coastal ponds in the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to eradicate the feral cat population on Ascension Island. [19409]

Dr. Fox: In 1995, this Department funded a £25,000 feasibility study into the eradication of rats and cats from Ascension Island. This was on the understanding that non-governmental organisations would be responsible for the fund raising to implement its recommendations. The FCO is prepared to consider a contribution to the implementation phase of up to £30,000 from its small budget for overseas environmental projects, provided that the funds are available at the time.

British Phosphate Commission (Assets)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current status of the United Kingdom assets of the former British Phosphate Commission. [19410]

Dr. Liam Fox: The British Phosphate Commission was wound up on 9 February 1987. The United Kingdom's share of the residual assets amounted to £7.7 million. This sum was paid direct to the Consolidated Fund.

Sudan

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has held with representatives of opposition groups in Sudan; and if he will make a statement. [19598]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and nobel Friend the Minister of State for Overseas Development met Sudan People's Liberation Army leader John Garang in Nairobi on 9 February, Officials in Khartoum, London, Cairo, Addis Ababa and Nairobi are in regular touch with opposition figures both in and outside Sudan.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with the Government of Sudan concerning the conflict in the south; and if he will make a statement. [19599]

Mr. Hanley: We take every opportunity to make clear to the Government of Sudan our desire to see an early negotiated end to the civil war. The permanent under-secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office did so most recently to Sudanese Ministers when he visited Khartoum in January The British ambassador in Khartoum takes the same line in his frequent contacts with Sudanese Ministers.

Germany

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's relations with Germany. [18309]

Mr. David Davis: Britain and Germany have important common interests on a wide range of issues and enjoy close and substantial relations across the board. We share the aim of an enlarged, free and prosperous Europe, and are working together to achieve this.

NORTHERN IRELAND

High Risk Prisoners

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many high-risk category A *(a)* remand and *(b)* convicted prisoners are currently detained in prisons in Northern Ireland; how many of these prisoners are (i) women and (ii) men; how many such prisoners have been charged under extradition legislation in the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [19748]

(2) how many *(a)* remand and *(b)* convicted high risk category A prisoners, detained in Northern Ireland, and charged under extradition legislation over the last 10 years have been transferred to prisons in England and Wales; and how many such prisoners were pregnant; [19749]

(3) how many mother and baby units exist in prisons in Northern Ireland; how many prisoners and babies can be accommodated in such units; and how many babies have been born in prisons in Northern Ireland over the last 10 years. [19750]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for subject of these questions has been delegated to the Northern Ireland Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. Mogg to Mr. Max Madden, dated 11 March 1997:

In the absence of the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Prison Service the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to the 3 Parliamentary questions you have tabled. You requested information regarding:

1. How many high risk Category A *(a)* remand and *(b)* convicted prisoners are currently detained in prisons in Northern Ireland; how many of these prisoners are (i) women and (ii) men; how many such prisoners have been charged under extradition legislation in the last 5 years; and if he will make a statement.

2. How many *(a)* remand and *(b)* convicted high risk Category A prisoners, detained in Northern Ireland and charged under extradition legislation over the last 10 years have been transferred to prisons in England and Wales; and how many such prisoners were pregnant.

3. How many mother & baby units exist in prisons in Northern Ireland; how many prisoners and babies can be accommodated in such units and how many babies have been born in prisons in Northern Ireland over the last 10 years.

Firstly categorisation in the Northern Ireland Prison Service is different to that used in England & Wales however, prisoners known as Category A would broadly equate with top and high risk prisoners in Northern Ireland.

I therefore respond to your questions as follows:

No. 17

	Number
HMP Maghaberry: Top Risk	0
Remand male, High Risk	89
Sentenced male, High Risk	63
Remand female, High Risk	0
Sentenced female, High Risk	24
Total	97
HMP Maze: Top Risk	0
Remand High Risk	9
Sentenced High Risk	177
No female prisoners at HMP Maze	0
Total	186

High risk prisoners are not detained in any other prison establishment and at present we do not have any top risk prisoners.

Five prisoners have been charged under extradition legislation in the past 5 years.

No. 18.

Nil.

No. 19.

(i) The NI Prison Service has a total of 6 mother and baby units.

(ii) 1 mother and 1 baby per cell.

(iii) 4 babies have been born in prison over the last 10 years.

I hope this information is helpful.

Independent Commissioner for Holding Centres

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's fourth annual report as independent commissioner for the holding centres. [20206]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have today arranged for copies of Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's annual report for 1996 to be placed in the Library.

I am grateful to the commissioner and his deputy, Dr. Bill Norris, for their report. I note that for the fourth successive year they have found nothing that might give anyone the slightest cause for concern about the care and treatment of detainees held in the custody of uniformed officers of the RUC.

I shall study carefully the recommendations which Sir Louis Blom-Cooper has made.

TRANSPORT

M25 Works

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how the error relating to the quality of the capping layer laid between junctions 6 and 8 of the M25 occurred; and when it was discovered; [19588]

(2) for what reasons the geological and consequential structural difficulties of the M25 between junctions 6 and 8 were not identified by surveys before the letting of the widening and engineering contract; [19589]

(3) when he now expects the completion of the widening and engineering works on the M25 between junctions 6 and 8; [19591]

(4) what is the estimated cost to his Department of relaying the capping layer and the replacement of the asphalt surfacing between junctions 6 and 8 of the M25; [19590]

(5) pursuant to his Department's memorandum of 12 February in evidence to the Transport Committee, (HC 213-i of Session 1996–97) who was responsible for the problem leading to the required relaying of the capping layer and replacement of the asphalt surfacing between junctions 6 and 8 of the M25. [19594]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 12 March 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the M25 between junctions 6 and 8.

The contract started in March 1994. In Summer 1994 the Contractor dug into the 20 year old carriageways and this was when we first realised that the amount of deteriorated capping layer material needing replacement was much greater than we had estimated.

Site investigations were carried out before work started and standard investigation procedures were followed. Site investigation is not an exact science. We knew there were problems, but without exhaustive tests on a live motorway we could not reasonably have foreseen the full nature of variations in the quality of material lying one metre below the road surface. In the event, the capping layer was in a much poorer state than had been assumed, following the survey work.

I am happy to say four lanes were open in both directions on Saturday 8 March. The hardshoulders will remain coned off until Easter to allow for electrical and communications works and signalling to be carried out. Landscaping work will continue into 1998. A small contract will be let this Summer to carry out localised maintenance works at the side of the carriageway at junction 7. We do not expect this to disrupt traffic.

Negotiations about the costs of relaying the capping layer and the replacement of the asphalt surfacing are taking place. To provide an estimate of the costs now would undermine the position of the Consulting Engineers appointed by the Agency to administer this contract and deal with the claims for extra payment submitted by the Contractors.

Hot rolled asphalt surfacing has been used for over thirty years in the UK. The material used here met fully the specified standard. We can only conclude that the problems were a result of an exceptional combination of site-specific factors which included the high number of lorries using this stretch of the M25, the temporary traffic, management arrangements which concentrated the lorries into one lane and the exceptionally hot weather experienced last Summer which could have affected the newly laid hot rolled asphalt materials.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department has had with the British Airports Authority in the past 18 months relating to the M25's *(a)* existing and *(b)* future volume and capacity needs between junctions (i) 12 to 15 and (ii) 15 to 16. [19587]

Mr. Watts: The Highways Agency has had a number of discussions with BAA about the capacity of the motorway network in the vicinity of Heathrow airport in connection with the proposal for a fifth terminal. Evidence flowing from those discussions has been provided to the inquiry.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what factors underlay his assessment that his objectives for junctions 16 to 19 of the M25 could be met by smaller-scale improvements than full D4 widening; and for what reason these criteria did not apply in respect of *(a)* junctions 12 to 15 and *(b)* junctions 15 to 16. [19583]

Mr. Watts: The decision, announced in "Managing the Road Programme" published in November 1995, to consider smaller scale solutions was aimed at maximising the use of capital resources whilst seeking to continue to meet the objectives of schemes. The proposed widening of the M25 between junctions 16 and 19 was identified for such a review but no decision has been taken.

The proposals for widening the M25 between junctions 12 and 15 represent a scaling down of the previously published link road proposals.

The Highways Agency is still looking at the options for widening M25 between junctions 15 and 16 following the withdrawal in April 1995 of the link roads scheme for that section.

Train Drivers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Health and Safety Executive last examined the *(a)* hours of work and *(b)* conditions of service of train drivers; and if he will make a statement. [19653]

Mr. Watts: Hours of work and other conditions of service are primarily matters for agreement between employers and staff. However, excessive hours of work on the railways which could pose a danger to safety are subject to the Railways (Safety Critical Work) Regulations and an associated approved code of practice. As part of its responsibility for enforcing these regulations, the Health and Safety Executive keeps train drivers hours of work under review. A train operating company wishing to change drivers' hours of work has to submit a material revision of its safety case to the infrastructure controller for acceptance, and any revisions which are accepted are sent to the HSE before they can take effect.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the recommendations of *(a)* the Rail Industry Advisory Commission and *(b)* the Parliamentary Advisory Committee on Transport on train drivers' hours; and if he will make a statement. [19694]

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Executive published an approved code of practice—ACOP—on hours of work for safety critical staff on the railways on 1 November 1996, which is contained in updated guidance on the Railway (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994. The ACOP was developed in co-operation with the Commission's Railway Industry Advisory Committee and comments were received from the Parliamentary Advisory Committee on Transport and others, during consultation on proposals for the ACOP.

The ACOP's principal recommendations are that employers should (i) set limits on the hours of work of their safety critical staff and ensure those limits are observed (ii) carry out a risk assessment before increasing existing limits on hours or work or making any significant change to an existing working time pattern—for example, to a system of shift working—and (iii) monitor safety performance after a change has been made, to confirm that there are no adverse effects on safety.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has recently commissioned into the relationship between train drivers' hours and conditions of work and accidents; and if he will make a statement. [19652]

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is currently co-sponsor with Railtrack and the British Railways Board of research into safety related incidents and the point at which they occur during a shift. The research will consider signals passed at danger and personal accidents. This work is continuing and it is too early to report any results.

HSE has recently commissioned a research project aimed at validating an improved method of assessing the risks of fatigue associated with the hours of work of staff undertaking safety critical work on the railways, including train drivers.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19392]

Mr. Bowis: Estimates provided by the respective agencies and by the Department are as follows:

Name	*Estimated cost of production and circulation (£)*	*Numbers of document issued*
Central Transport Group[1]	1,000	4,000
Driving Standards Agency[2]	11,331	200,000
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency[3]	120,000 pa	14,500,000
Highways Agency[4]	206,000	1,120,000
Marine Safety Agency[5]	12,990	16,000
The Coastguard Agency[6]	13,650	70,000
Vehicle Inspectorate[7]	12,412	80,500
Vehicle Certification Agency[8]	2,170	4,000

[1] CTG estimate for "Serving the Public."
[2] 1 DSA figures for 1996–97 Customer Charter and leaflet "If things go Wrong" which do not include drafting costs.
[3] 2 DVLA 1996–97 figures for Customer Service Guide which do not include drafting costs.
[4] 3 HA 1994 and 1996 Road Users Charter and Charter Statement.
[5] 4 MSA Codes of Practice.
[6] 5 TCA 1995–96 and 1996–97 figures for Charter statements which do not include drafting and circulation costs.
[7] 6 VI Standard of service leaflets from 1994 onwards: MOT Customers, Vehicle Testing, Training, MOT Enforcement, Roadworthiness Enforcement and Vehicle Testing. These figures do not include drafting costs, or circulation costs as the leaflets were distributed via the current circulation system.
[8] 7 VCA Customer Service Guide and Code of Practice.

Automatic Train Protector System

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many locomotives were fitted with the automatic train protector system in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement; [19695]

(2) where the locomotives fitted with the automatic train protector system are operating. [19659]

Mr. Watts: Automatic train protection—ATP—is currently installed on the Docklands light railway, the channel tunnel and the London underground. ATP is in use on the Great Western and Chiltern railway lines as pilot schemes.

Information on the number of vehicles fitted with ATP in each year since 1990 would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Motorcycle Strategy Group

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set up a motorcycle strategy group. [19565]

Mr. Bowis: The Government intend to establish a motorcycling strategy group, which I shall chair, to produce a report on matters affecting motorcyclists and other road users, including safety and environmental issues. This will build on the statement of policy issued by the Government last November, copies of which are available in the Library. It will be set up in the summer and report next spring.

London Underground

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the privatisation proceeds for London underground will be available for use by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Treasury. [19890]

Mr. Bowis: Receipts from privatisation will be recycled in order to ensure that the modernisation of the underground's infrastructure is completed as quickly as possible. The majority of any remaining surplus will be channelled into additional support for London underground or for other transport projects. The remainder will go to the Exchequer. Exact proportions cannot sensibly be estimated at this early stage.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of local initiatives to encourage the reporting of benefit fraud. [17853]

Mr. Heald: The Benefits Agency has run 42 "Spotlight on Benefit Cheats" local campaigns against benefit fraud. These have been given extensive local publicity, including encouraging claimants to call a freephone number to report suspicions of benefit fraud. A total of 14,000 referrals were received in the first phase of Spotlight alone, and the national benefit fraud hotline, launched last August, built on this success and to date received over 160,000 calls. The savings from the Spotlight campaigns now exceed £100 million.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if a person is refused incapacity benefit and appeals against this decision, in what circumstances the income support he receives in the meantime is reduced. [19633]

Mr. Burt: A person who is appealing against a decision that he is not incapable of work under the all work test can qualify for income support at a reduced rate until the appeal is determined. The reduced rate does not apply to a person who can qualify for income support on other grounds, for example, lone parents, nor does it apply to people who claim jobseeker's allowance.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *200*, what has been the average real increase since 1979 in the incomes of men who were then aged 65 years and women who were then aged 60 years, and whose income consisted of *(a)* the basic state pension and *(b)* the basic pension and supplementary benefit; and what has been the average increase in income of men and women of working ages over the same period. [19536]

Mr. Heald: The necessary longitudinal information is not available.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of pensioners who will be in receipt of *(a)* basic pension guarantee, *(b)* income support and *(c)* other means-tested benefits in (i) 2040, (ii) 2050, (iii) 2060 and (iv) 2070 under the basic pension plus proposals. [19903]

Mr. Heald: The figure of around £10 billion per annum for possible expenditure on the basic pension guarantee, given in the technical note, is a very broad estimate. It is not possible to say what precise numbers of pensioners could qualify for some guaranteed payments at such a distant date. We do not expect the number of pensioners in receipt of income support and other means-tested benefits to rise as a result of basic pension plus.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Roslin Institute

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will place in the Library the patents granted solely or jointly to the Roslin Institute; [18966]

(2) if he will list the patents granted to the Roslin Institute since its inception and the dates on which they were granted indicating *(a)* which were granted to the Roslin Institute, (i) alone and (ii) jointly with another body, and giving the name of such other bodies and *(b)* indicating which have been transferred to other bodies and the names of those bodies; and if he will place copies of the transfer instruments in the Library. [18965]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I understand that, since Roslin was formed as a self-standing institute in 1993, a number of applications for patents have been filed, but none yet granted. Between 1993 and 1995—when Roslin became a company limited by guarantee—the applications were made in the name of "BBSRC (or AFRC) Roslin Institute". Since 1995 applications will have been in the name of the Roslin Institute itself. Once granted, any patents applied for since 1993 would be published in the normal way. In addition, in 1995, BBSRC transferred to Roslin, as part of the process of forming the limited company, the rights to some published patents which dated from before 1993, when Roslin was part of the larger Institute of Animal Physiology and Genetics Research.

Saudi Arabia (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the official visits to Saudi Arabia made by Ministers in his Department since May 1979, stating in each case the dates and purpose of the visit. [19558]

Mr. Nelson: Details of visits to Saudi Arabia undertaken by DTI Ministers between January 1992 to present can be found in a list which is available in the Library of the House.

Recovery of data for the years 1979–91 would incur disproportionate costs.

Depreciation Payments

Mr. Barron: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* discretionary depreciation payments and *(b)* obligatory depreciation payments have been made in each year for which information is available since the passage of the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 by region; and what has been the (i) total and (ii) average value of such payments in each year, by region. [19551]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for the Coal Authority or other "responsible persons" as defined by the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 (as amended by the Coal Industry Act 1994). However I understand from the Coal Authority that the information requested is not readily available.

Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of whether the participating lenders under the small firms loan guarantee scheme are fully informing unsuccessful applicants of the reason for rejection, differentiating between ineligibility, lack of a viable business proposal and lack of credibility of the applicant. [19752]

Mr. Page: No assessment has been made of the information given to an applicant where their loan application has been rejected. The scheme is appropriate only when a lender considers the business proposal for a loan to be viable and would be prepared to lend but for the lack of collateral to use as security against a conventional loan or overdraft. If the loan application fails to meet the lender's normal commercial appraisal criteria the scheme should not even be considered and the notification of rejection should be subject to the lenders standard practice.

Any complaints received by the Department are investigated and, where appropriate, the matter is taken up with the lender concerned.

International Standard Organisation

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the accreditation of ISO 9000 certification bodies. [20306]

Mr. Ian Taylor: In the context of ISO 9000, accreditation is the recognition by an authoritative body that certification bodies are competent to carry out specified tasks. In the UK the Government have granted that authority solely to UKAS (the United Kingdom Accreditation Service). A memorandum of understanding between my Department and UKAS sets out those activities for which UKAS is recognised by Government and gives UKAS certain rights and obligations. A separate licensing agreement gives UKAS the right to use and confer the DTI's National Accreditation Mark (the "Tick and Crown") which signifies Government recognition.

Accreditation by UKAS ensures that certification bodies have been independently assessed to agreed international standards of competence and impartiality by a body which is itself subject to regular assessment and to oversight by Government. The Government therefore encourage certification bodies to become accredited by UKAS. We also encourage companies and other organisations seeking certification to ISO 9000 to use the services of UKAS accredited certification bodies where these are an option. Only certification by a UKAS accredited body allows companies to be entered into the United Kingdom Register of Quality Assessed Companies and to display the national accreditation mark as an internationally acknowledged symbol of Government recognition.

As in most other commercial matters, it is for each certification body to decide whether to become accredited by UKAS. It is also for individual companies to decide whether to use the services of UKAS accredited certification bodies. This freedom of choice does not imply Government recognition of or support for the activities of certification bodies not accredited by UKAS. Equally, it does not imply any Government authority, recognition or support for the activities of any other UK organisation which may claim to act as an accreditation body in the context of ISO 9000.

Where UKAS accredited certification is available as an option, some purchasers will not accept certificates issued by bodies which are not accredited by UKAS because they have no assurance of the competence of those bodies. This can lead to additional cost for companies as purchasers ask for other evidence of compliance with ISO 9000. UKAS accreditation can, therefore, help to minimise industry's costs. It also helps to remove technical barriers to international trade because the Government have granted UKAS the sole right to negotiate mutual recognition agreements with other national accreditation bodies on behalf of the United Kingdom.

Accordingly, the Government advise all companies to look for the national accreditation mark when selecting a certification body. In the absence of the mark, companies should make detailed enquiries about the relationship between the certification body and UKAS before entering into any commitment.

Research Masters

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made by the pilot scheme for research masters, announced by the Government in October 1994; and if he will make a statement. [20305]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Four of the research councils have been supporting some 250 students a year on the research master's, or MRes, courses on a pilot basis since autumn 1995. The councils involved are the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, the Medical Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council. The first year has been completed, and the second is now well into its stride.

It is still too early to draw firm conclusions about the success of the MRes in preparing students directly for employment or for a PhD. Experience with the pilot also

varies, to some extent, between the councils. However, there are encouraging signs. Students appear very satisfied. The courses are offering them an opportunity to broaden their horizons—including the attractions and possibilities of a career in industry—whilst also acquiring a greater degree of research expertise and experience. There is strong interest and involvement from employers.

Overall, the MRes continues to show much promise as a contributor to the diversity and quality of higher education provision in the UK. I am grateful to all those in academia, industry, and elsewhere who are working to make it a success.

The Director-General of Research Councils is today writing to universities and colleges and other interested parties, including the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, with further details of experience to date. I am placing a copy of that letter and a related press release in the Library of the House. Further reports on the pilot will be published as data and experience accumulate.

Global Environmental Change

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Government's chief scientific adviser has reviewed the Inter-agency Committee on Global Environmental Change; and if he will make a statement. [20307]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The review concluded that the Inter-agency Committee on Global Environmental Change had been an effective mechanism in the past and that it should continue to provide UK agencies funding global environmental change research with a senior-level forum for discussion of relevant science and policy developments.

I am pleased to announce that Sir Richard Southwood has been appointed chairman for the next three years.

A broader membership structure has been introduced. For the first time this has directly involved my Department's Environment Directorate, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Scottish Office, and the Overseas Development Administration.

I have arranged for copies of a note of the conclusions from the review to be placed in the Library of the House.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *124*, what action is taken when a postcode cuts across local authority boundaries; and what action has been taken in relation to the S12 and S31 post code areas. [19630]

Mr. Greg Knight: The Department does not take action when a postcode cuts across local authority boundaries, since postcodes are not used as the basis for geographically targeted policies.

Business Breakfast Tours

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much each of the business breakfast tours cost; and which hon. Members were present at each. [19246]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information requested is given in the following table.

Event	*Cost including VAT (£)*	*Members attending*
Luton	7,706.73	Mr. Lang, Mr. Page, Sir Graham Bright
Lincoln	1,232.41	Mr. Knight
Leeds	5,530.70	Mr. Lang, Mr. Curry, Mr. Kirkhope, Dr. Hampson, Mr. Gunnell
Southampton	3,353.50	Sir George Young, Mr. Ian Taylor
Norwich	5,650.39	Mr. Jack, Mr. Knight
Ipswich	7,484.10	Mr. Curry, Mr. Paice, Mr. Lord, Mr. Cann
Birkenhead	924.95	Mr. Jack, Mr. John Taylor
Leicester	3,700.43	Sir George Young, Mr. John Taylor
Bath	5,300.00	Mr. Waldegrave, Dr. Fox
Exeter	5,000.00	Mr. Waldegrave, Mr. Streeter
Crawley	5,500.00	Mr. Forth, Mr. Ian Taylor
Bolton	1,420.00	Mr. Alistair Burt, Mr. John Taylor
Ashford	6,053.63	Mr. Waldegrave, Mr. Ian Taylor
Birmingham	[1]17,432.00	Mr. Lang, Mr. Page
Grantham	3,876.79	Mr. Knight, Mr. Kirkhope, Mr. Davies
Worcester	[1]2,000.00	Sir George Young, Mr. Page
Corby	[1]2,426.27	Mr. Curry, Mr. Knight, Mr. Kirkhope, Mr. William Powell
Swindon	[1]4,760.00	Mr. Waldegrave, Mr. Evans
Croydon	1,184.50	Mrs. Knight, Mr. Congdon
Oxford	[1]2,700.00	Mr. Forth, Mr. Ian Taylor

[1] Indicates estimate.

Arms Sales

Ms Short: To ask Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the countries and other bodies which have bought arms from the United Kingdom in the last 10 years under the export credits guarantee scheme and defaulted on their payments and *(b)* the sums of money involved in each case. [14007]

Mr. Nelson *[pursuant to his reply 14 February 1997, c.337]:* I have been asked to reply. Since April 1986 the Export Credits Guarantee Department has paid the following claims on guarantees related to business with defence ministries.

	£ million
Egypt	93
Venezuela	31.7
Jordan	16.9
Kenya	13.7

In addition, some business not listed was also the subject of claims payments relating to defence ministries. This information cannot be released as it could cause harm in terms of one or more of the defence, security, international relations and commercial confidence exemptions in the code of practice on access to Government information. These were the exemptions in the code referred to the statement on defence exports by my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement on 23 July 1996, *Official Report*, column 212.

ECGD does not distinguish specifically arms from other sales to defence ministries but a review of the records and case files indicates that arms account for less than one quarter of the total defence claims.

The figures given do not take into account recoveries of claims paid. Likewise, they do not include any claims in respect of ECGD's former short-term operations which were privatised in 1991 and for which equivalent data are not available.

HEALTH

High-cost Drugs

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the recommendations contained in the White Paper, "Working for Patients", relating to patients' access to high-cost drugs, represent current Government policy. [17385]

Mr. Malone: Measures are in place to ensure that general practitioners are able to take on the prescribing of medicines for patients with unusually high prescribing costs, where it is clinically appropriate for them to do so.

CS Gas and Sprays

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment of the health effects of CS gas and sprays have been made by the senior medical officers of his Department since 1990; how many published and internal papers have been written by his Department's medical officers on this subject since 1990; and what are the current security classifications of these reports. [17950]

Mr. Horam: Officials of the Department have reviewed the scientific data on CS gas and sprays but they have not produced any scientific papers or reports on the subject. A list of the published scientific literature which was fully reviewed will be placed in the Library.

GP Surgeries (Computerisation)

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number and the percentage of general practitioner surgeries which are computerised for each NHS region; and how many of these operate clinical live on-line systems. [19103]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not held centrally. Projected results of a general practitioner computer survey undertaken by Gallup in 1993 are set out in the table:

Regional health authorities	*Per cent. computerised*
East Anglia	94
Oxford	92
South Western	91
Trent	89
Yorkshire	87
Northern	87
Wessex	86
Mersey	81
West Midlands	81
South-east Thames	80
North Western	80
South-west Thames	78
North-west Thames	76
North-east Thames	69

Equal Opportunities

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many black and Asian-owned companies have applied for NHS contracts; how many have won the contracts they have applied for; and what plans there are to introduce ethnic monitoring into the contracting process to establish whether stated equal opportunities policies are successful. [19064]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally. Trusts and health authorities are required to follow the European Union public procurement directives which set clear standards for the evaluation criteria which may be used in order to ensure openness and fairness of competition. There are no plans to introduce central monitoring of their compliance with the directives.

Health Services (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total funding provided by his Department for health services approved for 1997–98 in the London borough of Wandsworth. [19487]

Mr. Horam: The London borough of Wandsworth is covered by Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority. For 1997–98, the health authority has an initial total cash allocation of £350.8 million plus a further £7.2 million in additional allocations.

Information on the funding of the London borough of Wandsworth is not held centrally. I refer the hon. Member to Mr. Harry Cowd, chairman of Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority.

Smoking (Pregnancy)

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to encourage the reduction of smoking during pregnancy. [19364]

Mr. Horam: The Health Education Authority is continuing its campaign aimed at pregnant women, in conjunction with doctors, nurses, health visitors and pharmacists. In addition, the national smoking educational campaign is designed to motivate and assist those in socio-economic groups C2DE, in particular parents and pregnant women, to quit.

Senior Managers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many senior managers in the NHS who had resigned after being requested to do so or had their contracts terminated were appointed to another post within the NHS within *(a)* five years, *(b)* three years, *(c)* two years and *(d)* 12 months. [19428]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals are currently seeking PFI contracts in England. [19432]

Mr. Horam: There are currently 151 national health service trusts seeking private finance initiative contracts with a capital value of £1 million or over in England.

Postgraduate Deans

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many withdrawals of approval for post have been made by postgraduate deans in each of the last five years. [19379]

Mr. Malone: New posts require both educational and staffing approval. Postgraduate deans' power to withdraw educational approval from existing posts applies only to pre-registration house officer posts. Information on the exercise of this power is not available centrally.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list vaccines licensed since 1 February 1987 for mumps, measles, rubella or a combination of these indicating for each product the date on which a licence was granted, the conditions for which it was licensed and if the product licence is current. [19271]

Mr. Malone: The available information listing the vaccines licensed since February 1987 and still current is as follows:

Product name	*Date of grant*
Pulserix MMR Vaccine Injection with Diluent'	17 June 1988
Immravax Measles Mumps Rubella Live Attenuated Vaccine'	18 September 1989
Measavax Vaccine Injection'	18 September 1989
Rubavax Rubella Live Vaccine'	18 September 1989
Rublin—Rubella vaccine live BP	28 February 1992
Immravax/measles, mumps and rubella vaccine live BP	18 October 1993
Rimevax measles vaccine	25 October 1993
Mevilin-L Measles Vaccine Live BP	6 January 1994
Eolarix vaccine injection	22 July 1994
Merieux measles and rubella vaccine injection	1 September 1994
Measavax vaccine 1000TCID50/dose	13 October 1994
Rubavax injection (at least) 1000TCID50	14 October 1994
Almevax Rubella Vaccine'	2 November 1994
Ervevax rubella vaccine live EP RA 27/3 strain 1000TCID50	2 November 1994
MSD Meruvax II Vaccine'	2 November 1994
Mumpsvax Lyophilised Powder for Injection 2000IU'	2 November 1994
Pluserix MMR vaccine injection	9 February 1995
Pariorix vaccine	20 February 1995
M-M-R II Vaccine Injection'	24 March 1995
MSD Attenuvax Vaccine injection (at least) 1000TCID50'	24 March 1995
Meruvax II vaccine 1000TCID50	7 April 1995
Attenuvax injection	7 June 1995
M-M-R II vaccine injection	1 March 1996
Mumpsvax vacine injection 20000TCID50/dose	1 March 1996

' Indicates that the product licence has been cancelled.

Information relating to the conditions for which the products were licensed will be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the last five years for which information is available the serious adverse reactions to vaccines containing components against mumps, measles or rubella; if he will list trial products which have been withdrawn; and if he will make a statement. [19324]

Mr. Malone: Drug analysis prints, listing all serious suspected reactions reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines between 1 January 1992 and 31 December 1996 for vaccines containing components against mumps, measles or rubella will be placed in the Library shortly, along with an information sheet to aid interpretation. No trial products have been withdrawn, and no licences for these vaccines have been suspended or revoked in the last five years.

I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 6 November, at columns *607–11* which discusses the replacement of the urabe strain of MMR vaccine with the current strain.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the dates the Committee on Safety of Medicines considered matters relating to mumps, measles and rubella vaccines which were recommended for licensing, indicating the date on which each product was considered. [19265]

Mr. Malone: The available information is as follows:

Issue	*Considered by the Committee on*	*Name of product*
Mumps	26 May 1983	Pariorix
Measles	18 December 1980	Rimevax
	28 July 1988	Measavax
	22–23 September 1988	Immravax
Rubella	26–27 September 1984	Ervevax
	28 July 1988	Rubavax
	22–23 September 1988	Immravax

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of suspected adverse reactions to mumps, measles and rubella vaccines for the last five years for which figures are available. [19266]

Mr. Malone: Suspected adverse reactions reports to measles, mumps and rubella vaccine are given in the table.

Numbers of suspected adverse reactions reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines from 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1996 for MMR vaccine in the United Kingdom

Year	*All suspected adverse reactions (serious and non-serious) where MMR vaccine was indicated as a suspect drug*	*Number of reports where MMR vaccine was indicated as a suspect drug*
1992	350	180
1993	232	129
1994	212	134
1995	228	122
1996	232	134

A report of a suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the vaccine. Each report relates to one patient. Patients may have more than one suspected reaction and the number of reactions given exceeds the number of patients affected as seen above.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the statements his Department has made since 1 January 1986 relating to vaccination against mumps, measles and rubella. [19269]

Mr. Horam: Full details of the recommendations for immunisation against measles, mumps and rubella are given in the United Kingdom Health Departments' memorandum "Immunisation against Infectious Disease" which is updated regularly and was published in 1996 (ISBN: 011 321815 X), 1992 (ISBN: 0 11 321515 0), 1990 (ISBN: 0 11 321251 8), 1988 (ISBN: 0 11321136 8) and 1984 (ISBN: 0 90 2650 69 6). The following letters from the chief medical officer and circulars about measles, mumps and/or rubella have also been issued: PL/CMO(96)6, PL/CMO(94)13, PL/CMO(94)12, PL/CMO(94)10, PL/CMO(92)11, PL/CMO(88)19, PL/CMO(88)17, PL/CMO(88)16; CMO Update Numbers 8 (November 1995), 7 (October 1995) and 6 (July 1995); EL(96)61, EL(95)113, EL(94)73 and EL(94)60. Press releases about these immunisations include: 96/239, 95/361, 95/209, 95/154, 94/599, 94/433, 94/354, H92/277, 89/476, 89/353, 89/8 and 88/166. Copies of all these are available in the Library.

Liquid Paraffin (Adverse Reactions)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of suspected adverse reactions to liquid paraffin reported to the Medicines Control Agency for each of the last five years for which figures are available separately identifying the number of suspected adverse reactions relating to cancer. [19273]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is shown in the table.

Numbers of suspected adverse reactions reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines from 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1996 for paraffin liquid in the United Kingdom

Year	*All suspected adverse reactions (serious and non-serious) where paraffin liquid was indicated as a suspect drug*	*Number of reports where liquid paraffin was indicated as a suspect drug*
1992	2	1
1993	2	2
1994	0	0
1995	0	0
1996	5	4

None of these reactions were related to cancer. A report of a suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the drug. Each report relates to one patient. Patients may have more than one suspected reaction and the number of reactions given usually exceeds the number of patients affected as seen above.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates between 12 July 1995 and 28 November 1995 the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) met the chairman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. [19275]

Mr. Malone: None.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each of the chairmen of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, indicating their dates in office. [19326]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is as follows:

	Date in office
1. Professor Sir Eric Scowen MD DSc FRCP FRCS FRCP(Ed) FRCPath	1 January 1971 to 31 March 1976
2. Professor G. M. Wilson MD DSc FRCP FRCPE FRCPC FRSE	1 April 1976 to 31 December 1976
3. Professor Sir Eric Scowen MD DSc FRCP FRCS FRCP(Ed) FRCPath	1 January 1977 to 30 June 1980
4. Professor Sir Abraham Goldberg MD DSc FRCP FRSE	1 July 1980 to 31 December 1986
5. Professor Sir William Asscher BSc MD FRCP	1 January 1987 to 31 December 1992
6. Professor M. D. Rawlins BSc MD FRCP(Lon) FRCP(Ed) FFPM	1 January 1993 to date

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the quorum for a meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. [19270]

Mr. Malone: Seven, including the chairman.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the date of the first "Dear Doctor" letter issued by a chairman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines; what was its subject; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [19321]

Mr. Malone: The first "Dear Doctor" letter from the Committee on Safety of Medicines was issued in August 1972 and related to the safety of Lanoxin, a brand of digoxin. Copies will be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount paid in attendance allowances to members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines relating to work carried out in October 1995. [19267]

Mr. Malone: The total amount paid in attendance allowance to members of the committee relating to work carried out in October 1995, was £2,850.

Drug Safety Announcements

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision is made in the Medicines Act 1968 and related legislation for public announcements by the Licensing Authority relating to drug safety in the absence of licensing action. [19322]

Mr. Malone: The functions of Health Ministers include taking appropriate action whenever public health issues arise. These responsibilities are long established as per the Ministry of Health Act 1919.

Food Safety (Mineral Hydrocarbons)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what occasions the Committee on Toxicity has considered the safety of mineral hydrocarbons in food processes; what conclusions they reached; and if he will make a statement. [19272]

Mr. Horam: The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment has considered mineral hydrocarbons in 1988, 1989 and 1993. The conclusions of the latest consideration of these compounds were published in the 1993 annual report of the Committee, copies of which have been deposited in the Library.

Clinical Trials Volunteers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many volunteers who took part in clinical trials in the United Kingdom have died or suffered serious injury in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; what procedures his Department has in place to ensure minimisation of risk to such volunteers; and if he will make a statement; [19274]

(2) what procedures *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Medicines Control Agency have in place to ensure that commercial organisations obtain valid, independent ethical approval before conducting clinical drug trials on healthy volunteers. [19268]

Mr. Malone: These figures are not collected centrally and no data are available.

Volunteers who take part in clinical trials are protected by a variety of mechanisms designed to minimise the risk to the subjects. People who take part in any form of drug study are volunteers who do so on the basis of informed consent. Informed consent means that the purpose of the trial is explained to the subject together with what is known about the drug, any questions that the volunteer may have are answered and the potential volunteer is given the opportunity to decline to take part without it affecting his future treatment.

Studies on healthy volunteers, where there is no expectation of therapeutic benefit, do not meet the definition of a clinical trial given in section 31 of the Medicines Act 1968 and are not controlled by the Act. Companies carrying out such studies are self-regulated and, under an Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries code of practice for all pharmaceutical companies, companies are required to obtain the approval of an independent ethics committee before conducting studies on healthy volunteers. These studies are carried out in specialist units by experienced medical staff who have ready access to the appropriate support facilities to ensure the safety of those taking part.

In general, studies in patients are covered by the Medicines Act 1968 and it is necessary for any pharmaceutical company to gain the permission of the Licensing Authority before carrying out such studies. The principal control scheme for company-sponsored clinical trials in the UK is currently the CTX scheme—exemption from the need to hold a clinical trials certificate—covered by The Medicines (Exemption from Licences) (Clinical Trials) Order 1995 (SI 2808) and The Medicines (Exemption from Licences and Certificates) (Clinical Trials) Order 1995 (SI 2809). Under the CTX scheme, all studies must be performed to good clinical practice standards and these include a review of the study by an independent ethics committee before the study commences. Companies applying to carry out trials under the CTX scheme give an undertaking that the Medicines Control Agency, acting on behalf of the Licensing Authority, will be notified of any refusal by an independent ethics committee to approve the trial as proposed by the company.

Additionally, under the CTX scheme, companies must report the occurrence of serious, unexpected adverse drug reactions detected during trials taking place anywhere in the world to the MCA, which carefully reviews these data in order to decide whether or not trials in the UK with that drug should be allowed to continue. In any year, about 10 to 15 per cent. of trials applications are refused and a small number of approved trials have their conditions modified by the MCA because of safety concerns about the drug and its proposed use. The MCA does not collect total figures for adverse events and deaths across all clinical trials because such data would not be helpful in the assessment of the safety of an individual drug undergoing clinical trials.

The combination of informed consent, review by an independent ethics committee and constant monitoring of safety data by the MCA has been in operation for many years and has served well in the protection of public health while at the same time allowing the rapid development of new drugs to treat patients.

"Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the date of the first issue of the publication which is now entitled "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance"; who authorised its issue; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [19323]

Mr. Malone: The first issue of the publication now called "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" was published by the Committee on Safety of Medicines in September 1975. Copies will be placed in the Library shortly.

Methionine

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the safety of paracetamol preparations containing methionine; and if he will make a statement. [19325]

Mr. Malone: As with all medicines, the safety of paracetamol preparations containing methionine is continuously monitored by Medicines Control Agency and any new information is carefully evaluated. Side effects from methionine include nausea, vomiting, dizziness and irritability. Methionine is added to some preparations containing paracetamol to prevent liver damage if an overdose is taken but is of no benefit to patients who use paracetamol at the recommended dose. Patients who are not at risk of an overdose are exposed to the possible risk of side effects from methionine with no additional benefit.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total level of payments to date for each appropriate local authority for asylum seekers who would otherwise be facing destitution as defined under the National Assistance Act 1948. [19603]

Mr. Burns: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced we shall be reimbursing local authorities for reasonable costs that have fallen to them following the high court and courts of appeal judgments. Guidance has been issued to local authorities inviting them to claim for reimbursement of their expenditure in supporting adult asylum seekers. Claims forms must be submitted to the Department by 14 March.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the capacity of accident and emergency departments at *(a)* St. Bartholomew's, *(b)* Whittington, *(c)* the Royal Free, *(d)* Barnet general and *(e)* Edgware hospitals in each of the past five years; and what are the planned figures for 1997–98. [19605]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) gave on 25 November 1996, column *127*.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reviews have been undertaken by his Department of the operation of accident and emergency departments at *(a)* St. Bartholomew's *(b)* Whittington, *(c)* the Royal Free, *(d)* Barnet general and *(e)* Edgware hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [19606]

Mr. Malone: A strategy for the configuration of accident and emergency services in London was included in the report "Making London Better" in February 1993. Copies are available in the Library.

The on-going review and monitoring of accident and emergency departments is the responsibility of local health authorities. Service reviews are initiated in the light of local needs and circumstances and are the subject of statutory public consultation if major change or service development is indicated.

Statutory consultation exercises have been undertaken by individual health authorities on the reconfiguration of emergency services at St. Bartholomew's, Barnet general hospital and Edgware general hospital.

Child Labour

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to bring forward proposals for regulation of child labour in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [19604]

Mr. Burns: A comprehensive legal system has been in place for many years to protect children who choose to work. Regulations are being prepared to begin the process of implementing the minor changes to current law necessary to fully conform with a European Community directive on the protection of young people at work.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Tenanted Land

Mr. Richards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the results of the new annual survey of tenanted land; and if he will make a statement. [20100]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The results of the annual survey of tenanted land were published today. I have placed in the Library of the House copies of a departmental statistical notice which gives a summary of the results of this survey.

The first annual survey of tenanted land was carried out in October 1996 and replaces the previous rent enquiry. The new survey seeks details on rental agreements and on rents from a random sample of farmers who have rented agricultural land.

The survey indicates that in October 1996 the average rent paid for agricultural land in England was £116.99 per hectare. A total of 559 from business tenancy agreements were recorded in the survey. That figure represents over 11 per cent. of all types of agreement. And in terms of the amount of let farmland recorded, farm business tenancies account for more than 7 per cent. of the agricultural rented area.

Although the Agricultural Tenancies Act came into operation on 1 September 1995, that is only a short time ago in farming terms. I am greatly encouraged by the interest shown in the new farm business tenancies. The survey results provide statistics on a wide range of types of agreement, and illustrate that the flexibility available under the new legislation is already being used by the tenanted sector. Over 7 per cent. of FBT agreements in the survey sample were for five years duration or more, and a number of landlords had sufficient confidence to offer lettings for 25 years or more.

The new survey will be conducted each autumn, and, as well as collecting data on agricultural rents, makes good the Government's commitment, given during the passage of the Agricultural Tenancies Bill, to monitor uptake of farm business tenancies.

In addition, an independent policy evaluation of the effect of the new legislation has been commissioned, and I intend to publish the results of that study later in the year.

Honey and Bee Health

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the submission of the International Bee Research Association relating to recent EU proposals on honey and bee health circulated by his Department. [19407]

Mr. Boswell: The submission of the International Bee Research Association on the recent EU proposals on honey and bee health has, along with other representations received, provided a useful contribution to the debate and has helped the Government in framing their approach to negotiations.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines he has issued since 14 December 1995 concerning the effect on dressing hygiene of the slaughter of dirty stock in abattoirs. [19574]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Detailed guidelines on dressing procedures to prevent the outside of the hide from contaminating the carcase are contained in the "Meat Hygiene Service Operations Manual", issued in April 1995. This guidance was

reinforced in letters issued by the Meat Hygiene Service to all official veterinary surgeons and meat hygiene inspectors on 18 December 1996 and 17 February 1997. Any premises in which improvements are needed are followed up on an individual basis by Meat Hygiene Service staff with the operator concerned. The manual also contains guidance on the steps to be taken to ensure the cleanliness of animals presented for slaughter. The Meat Hygiene Service is at present preparing enhanced guidance on the standards expected and how to achieve them. This will be issued later this month.

Calf Exports

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many calves were exported during *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 1996 following the implementation of the Bovine Offal (Prohibition) (Amendment) Regulations on 2 November 1994; and what warnings were given to importers as to the action they should take concerning human food consumption. [18204]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Official overseas trade statistics show that approximately 558,000 cattle, the vast majority of which would have been calves, were exported in the period November 1994 to March 1996, prior to the export ban which came into effect in 1996. These figures remain provisional and subject to amendment.

Exports of calves to member states during this period took place in accordance with EC decision 94/474, which requires all calves imported from the UK to be slaughtered before the age of six months. The proposed implementation of the Bovine Offal (Prohibition) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 was notified to the Commission on 26 July 1994 in accordance with the provisions of article 9(3) of the EC Technical Standards and Regulations Directive 83/189/EEC and would have subsequently been notified to other member states by the Commission. It is for individual member states to decide whether or not similar controls should be put in place in their territory.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 March 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the conditions in which the Prison Service is holding Roisin McAliskey. [20510]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Nirj Deva, dated 13 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the conditions in which Roisin McAliskey is being held at Holloway prison.

Following a routine review of her security status Roisin McAliskey remains a Category A prisoner but has been downgraded from high risk to standard risk within that category. As a result some of the security arrangements which have been in operation have been relaxed.

The number of strip searches to which Roisin McAliskey had been subject has already been reduced and she is no longer being strip searched before and after every open visit within the prison. She is now only being strip searched on the same basis as all other prisoners at Holloway. This means before leaving the prison for court appearances and on return to the prison; as part of a cell search and drug testing procedures; on a random basis; or if there were reasonable suspicion she had secreted something about her prison.

Further relaxations as a consequence of the security review will take effect from now on. She will be able to attend chapel, to use the gym and the swimming pool, and to attend ante-natal classes with other prisoners. The number of overnight security checks will be reduced so that the light in her cell can be extinguished for most of the night.

Separately from the review of her security status, Roisin McAliskey applied on 14 February to be located on the Mother and Baby Unit at Holloway with her baby after it is born. Her application was considered, following the normal processes which apply to all expectant mothers, by the Admissions Board at Holloway, who considered the views of independent experts in the development needs of babies, as well as logistical issues.

The Assessment Board has now advised the Governor that Roisin McAliskey's application should be approved, the Governor has recommended approval and I have accepted this recommendation. She has been told that she may keep her baby with her after the birth. She will, as do all other mothers, have to sign a compact agreeing to be of reasonable behaviour and to co-operate with the ethos and regime of the Unit. Babies in the Unit normally remain with their mothers until the age of nine months.

Both the reduction in security classification and the decision to allow Roisin McAliskey to keep her baby have followed the standard procedures and processes that would apply to any other prisoner.

Tote

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the future use of Tote profits. [18533]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Tote's role is to provide pool betting on horseracing and to raise money for racing. Maintaining its contribution to racing is central to Government policy; it is for the Tote to decide how to distribute the money.

Prison Staff (Drugs)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures and guidelines exist for the random or routine searching at prisons with a significant drugs presence of *(a)* prison officers, *(b)* other prison staff and *(c)* other persons visiting in an official capacity. [19761]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 13 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the searching of staff and official visitors.

Guidelines for searching staff and visitors to prisons are contained in the Prison Service Manual on Security, copies of which are held in the Library of the House. These require the governor, in consultation with the area manager, to draw up a local searching strategy, including provisions for searching staff and visitors, to meet the particular security needs of the prison and to combat particular risks such as the illicit passage of drugs into the prison.

In addition, following recommendations by Sir John Woodcock, visitors and staff seeking to enter dispersal prisons (including Belmarsh) are searched on each occasion of entering the prison. This will be extended to the five local prisons at which we plan to hold category A prisoners in future, once building work has been completed to allow the necessary space and equipment to be installed at the gate.

Prison Visits (Recording)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, columns *288–89*, if he will review the use of video-recorded closed circuit television in the legal visit facilities at special secure units. [19909]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Tam Dalyell, dated 13 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about video recorded CCTV in the legal visits facility in Special Secure Units.

There are no plans to review this arrangement.

Staff Assaults (Ranby Prison)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reported incidents of staff assaults were recorded at Her Majesty's prison, Ranby from 1 January 1996 to date; and if he will make a statement. [19924]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Max Madden, dated 13 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of reported incidents of staff assaults recorded at Ranby prison from 1 January 1996 to date.

Six assaults on staff have been recorded at Ranby prison since 1 January 1996. This figure represents less than two assaults per 100 population.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce proposals for the registration and regulation of wheel clamping; and if he will make a statement. [20081]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans for legislation in this area. We are considering whether further legal measures are needed to regulate wheel clamping.

Child Abuse

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he is taking to ascertain the whereabouts of Rosemary Iredale, a convicted child abuser recently released from prison but since disappeared; [19160]

(2) what steps he is taking to ascertain the whereabouts of Terry Valrona, a convicted child abuser recently released from prison but since disappeared. [19159]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answers 10 March 1997]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

Remand Prisoners (Voting Rights)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance is given to remand prisoners, detained in prisons in England and Wales, to register to vote and to apply for a postal vote; and if he will ensure that all such prisoners are advised of their right to vote and assisted in securing their vote. [19740]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Max Madden, dated 13 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the voting rights of remand prisoners.

Those in Prison Service custody eligible to vote in Parliamentary, local Government and European elections are: unconvicted prisoners; convicted but unsentenced prisoners; prisoners imprisoned for contempt of court; and those serving a term of imprisonment in default of payment of a sum of money adjudged to be paid on conviction. Eligible prisoners must have been registered as electors at their home address even though they may have been in prison on the qualifying date. Decisions on the eligibility of prisoners to be included in the electoral register are for the Electoral Registration Officer who decides if the person was normally resident at a particular address prior to their imprisonment.

Establishments are required to notify eligible prisoners of their eligibility to vote and to inform them of the deadlines that are set for applications for a postal or proxy vote. They are also required to ensure that ballot papers sent to prisoners reach them unopened, that staff witness prisoners' declarations of identity, and that completed votes are posted back uncensored.

Casino Deregulation

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on casino deregulation. [20446]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information is as follows:

The Deregulation (Casinos Order) 1997

I am pleased to report implementation of the first deregulation changes to the casino regime since the 1968 Act.

Following approval by Parliament on 6 March, I made the Deregulation (Casinos) Order, which comes into force on 3 April.

This will allow casinos in England and Wales to provide alcohol after midnight, until 3 am in London, and 2 am elsewhere.

In casinos in Great Britain, it also reduces from 48 to 24 hours the waiting period before new members may take part in the gaming.

The Deregulation (Debit Cards) Order 1997

The order has now been cleared by the Deregulation Committees and awaits parliamentary approval. It would allow acceptance of payment by debit cards.

The Second Casino Consultation

Advertising, group and postal membership and slot machines:

Following initial consultation earlier in 1996, we went out to consultation on 12 November on a package of measures to relax certain other controls on the operation of casinos. The proposals were as follows:

Relax the total ban on advertising to allow casinos to give their name, address, telephone number and limited factual information about their facilities in non-national publications, including newspapers and magazines;

Allow group membership and postal applications;

Permit a maximum of three slot machines per gaming table subject to a discretion for the licensing justices to substitute a lower number on grounds of demand and suitability of the premises;

There would be a power to regulate the size of stakes and prizes, although this would not be used initially;

Make a number of detailed requirements including certification of manufacturers and agents by the Gaming Board and a monitoring and testing regime.

There was broad support for the advertising proposals. A few organisations were against any relaxation in the controls. However, this is a very modest relaxation, allowing casinos merely to give out information about themselves. I do not believe that necessary protection for the public would be removed by this measure.

Most respondents also supported the proposals for group membership and postal applications. A few were opposed but most were content with the detailed safeguards proposed.

We will prepare draft proposals in the form of a deregulation order.

I am still considering the more extensive proposals for slot machines in casinos. Some concerns have been expressed about the nature of such machines. However, they are common in casinos throughout the world, usually in substantially greater numbers than we propose. But I consider that such machines must be strictly regulated. More detailed work would be required on the technical specification, monitoring and other arrangements before we could introduce legislation. We will continue our discussions with the Gaming Board and the industry.

Permitted areas

We proposed to allow casinos in 21 new locations, including London docklands and a special category of seven conference towns.

Outside London, most of the proposed new areas attracted support or neutrality from their local councils and reasonable support from other local interests. I propose to remove Peterborough from the list; its council remained opposed and there was also significant other local opposition.

In the London area, most local authorities have welcomed our proposals. Slough is considering its position. I am in further contact with Croydon council, which has recently sought more information about the implications of permitted area status and its role in the regulatory regime for casinos.

I have taken account of representations in favour of greater casino provision in east London. In addition to Dartford and Redbridge, I intend to designate a permitted area within docklands, which will put it on a par with other urban development areas within Great Britain.

On the basis of up-to-date information provided by the British Association of Conference Destinations, I propose to add Milton Keynes and Weston-super-Mare to the category of conference towns to be designated as permitted areas.

I also propose to redefine existing permitted areas to reflect local authority boundary changes.

The changes that I wish to make could be implemented by secondary legislation. Before any new areas are introduced, however, I will need to address the resource, timing and other practical implications.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the asylum seekers currently held in detention *(a)* are awaiting a decision on their asylum application, *(b)* are awaiting an appeal following a refusal of their asylum application and *(c)* have had an appeal rejected. [19561]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information is given in the table.

Number of people recorded as being detained[1,2] on 31 January 1997[3] who had sought asylum at some stage, by stage of application and immigration status

Stage of application	*Port*	*Illegal entrant*	*Subject to deportation action*	*Total*
Awaiting an initial decision	103	57	15	175
Awaiting result of an appeal	203	144	29	376
Awaiting removal after refusal	86	144	17	217
Total	392	315	61	768

[1] Persons detained solely under powers contained in Schedule 2 or 3 to the Immigration Act 1971.

[2] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than one month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period of time, the figures should be used with caution.

[3] Illegal entrants and persons subject to deportation action are as at 31 January, port cases are as at 3 February 1997.

Sexual Orientation (Police Database)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 3 March, *Official Report*, column *463*, (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that any references to individuals' sexuality are deleted from the police national computer; [19434]

(2) on how many occasions an individual's sexual orientation has been recorded on the police national computer. [19433]

Mr. Maclean: There is no specific data field on the police national computer for recording sexual orientation. This might be inferred from the details of the convictions history and offending pattern. Information recorded on the PNC must be relevant to the purposes for which it is held in order to comply with the data protection principles of the Data Protection Act 1984. Data on sexual orientation would not be relevant for these purposes and would be removed if found to have been improperly recorded.

Records are not kept of how many occasions an individual's sexual orientation may have been improperly recorded on the PNC.

Prisoners (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison inmates there were in each London prison on 1 March. [19492]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 13 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking how many prison inmates there were in each London prison on 1 March.

Provisional figures are available for 28 February 1997 and these are detailed in the attached table.

Population in London Prison Service establishments on 28 February 1997

Prison Service establishment	Population on 28 February 1997[1]
Belmarsh	868
Brixton	617
Downview	289
Feltham	866
Highdown	689
Holloway	508
Latchmere House	174
Pentonville	908
Wandsworth	852
Wormwood Scrubs	1,213

[1] Provisional figures.

Burglaries

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of burglaries in each of the last five years was committed by people aged under 21 years. [19687]

Mr. Maclean: Information available is given in the table.

Percentage of persons cautioned and convicted at all courts for burglary offences who were aged under 21 years, 1990 to 1995

England and Wales

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Percentage	64.8	60.9	58.9	57.8	58.4	58.3

Youth Crime

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the percentage change in the number of crimes committed by youths in the past 10 years. [19822]

Mr. Maclean: Information available is given in the table.

Number and percentage change of known offenders (those cautioned or convicted at all courts) aged 10 to under 18 by type of offence, 1985 and 1995

England and Wales *Thousands*

Type of offence	1985	1995	Percentage change
Indictable	213.3	132.8	-38
Summary (excluding motoring)	50.0	46.2	-9
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	256.2	179.1	-32

Violent Crime

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* sex offences, *(b)* homicides and *(c)* other violent crimes were recorded in West Yorkshire in each of the last 10 years; and what percentage of these led to successful prosecutions. [19690]

Mr. Maclean: The requested information on recorded crime is given in the following table:

Notifiable offences recorded by the police West Yorkshire police force area

Year	Sexual offences	Homicide	All violent crime[1]
1985	1,219	26	7,660
1986	1,247	25	8,062
1987	1,311	31	8,940
1988	1,275	26	10,047
1989	1,537	33	11,381
1990	1,584	43	12,109
1991	1,675	34	13,544
1992	1,361	34	13,727
1993	1,465	27	13,828
1994	1,504	27	13,886
1995	1,416	43	13,118

[1] Offence groups of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery.

The available court data relate to defendants convicted in the West Yorkshire police force area and are given in the following table. Information is given for the years 1985, 1990 and 1995 only. The provision of data for other years would involve disproportionate cost. It is not appropriate to express these figures as a percentage of recorded offences as they relate to offenders who may have been proceeded against for more than one offence.

Number of defendants convicted at all courts for (a) sexual offences, (b) homicide and (c) violent crimes[1] in the West Yorkshire Police Force Area 1985, 1990 and 1995

West Yorkshire police force area

Offence	1985	1990	1995
Sexual offences	345	328	256
Homicide	21	24	18
Violent crimes[1]	2,861	3,447	2,751

[1] Includes the indictable offence groups of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery and the summary offence of common assault.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* sex offences, *(b)* homicides and *(c)* violent crimes were recorded in each of the last 20 years; and what percentage of these led to successful prosecutions. [19691]

Mr. Maclean: The requested information on recorded crime is given in the following table:

Notifiable offence recorded by the police

England and Wales

Year	Sexual offences	Homicide	All violent crime[1]
1975	23,731	515	106,044
1976	22,203	565	111,562
1977	21,313	482	117,233
1978	22,367	532	122,590
1979	21,843	629	129,285
1980	21,107	620	133,359
1981	19,424	559	139,913
1982	19,729	618	151,261
1983	20,410	550	153,871
1984	20,222	621	159,299
1985	21,456	616	170,650
1986	22,684	661	178,203
1987	25,154	688	198,829
1988	26,529	624	216,214

Notifiable offence recorded by the police

England and Wales

Year	Sexual offences	Homicide	All violent crime[1]
1989	29,733	641	239,858
1990	29,044	669	249,904
1991	29,423	725	265,085
1992	29,528	687	284,201
1993	31,284	670	294,231
1994	31,971	726	310,332
1995	30,274	745	310,936

[1] Offence groups of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery.

The available court data relate to defendants convicted in England and Wales and are given in the following table. Information is given for the years 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990 and 1995 only. The provision of data for other years would involve disproportionate cost. It is not appropriate to express these figures as a percentage of recorded offences as they relate to offenders who may have been proceeded against for more than one offence.

Number of defendants convicted at all courts for (a) sexual offences, (b) homicide and (c) violent crimes[1] 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990 and 1995

England and Wales

Offence	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
Sexual offences	6,848	8,042	6,010	6,605	4,702
Homicide	377	477	441	387	455
Violent crimes[1]	48,660	65,123	58,564	69,215	57,484

[1] Includes the indictable offence groups of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery and the summary offence of common assault.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the successful bids, in Wales, for CCTV funding; and how many bids were rejected and in which areas of Wales they were located. [20050]

Mr. Maclean: In the third round of the closed circuit television challenge competition—1997–98—the following bids from Wales were successful:

Bid	Amount awarded £
Monmouth town centre	112,500
Prestatyn town centre	85,500
Wrexham town centre	50,000

There were 13 unsuccessful bids from the following areas:

Abergele town centre.

Ammanford pedestrian and commercial centre.

Brecon, Newtown and Llandrindod Wells town centres.

Princess of Wales Hospital, Bridgend.

Lansbury Park, Caerphilly.

Llanrumney, Cardiff.

Ysgol John Bright, Llandudno.

Alway, Bettws, Llanmartin and Ringland shopping areas, Newport.

Port Talbot town centre.

Bishop Gore School and Singleton Park, Sketty, Swansea.

De la Beche Street, Dynevor Place and the Kingsway, Swansea.

Tenby town centre and harbour.

Byte Street, Treherbert.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sporting Ambassadors

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she will announce the conclusions of the committee chaired by Sir Colin Cowdrey on sporting ambassadors. [20511]

Mr. Sproat: I will be announcing the committee's conclusions on the morning of 14 March and copies of the announcement will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which her Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18930]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* The breakdown is in the following table. The figures in the table represented best estimates at the time the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98" was prepared. The figures in the FSBR are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

PFI Capital expenditure

PFI Capital expenditure	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	Total
Signed contracts	1.4	1.4	1.4	4.2
British Museum Object Store	13.0	11.0		24.0
British Museum Great Court			1.0	1.0
Science Museum Wellcome Wing			1.0	1.0
Tate Bankside Roof Observatory			4.0	4.0
Tate Millbank Queen Alexander site			15.0	15.0
Tate Millbank electric sub-station		0.3		0.3
Natural History Museum combined heat and power		1.0	2.0	3.0
British Library bibliographic cataloguing	4.0			4.0
British Library Boston Spa building	9.0	4.0		13.0
British Library Colindale building	10.0	5.0		15.0
British Library catering and conference	1.5			1.5
British Library digitisation		35.0	40.0	75.0
Sports Council IT		2.0		2.0
English Heritage—Stonehenge				
English Heritage—GIS		1.0	1.0	2.0
Total	38.9	60.7	65.4	165

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many law members of industrial tribunals were surveyed in the recent review of members' expenses and how many replied; what was the proportion of employee to employer members taking part; how many responses were received from each region; if he will place details of the survey in the Library; and what action he plans to take as a result of the survey. [20049]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Prior to the recent notification to lay members of industrial tribunals of changes to the arrangements for payment of their fees and expenses, an analysis of claims was undertaken. The analysis was based on a random sample of 400 claims made by members from across Great Britain. The sample did not separately identify claims made by employer and employee nominees. I will arrange for a summary of the results to be placed in the Library of the House.

Small Firms Loans Guarantee Scheme

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to improve the Government publicity relating to the small firms loan guarantee scheme. [19758]

Mr. Page: There are no plans to change the way in which the scheme is publicised.

Information on the scheme is widely available. Details appear in relevant DTI publications and there is a separate scheme booklet. This is widely distributed to lenders and business intermediaries throughout the United Kingdom and is freely available directly from the DTI. Currently, around 5,000 copies a month are requested.

The main focus for promoting the scheme lies with lenders and intermediaries. The scheme is appropriate only when a lender considers the business proposal for a loan to be viable, and would be prepared to lend, but for the lack of collateral to use as security against a conventional loan or overdraft.

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to make the booklet relating to the small firms loans guarantee scheme more comprehensive. [19759]

Mr. Page: The booklet will be updated later this year to reflect recent changes.

Roslin Institute

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library copies of the agreements between the Roslin Institute and other bodies since the inception of the Roslin Institute. [18967]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Roslin Institute enters into a very wide range of contracts and other agreements in the course of its business. All the contracts relating to commercial activities, including the exploitation of research, are classified as commercial in confidence.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Overseas Police Officers (Scholarships)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries whose police officers received scholarship awards in Britain in 1991. [19916]

Dr. Liam Fox: In 1991, the FCO diplomatic wing and the ODA did not keep centrally a record of police officers who received scholarship awards. It would involve a disproportionate cost to collate this information now for all such projects.

Namibia

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date the human rights performance of Namibia was last graded for internal purposes by his Department. [19913]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have no formal grading system. But with Namibia, as with other countries, we take human rights performance into account when monitoring political developments.

Sudan

Mr. Corbyn: Asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the total bilateral aid contribution to multilateral aid programmes in the Sudan for each of the last five years. [19600]

Dr. Liam Fox: Since 1992, the UK has channelled £13.5 million of bilateral emergency assistance for Sudan through multilateral agencies. The breakdown of disbursements together with information on disbursements through international non-governmental organisations is as follows:

	Multilateral agencies	*NGOs*	*Total*
1992	1.6	8.0	9.6
1993	5.0	6.3	11.3
1994	3.9	10.2	14.1
1995	2.2	5.0	7.2
1996	0.8	5.2	6.0
Total	13.5	34.7	48.2

ENVIRONMENT

Radioactive Waste (Vitrification)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evaluation *(a)* his Department and *(b)* consultants to his Department have made of the assessment by the US Department of Energy's glass advisory panel of the safety of using vitrified glass to encapsulate high-activity radioactive waste; and if he will make a statement on the current operational status of vitrification plants for nuclear waste immobilisation in the United Kingdom. [19912]

Mr. Gummer: Neither my Department nor consultants used by my Department are aware of an assessment by the US Department of Energy's glass advisory panel of

the safety of using vitrified glass to encapsulate high-level radioactive waste. The status of vitrification plants are matters for the operators subject to meeting regulatory requirements. But I understand that the one vitrification plant in the UK is operated using two processing lines at the BNFL, Sellafield site in Cumbria. This plant was commissioned in February 1991 and has a consent to operate in full compliance with all UK regulations. BNFL is building a third operating line at Sellafield which is expected to be commissioned in the year 2000.

Electricity Turbines (Fisheries)

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that the installation of turbines by electricity generating companies does not cause damage to migratory fisheries on *(a)* the River Leven and *(b)* other rivers in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [19676]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Section 14 of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975—amended by schedule 15 the Environment Act 1995—requires the owner or occupier of any mill, defined as including any erection for the purpose of developing water power which diverts water from any watercourse frequented by salmon or migratory trout, to place and maintain, at his own cost, a screen to prevent access to the intake by those fish. Such a screen is required to be so located and constructed that, so far as reasonably practicable, those fish are not injured or damaged by it. This obligation applies only where the intake channel was constructed after 18 July 1923.

There are two abstractions on the River Leven for hydro-power generation. Both intakes were constructed before 1923 and so are not covered by the screen obligation. Neither currently has screens in place, but the Environment Agency is well aware of the issue and is seeking agreement with the abstractor for the installation of suitable screens.

Local Authority Delegations

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authority delegations which met him or his Department's Ministers, and the hon. Member who accompanied each such delegation, and the subjects discussed between 1 November 1996 and 28 February 1997. [19717]

Sir Paul Beresford: A total of 79 authorities, as listed, sent delegations to Ministers in the Department of the Environment during the consultation period on the proposed local government finance settlement for England for 1997–98. The composition of each delegation was entirely a matter for individual local authorities, which were free to invite hon. Members to accompany them as they saw fit. A range of local government finance issues was discussed at each meeting.

1. County Councils (21 meetings)

Bedfordshire
Derbyshire
Devon
Dorset
Durham
Gloucestershire
Hampshire
Hereford and Worcester
Kent
Lancashire
Lincolnshire
Norfolk
Northamptonshire
Northumberland
Nottinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Shropshire
Somerset
Staffordshire
Suffolk
Warwickshire.

2. Shire Districts (26 meetings)

Blaby (Leicestershire)
Castle Point (Essex)
Castle Morpeth (Northumberland)
Copeland (Cumbria)
Darlington (Durham)
Derby (Derbyshire)
East Hampshire
Harlow (Essex)
Hertsmere (Hertfordshire)
Leicester (Leicestershire)
Luton (Bedfordshire)
Milton Keynes (Buckinghamshire)
Northampton (Northamptonshire)
Nottingham City (Nottinghamshire)
Plymouth City (Devon)
Poole (Dorset)
Purbeck (Dorset)
Rutland (Leicestershire)
Salisbury (Wiltshire)
Stoke on Trent (Staffordshire)
Warrington (Cheshire)
Waverley (Surrey)
West Lindsey (Lincolnshire)
West Somerset
Woking (Surrey)
York City (North Yorkshire).

3. Metropolitan Districts (12 meetings)

Barnsley (South Yorkshire)
Bradford (West Yorkshire)
Birmingham (West Midlands)
Coventry (West Midlands)
Doncaster (South Yorkshire)
Manchester (Greater Manchester)
Newcastle upon Tyne
Rotherham (South Yorkshire)
Sheffield (South Yorkshire)
South Yorks districts
Stockport (Greater Manchester)
Wolverhampton (West Midlands).

4. London Boroughs (10 meetings)

Brent
Greenwich

Hammersmith and Fulham
Harrow
Havering
Hillingdon
Kingston upon Thames
Merton
Redbridge
Richmond upon Thames.

5. Unitary Authorities (7 meetings)
Bristol City
Ex Cleveland Unitaries
Isle of Wight
Middlesbrough
Redcar and Cleveland
South Gloucester
Stockton on Tees.

6. Police Authorities (1 meeting)
Greater Manchester.

7. Fire Authorities (2 meetings)
Humberside Fire
Tyne and Wear FCDA.

British Waterways

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what part regeneration plays in British Waterways' management and operation of the canal network. [20606]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Waterways provide an important catalyst for urban and rural regeneration. One of British Waterways' aims is to promote and accommodate conservation and regeneration. In doing so it works with a range of partners in the private, public and voluntary sectors.

An excellent example of the role of canals in regeneration is the Birmingham waterfront where over £300 million of private sector finance has been attracted to developments alongside British Waterways' canals. Another success story is the joint investment of £7 million by British Waterways and Gloucester city council in Gloucester docks which has attracted over £30 million in private finance. The shift in the city's focus to the docks has seen the numbers employed rise from 100 to 2,000 and tourism visits rise from a few thousand to over 1 million. In Scotland the millennium link, aided by £32 million from the Millennium Commission, will create 4,200 permanent jobs and attract £400 million of private investment along the 70-mile waterway corridor.

Blight

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the report of the interdepartmental working group on blight. [20607]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The interdepartmental working group on blight was established to review the scope, cause and effects of blight arising during the various stages of major infrastructure projects and to consider whether any practical changes could be made to existing arrangements for property purchase and compensation. The group published a discussion paper last June and a progress report, which set out the various proposals that had been put to group, was published last November. Since then the group has been evaluating these ideas and assessing the costs and benefits of various options. That work has yet to be completed. I anticipate that the group will now complete its work in about the middle of this year.

In addition to a consideration of possible changes to the purchase and compensation arrangements, the group is looking at steps that might be taken to reduce the blighting effects of projects by, for example, speeding up decision processes and reducing uncertainty. On 14 January I announced consultations on proposals to speed up both the development plans and planning appeals processes, all of which has the potential to reduce blight. However, the group has drawn attention to two ideas which might be pursued ahead of its final report. I therefore propose to begin consultation on ways of reducing the blighting effects of infrastructure projects which are shown on statutory development plans, but which have subsequently been abandoned, and on developing a code of good practice on the timely dissemination of information about projects by major infrastructure developers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is considering similar proposals.

Listed Buildings (Green Belt)

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of the listed buildings in the green belt. [20608]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: National policy for green belts is set out in our planning policy guidance note 2 and for listed buildings in planning policy guidance note 15. PPG2 confirms the importance which the Government attach to green belts, and maintains the general presumption against "inappropriate" development within them—as detailed in PPG2. Very special circumstances are needed to outweigh this presumption. The Government also attach a high priority to protecting the historic environment and to ensuring that the special architectural or historic interest of listed buildings is fully recognised. PPG15 makes clear that, in general, the best way of ensuring the upkeep of historic buildings is to keep them in active use; and PPG2 advises that suitable reuse of a building is to be preferred to redevelopment where it is of architectural or historic interest.

Where a change of use, extension or alteration to a listed building in the green belt would be essential for, or contribute significantly to, ensuring a viable future for the building or for maintaining it in good order, this could constitute or contribute to the "very special circumstances" which can justify inappropriate development in the green belt. Proposals would have to be of a high standard of design to complement or enhance their surroundings; and any proposals would need listed building consent as well as planning permission.

Local Authority Services

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the research on "CCT and Local Authority Blue-Collar Services" by Austin Mayhead and Co. [20672]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department will publish today research on "CCT and Local Authority Blue-Collar Services" by Austin Mayhead and Co. It followed up an earlier piece of research into blue-collar compulsory competitive tendering carried out by the institute of local government studies at the university of Birmingham.

This research confirms the progress that has been made in achieving greater efficiency and value for money in the delivery of local authority services through fair competition between in-house teams and private contractors. Average annual savings from blue-collar CCT in the second round are running at 9 per cent. compared with 6.5 per cent. in the first round. Most authorities recognise that the quality of CCT services has improved since the first round. Three quarters said that CCT had resulted in clearer and more comprehensive service specifications and two thirds thought it had resulted in a closer reflection of consumer needs.

Only a minority—11 per cent.—of authorities, however, are supportive of the compulsory element of the CCT regime and almost a third said they would not undertake competitive tendering of services should compulsion be removed.

The report looks at the experiences of authorities during the second round of tendering for blue-collar services and analyses data on costs, number of bids, changes in specifications and other factual information about contracts.

I will place in the Library today copies of the executive summary of a copy of the full report entitled "CCT and Local Authority Blue-Collar Services".

PRIME MINISTER

Pay Review Bodies

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister what is the current membership of the public sector pay review bodies. [20512]

The Prime Minister: The current membership, with effect from 1 April 1997, is as listed:

Senior salaries review body

Sir Michael Perry CBE (Chairman)
Sir Gordon Hourston
Sir Anthony Wilson
Sir Sydney Lipworth QC
Mrs. Rosemary Day
Ms Patricia Mann
Mr. Mark Sheldon
The Hon. Michael Beloff QC
Professor Sandra Dawson
Mr. David Clayman.

Armed forces pay review body

Sir Gordon Hourston (Chairman)
Mr. Michael Bolton
Mrs. Dorothy Venables
Mr. John Cox OBE
Mr. John Crosby
Vice Admiral Sir Toby Frere KCB (from July 1997)
Sir Gavin Laird CBE
Mrs. Kay Coleman.

Review body on nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and professions allied to medicine

Mr. Bryan Rigby (Chairman)
Miss Anne Mackie OBE
Professor Gillian Raab
Ms Ruth Lea
Mrs. Shelia Gleig
Mrs. Anne Dean
Mr. Lawrence Lyndon Haddon
Mr. Keith Miles.

Review body on doctors and dentists remuneration

Mr. Brandon Gough (Chairman)
Mrs. Carol Hui
Dr. Elizabeth Nelson
Mr. David Penton
Mr. Michael Innes
Mr. Christopher King CBE
Mrs. Beryl Brewer
Mr. Roderick Jackson.

School teachers review body

Mr. Tony Vineall
Mrs. Brigita Amey
Mr. Michael Harding
Mrs. Julia Cuthbetson
Miss Janet Langdon
Mr. Peter Gelding
Mr. Vincent Harris.

TRANSPORT

Marine Oil Pollution (Contingency Plans)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of the annual cost to local authorities of *(a)* drawing up and *(b)* maintaining their contingency plans for dealing with marine oil pollution; [19299]

(2) what arrangements are in place to check the adequacy and resilience of local authority contingency plans for dealing with marine oil pollution. [19300]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency, Mr. Chris Harris, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 13 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the costs to local authorities of drawing up and maintaining their contingency plans for dealing with marine oil pollution and the adequacy and resilience of these plans.

The forthcoming review of the National Contingency Plan will include an exercise to identify the costs to local authorities of preparing and maintaining contingency plans.

The National Contingency Plan, maintained by the Agency's Marine Pollution Control Unit (MPCU) states that "each coastal local authority at district, island, county or regional level, should have a contingency plan so that an effective counter-pollution response may be effected speedily at any time." A copy of the August 1996 version is now in the House of Commons Library.

Annex 11 of the National Contingency Plan contains a list of items which should be included in local authority plans. MPCU encourages local authorities to submit their plans for the Unit to

check that they are consistent with the National Plan. The Unit notifies them of any omissions and may make suggestions for amendments and improvements. MPCU also holds four one week residential training courses for local authority staff, covering all aspects of contingency planning. It encourages local authorities to exercise their plans and carry out training using equipment from MPCU's stockpiles. From time to time MPCU takes part in local authority exercises and incorporates local authorities into MPCU's exercises.

M45 (Litter)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, *Official Report*, column *609*, if he will instruct the Highways Agency to publish figures relating to the regularity of litter collection on the M45. [19562]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 13 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the regularity of litter collection on the M45.

The funding available for motorway and trunk road routine maintenance this year has been extremely tight. In these circumstances we have taken the view that our prime concern must be to maintain the safety of the motorway and trunk road network. Consequently, those activities directly related to road safety have first call on our funds.

This means that the normal programme of routine maintenance works carried out by our agent authorities, in accordance with our Code of Practice, has had to be curtailed. We have not been able to carry out activities beyond those necessary for achieving safety. Litter picking on the hard shoulder of the M45 is carried out every four weeks, and additionally if the need arises. Verge scavenging on the M45 has not been carried out since March 1996.

M25 (Works)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how the Highways Agency will identify those projects that will be delayed or deleted as a consequence of the additional expenditure it will have to meet consequent upon the relaying of the capping and asphalt surfacing replacement between junctions 6 and 8. [19572]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 13 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking which projects will be delayed or deleted as a consequence of the additional expenditure on relaying the capping layer and renewing the asphalt surfacing between junctions 6 and 8 on the M25.

It will be some time yet before we know accurately what the additional costs will be. They will be the subject of negotiations with the contractor and not all of them will fall to the Agency.

It is therefore not possible to give a precise answer to the question but whatever the cost, we must manage our programme within our budget. That said, there are no proposals for deleting schemes as a consequence. The most likely outcome is an adjustment to the timing on delivering projects as part of our normal management of projects to budget. But given that any additional costs are minor in relation to our overall budget, any delays will be small.

Traffic Congestion

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those stretches of road, including bridges, classified as orange and red for congestion in 1995 for each region which have residual life of *(a)* nought years and *(b)* nought to four years; and if he will specify the maintenance planned for those stretches of road. [20136]

Mr. Watts: The residual life of the road network is held on a database comprising some 20,000 discrete sections designed to permit efficient computer analysis. The sections of the network covering the congestion maps and the residual life bands specified in the question are likely to number some 2,000 reference sections which could be identified and interpreted to provide a meaningful answer only at disproportionate cost.

The Highways Agency's plans for future maintenance of the trunk road network have not yet been finalised.

Coastguard Service

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) he will assess the impact of safety of the reduction in sector posts by the Coastguard agency; and if he will make a statement; [19022]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effects of the increasing role of volunteers in supporting the Coastguard agency. [19021]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Ms Joan Walley, dated 13 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the reduction in sector posts and the role of volunteers in supporting the Coastguard Agency.

The recent review of uniformed coastguard officers has introduced a new higher grade sector manager level with enhanced responsibilities, skills and abilities. This will enable the number of administrative sectors to be reduced from 90 to 64. These changes are administrative and will not affect HM Coastguard's coastal response nor increase reliance upon volunteers.

Although volunteers play a vital part in the service we provide, the Agency is not increasing their role or number. In fact the opposite is true; nearly 200 Coastguard Watch Assistants have been recruited to replace the part-time auxiliary volunteers in operations rooms and in regional and district offices.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Commission Committees

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library *(a)* the titles and short description of the functions of each regulatory, advisory or other committee of the Commission of the European Communities, *(b)* the names and details of each member and *(c)* their method of appointments and the designation of their responsible officers; and if they publish an annual report. [19435]

Mr. David Davis: A list of Commission committees is in section III of volume 4 of the 1997 draft general budget of the European Communities which is available in the Libraries of the House. The other details requested are not held centrally and could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress with the European IGC. [18312]

Mr. David Davis: The intergovernmental conference is progressing well. All member states are working towards a conclusion to the intergovernmental conference at the Amsterdam European Council.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when her Department established its Internet site; what representations she has received and what data she has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps she is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19142]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department's Internet site was established with the merger of the former Education and Employment Departments in the summer of 1995, both of which had their own sites for a short time prior to this.

No significant representations have been received about the site, except for a few constructive comment received from users. Statistics show that the site is accessed, on average, 35,000 times a week.

The Department's policy is to extend its site, wherever possible, to provide information about its policy areas.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19393]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department and its executive agencies publish four charters and one customer standard document. The costs of publishing these documents and the number of copies issued are as follows:

	Publishing and circulating (£ millions)	*Number of copies issued (millions)*
The parent's charter	3.073	20
The jobseeker's charter	0.02	0.055
The higher education and further education charters	0.77	2.87 2.42
The overseas labour service statement of service standard	0.002	0.02

The involvement of civil servants in drafting and preparing text is part of their normal responsibilities and cannot be quantified separately.

It would compromise the Department's confidential tendering procedures to disclose separately the payments made for the circulation of charters.

The figures shown cover the costs of publishing and circulating the latest version of the jobseeker's charter. The information on costs for previous versions could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The higher education and further education charters were produced jointly. It is not possible to disaggregate costs. Although the main publishing and circulation costs are shown, there is some additional on-going expenditure which is not possible to itemise separately.

Nursery Vouchers (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many nursery vouchers have been taken up in the London borough of Wandsworth. [19490]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows the numbers of nursery education vouchers issued to parents and redeemed, in whole or in part, for each term during phase 1 of the voucher scheme in Wandsworth.

	Summer 1996	*Autumn 1996*	*Spring 1997–to date*
Vouchers issued	3,123	3,147	3,026
Vouchers redeemed in whole or part	2,798	2,760	2,437

Deaf and Visually Impaired Children (Teachers)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) which teachers of deaf children are required to hold a qualification for teaching the deaf; [19895]

(2) what specialist qualifications for teaching the deaf are required of a teacher of hearing-impaired children in a special unit where that child is registered in a mainstream class. [19897]

Mrs. Gillan: Teachers of classes of hearing impaired children, including teachers of children registered in a mainstream class but taught in a special unit, are required to gain a qualification recognised by the Secretary of State, within three years of appointment.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate her Department has made of *(a)* the number of schools and *(b)* the number of special classes, in England and Wales, which require teachers with a qualification for teaching the deaf. [19896]

Mrs. Gillan: In January 1995 there were 28 maintained and 13 non-maintained special schools for children with hearing impairments—source: table 10 of "Statistical Bulletin", 9/96. The Department does not collect statistics on special classes for hearing impaired children. Teachers of such a class, whether in a special school or a mainstream school, must gain an approved qualification.

Questions relating to schools in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if statements made for *(a)* deaf and *(b)* visually impaired children below statutory school age, require prior consultation with an appropriately qualified teacher under the Education Act 1981; and if she will make a statement. [19894]

Mrs. Gillan: The Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations 1994 require local education authorities making a statutory assessment of a child with hearing and/or visual impairment to seek advice from a teacher with a relevant qualification. The Government have no plans to change this requirement.

Private Finance Initiative (Bolton)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what decision has been reached concerning funding by the private finance initiative for the Caste Hill site in Bolton; and if she will make a statement. [19015]

Mr. Robin Squire: Bolton local education authority is assessing the feasibility of using the private finance initiative to take forward a project to build a replacement primary school and community facilities on the Castle Hill site. It is for the authority to decide whether the PFI offers the best value for money for the project.

I am encouraged by the amount of interest that has been shown by local education authorities in the PFI to date. There are currently 15 pathfinder projects across the schools sector, including LEA, grant-maintained and voluntary-aided schools. There is a wide range of projects: examples include replacement secondary and primary schools and grouped projects for catering, information technology equipment and energy management facilities.

Enborne Lodge School

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answers of 4 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns *557–58*, if the proceeds of the sale of Enborne Lodge school will be divided according to the provisions in force at the time of the decision to sell or those in force at the time of the sale itself. [19952]

Mrs. Gillan: A final decision on the interpretation of legislation would be a matter for the courts. Subject to that, however, my right hon. Friend considers that the provisions which would apply would be those in force at the time of any sale. Proposals by the Association of London Government which would affect the arrangements for sharing the proceeds from disposal of certain former Inner London education authority property are at present under consideration.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the outcome of the consultation on her proposals to accept the School Teachers Review Body's recommendations for a 3.3 per cent. increase for teachers. [20614]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am today confirming that I am accepting the School Teachers Review Body's recommendation to increase teachers' pay by 3.3 per cent. This award will be staged so that teachers will receive 2 per cent. on 1 April 1997 and the remainder on 1 December 1997. I will lay an order before Parliament which will give the values of the new spine points, scale and allowances with effect from 1 April 1997 and 1 December 1997.

I am writing to the teacher associations, the National Employers Organisation for School Teachers and the head teachers and chairmen of governors of all schools in England and Wales notifying them of my decision. Officials will be writing to other interested parties.

I am announcing my confirmation of the pay award immediately because I want teachers to receive the first stage of their pay increase as soon as possible after 1 April 1997.

I have received a number of representations about the level of the award and the staging of it and considered them carefully. The Government have decided to stage the pay awards for all the review body groups this year. Staging will make it possible to accommodate the costs within spending plans without prejudicing the planned level of service delivery. In addition, staging reflects the Government's view that settlements should be lower this year both generally throughout the public sector and specifically for the pay review body groups. I believe that phasing the increase will make it more manageable for local education authorities and schools.

I have also decided to confirm my other proposals listed, which will come into force from 1 September 1997 by means of revisions to the "School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document":

(i) the STPCD should be amended to make it clear that sick leave should count as a period of service for the purpose of the award of experience points, but that the award of such points for absences from duty other than for holiday periods and maternity leave should be discretionary;

(ii) within one month of the commencement of a period of absence of a head or a deputy the governing body should be required to consider whether payment of an acting allowance would be appropriate to an individual who is called upon to act as the head or deputy;

(iii) the level of an acting allowance should ensure that the individual receives remuneration equivalent to an appropriate point on the pay spine for heads and deputies, not less than the minimum of the normal range for the school group but not necessarily the same as for a substantive postholder whose salary may reflect factors particular to the individual;

(iv) individuals acting as heads or deputies and in receipt of an acting allowance should be regarded during that time as having the conditions of employment of the post for which they are temporarily being paid;

(v) where teachers in charge of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are paid as heads they should be subject to the conditions of employment of heads; and

(vi) where other centrally-based teachers are paid as heads or deputies their conditions of employment should be agreed on a separate contractual basis.

I also confirm the following proposals which are not statutory recommendations because they will not in themselves require changes to be made to the STPCD 1996:

(i) that appropriate guidance should be included in the DfEE Circular on the application and management of the obligation of teachers to provide cover for absent colleagues, and the importance of effective management and monitoring of teacher absence;

(ii) guidance should be provided in the DfEE's pay Circular which makes it clear that an acting allowance should be paid from, or backdated to, the time that the individual is called upon to perform functions that require the full authority of the post to be exercised, for example formulating aims and policies or appointing staff;

(iii) the Circular which accompanies the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document should include guidance based on the presumption that teachers in charge of PRUs should be paid as headteachers unless local circumstances make clear this is inappropriate, for example where the PRU is particularly small or part of an organisational structure which makes it different from other PRUs.

Finally, on the STRB's recommendation that teacher governors should not be members of committees which determine the individual levels of pay of heads and deputies at their own school, I decided not to take a decision until after consultation. The arguments are balanced; I have now decided that the question will be considered further in the context of the review of the school government regulations. This will leave the matter as one for local discretion for the time being.

Learning Credits

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has for the implementation of learning credits; and if she will make a statement. [20615]

Mr. Paice: The White Paper "Learning to Compete", Cm 3486, published in December 1996 set out the Government's intention to introduce, progressively from September 1997, a new learning credits entitlement for all young people aged 14 to 21 to career planning and learning opportunities up to level 3. This will clarify and make more coherent young people's entitlement to post-16 learning and career planning, and increase still further their participation, motivation and attainment. Learning credits will be issued nationally from Easter 1998 to all 16-year-olds completing compulsory education.

The consultation document "A Passport to Learning" published alongside the White Paper sought views on how learning credits should be implemented and their scope for further development.

The Government's proposals have been warmly welcomed by respondents across the education and training worlds.

The new learning credits entitlement includes:

an improved entitlement to two weeks' work experience pre-16;

enhanced careers education and guidance from 14;

a new national record of achievement from 14;

access by age 21 to learning opportunities leading, where appropriate, to level 3 qualifications; and

continuing independent advice from the careers service post-16.

The effective delivery of this entitlement will require the active partnership of careers services, training and enterprise councils, the Further Education Funding Council, local education authorities, schools, colleges and training providers.

In taking forward learning credits through local partnerships, the Government believe that careers services should have the central role in delivering the learning credits entitlement. From September 1997 they will be responsible for a range of tasks including:

issuing learning credits to those entering year 11;

preparing young people in years 9 and 10, through group sessions, for learning credits;

informing parents and schools about learning credits; and

providing extra help to those young people requiring further advice on how to use the learning credit.

I am allocating £5.5 million to careers services for 1997–98 to enable them to fulfil these roles.

The Government have decided that, initially, the learning credit will be in the form of a simple card which will be made available to all young people completing their compulsory education from Easter 1998. The experience of training and enterprise councils in delivering youth credits has shown that such cards can be a very effective mechanism for focusing young people on the range of options open to them.

Learning credits will be made available to all young people. They will build on the best of youth credits arrangements. We intend to consider the potential for developing the card further to form the basis of systems for tracking more effectively how young people progress in post-16 learning. This should lead to improvements in planning, and contribute to evaluation of the effectiveness of learning provision and of the guidance process.

The year 1997–98—the first year of learning credits—will be a transitional year. Careers education and guidance will be targeted, so that young people in their final year of compulsory education are advised how to use their credit effectively. In future years young people will receive this advice and guidance within a structured and coherent careers education, guidance and information package spanning years 10 and 11.

Youth credits will be relevant to the transitional arrangements. Training and enterprise councils will be able, for 1997–98, either to adopt the national learning credits format from the outset or to continue with their current youth credit arrangements for the work-based route.

More detailed guidance covering the implementation of learning credits will be made available to the key partners shortly.

"A Passport to Learning" generated a great deal of interest in the potential for links to be developed between learning credits and the national record of achievement and lifetime learning. The Government will continue to reflect on these ideas.

WALES

Local Government Finance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the expected levels of council tax in 1997–98. [19213]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Local authorities in Wales are required to notify my Department of the level of council tax set for 1997–98 by 17 March 1997. The available provisional information is given in the following table. I shall write to the hon. Member when final figures are available and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Average band D Council taxes—1997–98

Unitary authority	*Average band D payable*[1] £
Blaenau Gwent	—
Bridgend	539
Caerphilly	—

Average band D Council taxes—1997–98

Unitary authority	*Average band D payable*[1] £
Cardiff	486
Ceredigion	562
Conwy	403
Denbighshire	—
Flintshire	511
Gwynedd	515
Isle of Anglesey	424
Merthyr Tydfil	569
Monmouthshire	403
Neath Port Talbot	619
Newport	413
Pembrokeshire	451
Powys	—
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	—
Swansea	478
Torfaen	483
The Vale of Glamorgan	—
Wrexham	—

[1] After damping, including amounts for police, community councils, discretionary non-domestic rate relief.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on local authority capital expenditure plans for the year 1997–98. [19508]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's statement on 12 December 1996 on public expenditure in Wales for 1997–98, *Official Report*, columns 405–19.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to increase the percentage of capital sales receipts available to local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [19503]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government currently have no plans to increase the percentage of usable capital receipts from the sale of local authority assets. Authorities have to set aside a proportion of receipts from the sale of capital assets for debt redemption. If they were allowed to spend their set-aside resources, either other areas of spending would need to be reduced to ensure that debts were paid off or public spending as a whole would rise.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received relating to changes to the formulae for the standard spending assessments; and if he will make a statement. [19505]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The distribution formula for 1997–98 was ratified by the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance. A joint Welsh Office-Welsh Local Government Association review of the formula is under way for 1998–99. Recommendations for change will be considered by the consultative council in the autumn.

Youth Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on current levels of youth unemployment in *(a)* the previous county of Clwyd and *(b)* the county of Flintshire. [19512]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In January 1997 there were 3,482 persons aged under 25 on the claimant unemployment count in the former county of Clwyd. The corresponding figure for Flintshire was 985.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 10 March, *Official Report*, column *38*, to the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) on NHS trusts mergers, what estimate he has made of *(a)* the transitional costs of achieving the trust merger, *(b)* recurring administrative savings and *(c)* the time which it will take to reach the recurring administrative costs. [20084]

Mr. Hague: It is estimated by the trusts that the merger will result in recurring savings of up to £1 million starting in 1998–99. The level of transitional costs will depend upon the trust board's decisions on management arrangements in the new organisation.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 10 March, *Official Report*, column *38*, to the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West on NHS trust mergers, when he expects to appoint the *(a)* chairman and *(b)* board members of the newly merged trust. [20083]

Mr. Hague: Interim arrangements will be announced shortly which will enable the appointments to be made in line with the code of practice for public appointments issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 10 March, *Official Report*, column *38*, to the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West on NHS trust mergers, what estimate he has made of the job losses associated with the merger *(a)* before 1 April 1997 and *(b)* after 1 April 1997; and what estimate he has made of the winding-up costs in connection with the termination of services of board members. [20085]

Mr. Hague: There will be no job losses associated with the merger of the Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS trusts before the new trust becomes operational on 1 April 1997. The detail of any job losses and costs incurred after that date will be a matter for the new trust board.

Nursery Education (Conwy)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many children in Conwy he estimates will register for nursery education by the local education authority in the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [19957]

(2) what estimates he has made of the value of nursery voucher redemption to Conwy county borough council; and if he will make a statement. [20041]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Conwy county borough council has estimated that there will be 1,066 voucher-bearing children in their schools in the 1997 summer term. At this level, total annual voucher income for the authority would be £1,172,600.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what justification Conwy county borough council has submitted to him in respect of increases in *(a)* centrally held school budgets and related services and *(b)* provision for the rationalisation of nursery education; [19958]

(2) if he will make a statement on the costed items Conwy county borough council has included under the heading "Demography" in its education budget. [19959]

Mr. Evans: Statements of the financial provision local authorities plan to make for schools they maintain have to be submitted before the start of the financial year. Information has not yet been received from Conwy county borough council.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning the quality of project management of community hospitals by *(a)* Beard Dove and *(b)* Welsh Health Estates. [20082]

Mr. Hague: None. Welsh Health Estates does not act as project manager.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Llandough NHS trust concerning the termination of the services of Beard Dove as the project management company for the Barry community hospital and its replacement by Welsh Health Estates. [20086]

Mr. Hague: None. This is a matter for the trust. However, Welsh Health Estates is not acting as project manager but is advising the trust.

Suicides and Fatal Accidents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of the population in Wales have *(a)* committed suicide and *(b)* suffered a fatal accident in each of the last seven years; and if he will make a statement. [20036]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest available, complete, annual figures from the Office for National Statistics for residents of Wales are shown in the following table:

	Suicides[1]		*Fatal accidents*[2]	
	Number	*Rate per 100,000*	*Number*	*Rate per 100,000*
1989	264	9.2	719	25.1
1990	303	10.5	711	24.7
1991	337	11.7	717	24.8
1992	335	11.6	698	24.1
1993	297	10.2	673	23.2
1994	331	11.8	690	24.5
1995	317	10.9	708	24.3

[1] International Classification of Diseases: E950–E959, E980–E989 excluding E988.8.
[2] ICD E800–E929.

Local Management of Schools (Conwy)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes Conwy county borough council has notified his Department it has made to its local management of schools scheme; and if he will make a statement. [20042]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Conwy county borough council has not submitted any proposals for changes.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Department of Agriculture (Personnel Documents)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what inquiries he has conducted to establish who was responsible for passing restricted Department of Agriculture personnel documents to the *Irish News*; when the RUC was informed; what action can be taken against those held responsible; and to what extent such action takes account of the Northern Ireland civil service fair employment code. [18750]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The permanent secretary of the NIO and the head of the Northern Ireland civil service has ordered an inquiry into the leakage to the media of documents and other information relating to the identity, records and deployment of civil servants in Northern Ireland. That inquiry will be headed by Mr. William Innes, a former senior Whitehall official with experience of government in Northern Ireland.

If the inquiry indicates that a criminal offence may have been committed, the RUC will be informed.

Only when the inquiry has been completed can a decision be taken on appropriate action. If that action involves a civil servant, it will comply with the civil service pay and conditions of service code.

Sectarian Harassment

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date a claim of sectarian harassment was lodged against the Department of Agriculture and one of the Minister's private office staff; on what date the claimant was transferred out of her private office; and if he will make a statement. [18751]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The complainant raised orally allegations of sectarian harassment on 31 July 1995 and followed this up as requested in writing on 8 August 1995. A formal complaint of sectarian harassment was lodged with the Fair Employment Tribunal against the Department of Agriculture on 4 October 1995.

The complainant was told of her transfer on 28 July 1995, informed orally about her new post on 7 August 1995 and took up her new post on 10 August 1995.

Civil Service Graduates

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for the most recent year for which figures are available *(a)* the percentage and number of school leavers who obtained a degree and *(b)* the percentage and number of posts requiring a degree filled in the Northern Ireland civil service clerical and administrative grades; and if he will ensure that the admission procedure does not discriminate against graduates. [18752]

Sir John Wheeler: It is estimated that 27 per cent. of school children in Northern Ireland—some 6,700—graduate by the age of 25.

In the year 1996–97 a total of 735 clerical and administrative vacancies were filled in the non-industrial Northern Ireland civil service, of which 20, 2.7 per cent., required a degree as a condition of entry. The remaining 715 posts were standard clerical appointments where the nature of work to be performed does not require applicants to possess a graduate level qualification. Recruitment procedures to the NI civil service reflect the service's firm commitment to equality of opportunity in

employment; entry standards for particular posts are set in relation to the nature of the work to be performed and all applicants are considered strictly on the basis of merit.

Northern Ireland Forum

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to allow the Northern Ireland Forum to continue operating during any castle buildings talks adjournment. [18754]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 places me under a duty to make, subject to approval of a draft in each House, an order to withdraw from effect the provisions establishing the Forum if it appears to me that the negotiations have been concluded or suspended.

On 10 March I announced that I had concluded that the talks were suspended, following the decision of the plenary session to adjourn until 3 June, and taking account of all the circumstances. In accordance with my statutory duty I therefore laid before Parliament the draft Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 (Cessation of Section 3) Order 1997.

If the draft order is approved, the Forum will not be able to operate in any form. It will be possible for a new Secretary of State to bring before the next Parliament a further draft order reviving the Forum.

Respite Care

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to improve respite care facilities for special school students and their parents in the North Down and Ards area; and what factors underlay the closure of the South Eastern education and library board's summer schemes. [18755]

Mr. Ancram: There is no statutory requirement for education and library boards to provide summer schemes at special schools and my Department has no approval function to exercise. I understand that, in reaching its decision to discontinue the schemes, the board took into account concerns about the supervision and safety of pupils.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the respite care centre at Beechfield avenue, Conlig, Newtownards, will come into service; and if he will make statement. [18757]

Mr. Moss: A range of services for children with learning disability are currently provided by the centre. An afternoon club offering after school respite will restart shortly. Full use will be made of the facility as soon as an analysis of the findings of a detailed and comprehensive assessment of the needs of families with children with learning disability has been completed.

Training Centres

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the training centres indicating *(a)* their capacity and *(b)* the total number of trainees currently at each. [18759]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 11 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, to reply to your question about the Agency's Training Centres.

The Agency has 10 Training Centres in Northern Ireland. The following chart details the trainee capacity and the number of trainees currently at each Centre.

Centre	*Physical capacity*	*Current in-centre occupancy*
Ballymena	330	194
Craigavon	308	129
Dundonald	408	208
Enniskillen	204	125
Felden	419	152
Lisburn	216	206
Maydown	208	86
Newry	358	155
Omagh	192	122
Springtown	340	122

I hope you find this information useful.

Acute Hospital Reorganisation Project

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to announce his decisions on tranches 2 and 3 of the acute hospital reorganisation project; and if he will make a statement. [18760]

Mr. Moss: The position with regard to tranche 2 is that following receipt of the recommendations from the project steering group additional work had to be undertaken in relation to the recommendation on maternity services. This is now complete and I hope to make an announcement on all aspects of tranche 2 in the near future.

Following consultations on tranche 3, the steering group put recommendations to me on 29 November 1996. I, in turn, consulted relevant bodies, inviting comments by mid-February. I will be considering these shortly and will announce my decisions soon afterwards.

Clifton Special Care School

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the summer schemes for mentally disabled children at Clifton special care school, Bangor; and what assessment he has made of the advantages of parents covering the cost of the schemes. [18756]

Mr. Ancram: There is no statutory requirement for education and library boards to provide summer schemes at special schools and my Department has no approval function to exercise. I understand that, in reaching its decision to discontinue the scheme at Clifton special school, the South Eastern education and library board took into account concerns about the safety and supervision of pupils. Any further proposals from parents should be put to the board for consideration.

Housing Executive Dwellings

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many fires in Housing Executive properties in each of the last three years are estimated to have resulted from a failure to observe building regulations. [18970]

Mr. Moss: I am advised by the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that the answer is none.

Noxious Smell (Newtownards)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what investigations he has conducted into the source of the noxious smell detectable at Manse road, Manse park and Manse green, Newtownards; and what action the Water Service of the Department of Environment (Northern Ireland) proposes to take. [18758]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Water Service under its chief executive, Mr. H. R. F. Plester. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from H. R. F. Plester to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 10 March 1997:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the source of the noxious smell detectable at Manse Road, Manse Park and Manse Green, Newtownards, and what action the Water Service proposes to take.

On 25 February 1997 Water Service officials and officers from the Environmental Health Department, Ards Borough Council, investigated a complaint about a smell at 7 & 12 Manse Green, Newtownards. This investigation established that the smell was not then emanating from the sewers or drainage culverts which serve the Manse Green area. Further checks by Water Service staff on 5 March 1997 revealed no evidence of any smell from the public sewers.

The matter will continue to be investigated, as part of a process of elimination, by the Water Service in conjunction with the Ards Borough Council's Environmental Health Department. This liaison is on the basis that while Water Service considers its infrastructure is not the source of the smell problem this can best be proven definitively by further testing of the sewer system on the next occasion the problem is generally manifested in the area.

Non-NHS Health Care Providers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure on the purchase of health care from non-NHS providers in 1995–96 by *(a)* health boards, *(b)* fundholding GPs and *(c)* NHS trusts in Northern Ireland. [18795]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Table 1 discloses expenditure by health and personal social services on the purchase of health care, personal social and related services from non-HPSS bodies and grants to voluntary organisations is also disclosed.

This information has been extracted from the "Summary of Health and Personal Social Services and Special Agencies Accounts for 1995–96".

Table 2 discloses expenditure by general practitioner fundholders on the purchase of health care and personal social services form non-HPSS providers.

This information has been supplied by the individual health and personal social services boards.

Table 1: Expenditure on non NHS providers in 1995–96

Year	*HPSS Boards Other providers of health care and personal social services* £	*HSS trusts purchase of care from non-HPSS bodies and grants to voluntary organisations* £
1995–96	3,917,680	64,382,000

The information has been extracted from the Notes to the Accounts in the Summary of HPSS and Special Agencies Accounts for 1995–96

Table 2: GP fundholders expenditure on the purchase of healthcare from non-HPSS providers

	Northern board area £	*Southern board area* £	*Eastern board area* £	*Western board area* £	*Northern Ireland area* £
1995–96	105,695	13,740	258,278	65,231	442,944

This information was supplied by the individual Health and Personal Social Services Boards.

Visual Handicap

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are registered *(a)* blind and *(b)* partially sighted. [19084]

Mr. Moss: Information is not collected centrally in the format requested. The numbers of blind and particularly sighted people in Northern Ireland who were in contact with health and social service providers during the year ended 31 March 1996 were 3,634 and 2,514 respectively.

Organic Farming

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of farms in Northern Ireland are currently classified as organic; and if he will make a statement. [19858]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* As at February 1997, there were 11 registered organic units in Northern Ireland. These constitute 0.04 per cent. of total active farms in Northern Ireland.

Schools (North Down)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils there are at each primary and secondary school in North Down; and what is the permanent physical capacity of their buildings for enrolments, indicating any under-use or over-use. [19925]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is set out in the table. The Department's calculation of a school's physical capacity is based solely on teaching spaces in both permanent and temporary accommodation. The

figures given are estimates of the capacity of the school's permanent accommodation for teaching purposes.

School name		Number of pupils at October 1996	Capacity of permanent accommodation
Primary schools			
Ballyholme Primary School	Bangor	721	406
Ballymagee Primary School	Bangor	283	408
Bangor Central Primary School	Bangor	455	337
Bloomfield Road Primary School	Bangor	350	408
Clandeboye Primary School	Bangor	504	544
Conlig Primary School	Conlig	59	72
Crawfordsburn Primary School	Crawfordsburn	134	141
Dundonald Primary School	Dundonald	587	389
Gilnahirk Primary School	Belfast	466	358
Glencraig Primary School	Holywood	197	252
Grange Park Primary School	Bangor	333	203
Groomsport Primary School	Groomsport	49	145
Holywood Primary School	Holywood	536	348
Kilcooley Primary School	Bangor	200	567
Kilmaine Primary School	Bangor	862	494
Rathmore Primary School	Bangor	511	608
Redburn Primary School	Holywood	178	356
St. Comgall's Primary School	Bangor	249	233
St. Malcachy's Primary School	Bangor	342	437
St. Patrick's Primary School	Holywood	224	316
Towerview Primary School	Bangor	361	405
Tullycarnett Primary School	Knock	299	552
Secondary andGrammar schools			
Bangor High School	Bangor	998	681
Bangor Grammar School	Bangor	920	952
Glenlola Collegiate	Bangor	1,014	623
Gransha Boys High School	Bangor	588	764
Holywood High School	Holywood	352	415
Our Lady and St. Patrick's College	Knock	1,233	806
St. Columbanus's High School	Bangor	458	398
Sullivan Upper School	Holywood	1,057	1,044

Secure Training Schools (Girls)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the need for a secure training school for girls; what facilities are currently available for girls requiring escape-proof custody; and if he will make a statement about his capital expenditure priorities in relation to such offenders. [19926]

Sir John Wheeler: There are currently no girls under the age of 17 held at Maghaberry young offenders centre. A review of training school accommodation, including secure accommodation for girls, is being undertaken in light of the proposal for a draft Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order, which was issued for consultation in February this year.

Driving-related Offences

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many custodial sentences were imposed in the last three years for a first offence on 17-years-olds convicted of driving-related offences not involving excess alcohol or car stealing; and if he will make a statement on the use of custodial sentences for those convicted of dangerous driving without fatal consequences. [19927]

Sir John Wheeler: The number of persons aged 17 years given custodial sentences for driving offences not involving excess alcohol or theft of a car, and the number of cases in which it was the first offence of any sort, for the years 1994 to 1996 were:

	Custodial sentences	First offence
1994	37	7
1995	19	6
1996	16	2
Totals	72	15

The use of custodial sentences for persons convicted of dangerous driving without fatal consequences is an issue for the courts to decide after consideration of all aspects of individual cases.

Amnesty International

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from Amnesty International since 1 September 1994 in relation to the Northern Ireland troubles. [19928]

Sir John Wheeler: Amnesty International has written to my office on three occasions during the period. One letter was to inform the Government of a visit by Amnesty International to Northern Ireland to 13 to 18 October 1996, another enclosed the report entitled "UK Summary of Human Rights Concerns" and the third discussed the available information about Bloody Sunday.

Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Bill

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to seek to amend the Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Bill to extend its provisions to Northern Ireland from the time of its coming into force; and if he will make a statement on the merits of the Bill in relation to Northern Ireland. [19930]

Sir John Wheeler: The Bill has been drafted to meet the particular circumstances in England and Wales as identified by responses to the Home Office consultation document "Sentencing and Supervision of Sex Offenders" which was issued in June 1996. The Law Society in England and Wales has undertaken to amend its code of discipline so as to ensure that defence lawyers comply with the provisions in the Bill on supervised access.

The Home Office document was also circulated in Northern Ireland. On the particular issue of the misuse of victim's statements, the Northern Ireland responses did not produce any evidence of a major concern but did indicate a general consensus on the importance of developing solutions which reflected the needs of Northern Ireland.

The Government believe that the matters addressed by the Bill do merit application in Northern Ireland and intends to bring forward legislation after appropriate consultation with interested parties.

New Schools

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons his power to specify a time before which proposals to open new schools could not be reconsidered was not invoked in the current year before resubmissions commenced. [19931]

Mr. Ancram: A power which enables the Department of Education to specify the form, content and timetable for statutory proposals for the establishment of new grant-maintained integrated schools, was included in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. In view of the existence of administrative guidance to the education and library boards and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education about the timetable for the submission and publication of such proposals, it was not considered necessary to invoke this power immediately.

However, in light of the recent submission of development proposals for the establishment of two new GMI schools, outside the recommended timetable, my Department has issued a direction on 6 March 1997 to all education and library boards under article 71 of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 specifying the timetable to be applied to all future proposals.

Military Complaints Procedures

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to lay before Parliament the fourth annual report of the independent assessor of military complaints procedures in Northern Ireland. [20480]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have today arranged for the fourth annual report of the independent assessor of military complaints procedures in Northern Ireland to be laid before each House of Parliament. I note that the assessor has commented that the complaints procedures and their operation are being given proper attention by the Army and that he is not aware of any public misgivings in this area during 1996. The report provides welcome reassurance to the Government and to the public that the Army's complaints procedures withstand scrutiny. The number of formal non-criminal complaints registered in 1996 remains low despite the increase in Army patrolling made necessary as a result of the renewed terrorist campaign.

Street Names

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under that legislative powers councils have the power to rename streets. [19953]

Mr. Moss: Article 11 of the local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 provides the authority for district councils to determine the name by which a street is to be known.

Suicides and Fatal Accidents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of the population in Northern Ireland have *(a)* committed suicide and *(b)* suffered a fatal accident in each of the last seven years; and if he will make a statement. [20035]

Sir John Wheeler: The number of deaths registered as suicides and fatal accidents along with details of the percentage of the population in each of the last seven years are set out in the table.

Year	*Suicides*	*Fatal accidents*	*Injuries undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted*	*Population*	*Suicides as percentage of total population*	*Fatal accidents as percentage total population*	*Undetermined as percentage of total population*
1989	116	453	18	1,582,970	0.007	0.029	0.001
1990	158	460	10	1,589,353	0.010	0.029	0.001
1991	129	495	19	1,601,387	0.008	0.031	0.001
1992	107	377	21	1,618,406	0.007	0.023	0.001
1993	129	393	22	1,631,827	0.008	0.024	0.001
1994	138	433	13	1,641,711	0.008	0.026	0.001
1995	122	392	24	1,648,960	0.007	0.024	0.001

SCOTLAND

Extra-corporeal Membrane Oxygenation

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those hospitals in Scotland which have facilities to provide extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation for children aged *(a)* up to six months and *(b)* six months and over; and how many paediatric intensive care beds there are in each of the units with extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation facilities. [19495]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Royal hospital for sick children in Glasgow has facilities to provide extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation—ECMO—for children aged up to six months and six months and over. The hospital has 12[1] paediatric intensive care beds and can provide ECMO treatment in both its paediatric intensive care and neo-natal surgical intensive care units.

The Royal hospital for sick children in Edinburgh has ECMO facilities which are used only occasionally as support for other treatments.

[1] At March 1996.

Consultants

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total cost of consultants' reports commissioned by his Department since 1 April 1995; and

if he will summarise the identifiable savings achieved as a result of implementing the recommendations of reports. [19515]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The total cost of management consultancy work commissioned by the Scottish Office for the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 was £5,440,000. Information for the current financial year is not yet available.

In 1995–96 some 150 consultancy contracts were led by the Scottish Office. Given the wide range of responsibilities and activities of the Scottish Office, the consultancy projects related to many different areas of business.

The Scottish Office follows the guidance given in the August 1994 report of the Cabinet Office efficiency scrutiny on the use of external consultants. External consultants are engaged only when internal resources are not available, best procurement practices are followed to ensure that value for money is obtained, and all consultancy assignments are subjected to post-contract reviews. Not all consultancy projects lend themselves to analysis in terms of savings, but I am satisfied that the intelligent and selective use of consultants has consistently delivered worthwhile solutions and benefits for the Scottish Office in recent years.

Dental Treatment (Complaints)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the adequacy of provision for considering late complaints about dental treatment in cases where professional opinion verifies that the patient could not reasonably have been expected to realise there were grounds for complaint within the time limits set. [19047]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* No. On 1 April, after Mr. W. J. Duff had ceased to practice, a new system was introduced for the consideration of complaints against family health service practitioners, separately from discipline procedures. Normally complaints have to be made within six months of the event which is the subject of the complaint, or within six months of the patient becoming aware of the problem, provided that this is within 12 months of the event. There is, however, discretion to accept late complaints for investigation. Guidance issued to health boards makes it clear that this should be exercised with flexibility and sensitivity, and there is a procedure for decisions by complaints officers in health boards to be reviewed at the request of the complainer.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for what reasons Moann Russell was awarded *(a)* the maximum amount for remedial treatment and *(b)* no compensation within the non-statutory complaints procedure in respect of NHS treatment. [19632]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* Mrs. Russell's complaint was made on 11 June 1994 and therefore fell to be dealt with under the National Health Service (Service Committees and Tribunal) (Scotland) Regulations in force at the time, as did the determination of any sum payable to her for remedial treatment.

The non-statutory complaints procedure came into force on 1 April 1996 for complaints made on or after that date.

Mr. W. J. Duff

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the dates on which patients raised complaints in each of the cases referred to Greater Glasgow health board by the Scottish dental practice division, in which the national health service tribunal found Mr. W. J. Duff had provided unnecessary treatment. [19048]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* These cases were referred to the tribunal following reports by regional dental officers; no complaints were made by the patients involved.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what general conclusions were reached by regional dental officers from their inspections of Mr. W. J. Duff's patients on 25 August 1986 and subsequently. [19049]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* Regional dental officers undertake independent clinical examinations of individual dental patients and pass their findings of fact to the dental practice division of the Common Services Agency. Any adverse reports are then passed to the Scottish dental practice board which forwards a copy to the relevant health board. The health board then decides what further action to take. It is no part of the function of regional dental officers to draw general conclusions.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients of Mr. W. J. Duff have complained to date that they were not told in advance what treatment was to be carried out by him. [19051]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* One.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will request sight of the reports provided by the director of practitioner services to Greater Glasgow health board on the circumstances surrounding the case of Mr. W. J. Duff; [19052]

(2) if he will publish the paper on Mr. W. J. Duff requested by Greater Glasgow health board at its meeting on 18 February; [19053]

(3) if he will publish the report of the Director of Practitioner Services to Greater Glasgow health board on the circumstances surrounding the case of Mr. W. J. Duff. [19411]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* When the requested material has been prepared, it will be discussed by Greater Glasgow health board at a future meeting, during that part of its proceedings at which members of the public may be present. Once the paper or papers are in the public domain, I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a copy.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure that money received from Mr. W. J. Duff by Greater Glasgow health board is applied directly for the benefit of his former patients. [19054]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* Greater Glasgow health board has not as yet received any money from Mr. Duff. The sums due, or which may become due, from him fall into two categories. The first comprises sums for payment to former patients who are likely to incur additional expenditure in obtaining further treatment required as a result of Mr. Duff's failure to comply with his terms of service. The second comprises sums in the nature of fines for failure to comply with the terms of service. My right hon. Friend has no power to ensure that such sums are applied for the benefit of patients.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a financial contribution to the voluntary support group organised by former patients of Mr. W. J. Duff. [19133]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* No. Funding for NHS general dental services may be used only for the purposes set down in statute which do not include assistance to voluntary support groups.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients were registered with Mr. W. J. Duff in each year since he began practising; and what was the highest number of patients registered with any dentist in Scotland in each of these years. [19263]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* A new contract for the provision of NHS general dental services was introduced in October 1990, including, for the first time, the registration of patients under continuing care or capitation arrangements. The information requested is listed in the table for financial years 1991–92 to 1994–95:

Number of patients registered under NHS continuing care and capitation arrangements with Mr. W. J. Duff and the highest number of patients registered with an NHS principal dentist in Scotland 1991–92 to 1994–95

Dentist	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Mr. W. J. Duff [1]	847	1,603	1,930	1,451
Dentist with highest number of registrations [2]	1,126	2,338	3,726	5,788

[1] Mr. Duff ceased practising NHS general dental services in summer 1994.

[2] A dentist may hold more than one contract within a health board or within Scotland. A dentist may have more than one practice or may have patients registered with him/her who are treated by an assistant or vocational trainee.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors led to the inspections of Mr. W. J. Duff's patients by regional dental officers on 25 August 1986. [19564]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* Each year, regional dental officers undertake clinical examinations on a small number of patients of every dentist in Scotland providing NHS general dental services. The patient sample is chosen at random.

Non-fossil Fuels

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has made a decision on the second order under the Scottish renewables obligation; and if he will make a statement. [20609]

Mr. Kynoch: I have today laid before Parliament an order requiring the two public electricity suppliers—PESs—in Scotland to make arrangements to secure 112 MW of new renewable electricity generating capacity from a range of renewable sources. There has been a good response by bidders to tender invitation for SRO2, and average bid prices have been much lower this time round. This represents a considerable success for our policy of creating an initial market within each of the most promising technologies through strong price competition between projects. This has allowed me to set a larger order than originally envisaged when announcing SRO2 in November 1995.

In order to meet their obligations arising from the order, I understand that Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-Electric expect to sign contracts with 26 project developers. These are expected to be nine waste to energy projects making up 55 MW of capacity seven wind projects totalling 44 MW, nine hydro projects totalling 11 MW and one biomass project of 2 MW.

We are aware of concerns about the possible effects on the environmental and landscape of the development of renewable energy projects and expect developers to give particular care and attention to these sensitive issues. Successful developers will need to obtain planning permission for their projects if they have not already done so; award of a contract as a result of the order does not confer any special advantage in the planning process and approval must be sought in the usual way. I know too that there are concerns about the need to strike the right balance between the visual impact of wind farms and the need to safeguard the scenic value of large parts of the Scottish countryside. For this reason, we have decided that wind projects, while being allocated substantial capacity within the order, should not form a disproportionately large part of it.

As far as waste to energy projects are concerned, I was very pleased that the overall level of bid prices for this technology had fallen as much as it has done since SRO1. In view of the environmental benefits which such projects can deliver, I have decided to increase the size of the allocation for waste to energy projects beyond that originally envisaged, to cover landfill gas, tyre incinerations and municipal waste incineration projects.

We are aware of concerns in some quarters about the potential impact of new hydro schemes on fisheries. I understand that at least one of the hydro projects likely to be awarded a contract as a result of the order will include the installation of a new fish pass to assist salmon to gain easier access to spawning grounds. I have asked my officials to liaise closely with the project developer on the fisheries aspects. All hydro projects do of course require consultation with the local district salmon fisheries board before being granted permission to proceed.

On biomass, although the prices tendered for projects were comparatively high, we took account of the wider benefits to agriculture and the environment of such projects, and the need to enable the technology to

establish a foothold in Scotland. For this reason we decided to allocate a small part of the order to this technology.

By making an order for a total of 112 MW, we are taking a considerable step towards meeting Scotland's share of the Government's overall aim of achieving 1,500 MW of new renewable generating capacity by the year 2000. I will make a further announcement in due course about the next steps that we propose to take under the SRO.

I have made the order after considering the advice of the Director General of Electricity Supply and after consulting the two Scottish PESs.

Galleries (Access)

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on improving access to the collections of the national galleries of Scotland. [20610]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am anxious that the people of Scotland should have the fullest possible opportunity to see and appreciate the country's heritage of art and design in appropriate surroundings. At present only one fifth of the Scottish paintings held by the national galleries of Scotland—NGS—are on permanent public view. It is right that action should to taken to improve the position.

To this end I am inviting the NGS trustees to consider the establishment of a new national loans scheme whereby coherent groups of good quality works of art from the national galleries are made available for exhibition at suitable local museums and galleries and other appropriate locations throughout Scotland. This initiative would also encourage local museums and galleries to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the heritage lottery fund to upgrade their facilities to a standard appropriate to housing works of national importance.

As a further step the board of trustees of the NGS has put to me revised outline proposals to establish a new national gallery of Scottish art and design in Glasgow. These proposals reflect the advice of the national heritage memorial fund that it could not support a project of the scale described in the NGS's original application for lottery funding towards the capital costs of acquiring and fitting out the former Post Office building in George square. The new proposals which take account of that advice are smaller in scale and more focused on the objective of making available to the public good-quality works of Scottish art which are not currently on permanent display.

The trustees are aware that the capital costs of the revised project would need to be met from non-government sources and I would require half the running costs for at least the first four years to be met from private sources. The provision of the balance from public funds would be a matter for consideration in future public expenditure rounds. The project would also have to meet normal requirements of public sector investment appraisal.

On the basis of these assurances about the funding of the capital and running costs of a Glasgow gallery, I am prepared for further detailed work to go ahead on this proposal, in parallel with the development of the new national loans scheme initiative, with the objective of maximising access to the national collections.

Suicides and Fatal Accidents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of the population in Scotland have *(a)* committed suicide and *(b)* suffered a fatal accident in each of the last seven years; and if he will make a statement. [20034]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table:

Deaths in Scotland, 1989–1995—suicides, accidents, etc.

	Suicide[1]		Undetermined[2]		Accidents[3]	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
1989	527	10.34	191	3.75	1,829	35.89
1990	535	10.49	214	4.19	1,784	34.97
1991	525	10.28	181	3.54	1,734	33.95
1992	569	11.13	224	4.38	1,580	30.91
1993	615	12.01	297	5.80	1,469	28.69
1994	624	12.16	210	4.09	1,413	27.53
1995	623	12.13	213	4.15	1,439	28.01

[1] World Health Organisation International Classification of Diseases. 9th Revision. (ICD9) codes E950–E959.
[2] ICD9 codes E980–E989 (Injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted).
[3] ICD9 codes E800–E929.
Rates are per 100,000 population.

TREASURY

School Finance

14. **Dame Angela Rumbold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on the public sector borrowing requirement of allowing schools to borrow money from the banks to pay for capital spending. [18535]

Mr. Waldegrave: Voluntary-aided and grant-maintained school borrowing has no effect on the PSBR as both are classified to the private sector. Any borrowing that local authority schools undertake would count against the local authority control totals and would count in the PSBR.

Economic and Monetary Union

15. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the degree

of resistance to the proposed introduction of a single currency in each of the member states of the European Union. [18536]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: That is a matter for each member state.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what proposals have been assessed by (i) European institutions and (ii) member Governments for a common basis of calculating inflation in each EU member state; and what assessment he has made of the implications of such proposals for *(a)* United Kingdom Government expenditure and *(b)* United Kingdom pensioners' incomes; [17358]

(2) what reports on the determination of price indices in each EU member state have been evaluated by which European institutions in connection with the management of the proposed single currency; and if he will publish those reports. [17357]

Mr. Oppenheim: Protocol 6 to the Maastricht treaty states that the criterion on price stability will be assessed using consumer price indices on a comparable basis. Eurostat has now developed a harmonised index of consumer prices—HICP—for member states, and the first full set of figures was published on 7 March.

Eurostat commissioned a report on the similarities and differences between national consumer price indices. The report, published by Eurostat in 1989, covered the methodology used by each country and set out the need for harmonised indices.

The proposed legislation for the HICPs, in the form of draft regulations, was first discussed at a working level by technical representatives from each member state's national statistical institute at meetings chaired by Eurostat. The European Monetary Institute and the Commission were also present at these discussions as non-voting members and their opinion was sought before any legislation was agreed. The legislation in its final form was voted on by the Statistical Programme Committee using standard EU voting procedures.

The Government have an obligation to uprate pensions and benefits by the RPI.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy to be hostile to the principle of a single European currency; and if he will make a statement. [17500]

Mr. Clarke: The Government believe that it is in Britain's national interest to keep our options open, continue to negotiate and decide at the appropriate time whether or not it would be in Britain's interests to participate in a single currency.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications of the increase in the value of the dollar in the last year for the stability of the proposed single European currency. [18867]

Mr. Clarke: The increase in the value of the dollar in the last year reflected the judgment of the market of the value of that currency vis-a-vis other currencies; last year's increase has no implications in itself for the future stability of the proposed single European currency.

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to update the convergence programme produced by the United Kingdom in April 1996. [20479]

Mr. Clarke: An updated convergence programme was submitted today to the European Commission. Copies of the convergence programme have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Consumer Spending

16. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on recent trends in consumer spending. [18537]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Consumer spending is growing at a healthy rate on the back of levels of consumer confidence not seen for over eight years.

Government Statistics

17. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revisions he proposes of Government statistics as published in the Red Book. [18538]

Mr. Jack: A more detailed analysis of public expenditure will be published on 20 March in departmental reports and in the Treasury document "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses". I expect the next Industry Act forecast to be published in the summer.

Public Debt

18. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of the United Kingdom's public debt. [18539]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's fiscal objective is to bring the public sector borrowing requirement back towards balance over the medium term, and in particular to ensure that when the economy is on trend the public sector borrows no more than is required to finance its net capital spending. The ratio of government debt to gross domestic product is projected to fall over the medium term as the PSBR comes down. The UK's debt burden is already among the very lowest in the European Union. It is also lower than in any year under the last Labour Government. If the UK had continued to borrow at the rate seen under the last Labour Government, the debt burden would be double what it is now.

Income Tax

19. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in respect of his policy on the rates of income tax. [18540]

22. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his policy in respect of income tax. [18543]

Mr. Jack: I receive a steady flow of representations regarding all aspects of the tax system.

24. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on the basic rate of income tax. [18545]

Mr. Jack: It is our policy to reduce the basic rate of income tax to 20 per cent. when it is economically prudent to do so. The last Budget took another major step towards this goal by reducing the basic rate to 24 per cent.—10 per cent. lower than it was in 1978–79.

26. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the changes in the standard rate of income tax since 1967. [18547]

Mr. Jack: This information is published in table 1.5 of the "Tax Benefit Reference Manual 1996–97", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Productivity

20. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase productivity in the United Kingdom. [18541]

Mrs. Angela Knight: There has been a significant improvement in the UK's productivity performance over the last 15 years, compared both with other countries and with the UK's performance in the 1970s. The UK's productivity performance is benefiting from a more stable economic environment, with continued health growth and low inflation, and from the Government's supply side reforms which have contributed to increased labour market flexibility, strengthened competition and market forces, and improved industrial relations. The improvement should continue over the rest of the 1990s as the impact of supply side reform continues to be felt.

Windfall Gains

21. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the economic impact of windfall gains arising from *(a)* the demutualising of building societies and *(b)* takeovers of life assurance companies. [18542]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Experience and recent surveys suggest that most of the payouts will be saved rather than spent. Therefore, I expect them to have a relatively small impact on consumers' expenditure this year.

Mr. Dover: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the legality of a windfall tax on privatised companies; and if he will make a statement. [19424]

Mr. Jack: No such representations have been received.

Exchange Rates

23. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received *(a)* for and *(b)* against fluctuating exchange rates during the past three months. [18544]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have received many representations during the past three months both for and against the recent appreciation of sterling.

Economic Growth

25. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met his EU counterparts to discuss economic growth. [18546]

Mrs. Angela Knight: My right hon. and learned Friend last met his European Union counterparts at the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers on 17 February 1997, where among other issues they discussed the general economic situation in the European Union. My right hon. and learned Friend outlined the continuing success of the UK economy with five years of growth combined with low inflation and falling unemployment.

Education and Unemployment Benefit Expenditure

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated outturn general government expenditure on *(a)* education and *(b)* unemployment benefits for 1995–96. [17438]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The estimated outturn for general government expenditure in 1995–96 on *(a)* education is £35.9 billion and *(b)* unemployment benefit is £1.1 billion.

These are the most recently published figures for these parts of general government expenditure and have been taken from "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1996–97", published in March 1996. Revised figures will be available in PESA 1997–98, which is due to be published shortly.

European Community (Publicity)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the EC spent on public relations and publicity in 1995–96. [18102]

Mr. Oppenheim: Payments from the European Community Budget in 1995 on information and communications amounted to 47,701,477 ecu or £35,373,732[1]. Figures on a UK financial year basis are not available.

[1] Converted at the rate £1 = 1.3485 ecu, the rate holding at 31 January 1997.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a definition of the term "retail premises" as used in VAT legislation and the Finance Bill; and if he will make a statement. [18652]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* The question concerns a proposed amendment to clause 37 of the Finance Bill which will not now be tabled. I refer the hon. Member instead to the amendment laid on 4 March, and to my press statement that day.

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when his Department established its Internet site; what representations he has received and what data he has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19143]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury established its Internet site on 14 November 1994, and was one of the first Government Departments to do so. The site offers a wide range of material which continues to grow. It includes Budget documentation, Treasury press releases, ministerial speeches and the minutes of the Chancellor's

monthly monetary meeting. Use of the site has climbed dramatically since its launch, with about 33,000 accesses in the 1994 Budget week, about 250,000 in the 1995 Budget week and about 400,000 in the 1996 Budget week. Accesses for a typical week currently run at about 15,000. The site was nominated by the public and chosen by a panel of industry experts as a finalist in the 1996 UK web awards—Yell—for best non-commercial site. We are committed to expanding and improving the site further.

London Underground (Finance)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *552*, concerning the scoring of future investment in London Underground Ltd. in respect of the obligations imposed by the treaty on European union, if he will set out the differences between the criteria determining whether public investment contributes to *(a)* the general government deficit and *(b)* the public sector borrowing requirement. [19204]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The capital expenditure of bodies in general government—central and local government—scores in the calculation of the general government financial deficit. The capital expenditure of public corporations does not affect the GGFD, as public corporations are not part of general government. However, if public corporations' capital expenditure is financed by general government capital grants or subsidies, this expenditure will score as general government expenditure and thus increase the GGFD. All borrowing by general government and public corporations scores in the PSBR.

Long-term Care

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice has been given to his Department by the Government Actuary about *(a)* the likely uptake and *(b)* the cost to the Exchequer of introducing private partnership insurance for long-term care; and if he will place in the Library the figures and papers received from the Government Actuary. [19309]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Secretary of State for Health on 10 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *113*. The Treasury received no figures or papers from the Government Actuary.

Labour Statistics

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged *(A)* 50 to 54, *(B)* 55 to 59, *(C)* 60 to 64 and *(D)* 65 to 69 years were (i) in full-time work, (ii) in part-time work, (iii) unemployed, (iv) long-term sick and disabled and (v) retired in each of the last 10 years. [19244]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Harriet Harman, dated 13 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many men and women, by varying age groups, are in full-time work, part-time work, unemployed, long-term sick and disabled and retired in each of the last 10 years.

This information is available from the Labour Force Survey database which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* men and women are employed in (i) Great Britain, (ii) each standard region of England, (iii) Wales (iv) Scotland for each major group of the standard occupational classification. [19585]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 13 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number of men and women in employment broken down by region and occupation in Great Britain.

The information is available from the Labour Force Survey database and can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) of 21 October 1994, *Official Report*, columns *373-74*, on the cost and take-up of private health insurance. [19485]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information is given in the table.

Tax relief on private medical insurance contracts for individuals aged 60 or over

Year	Approximate number of contracts	Approximate number of individuals covered	Cost of tax relief (£ million)
1990–91	350,000	500,000	40
1991–92	350,000	500,000	60
1992–93	350,000	500,000	70
1993–94	375,000	550,000	80
1994–95	375,000	550,000	95
1995–96	400,000	600,000	100
1996–97[1]	400,000	600,000	110

[1] Provisional.

Advance Corporation Tax

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much additional tax would be raised if pension funds were not able to recover advance corporation tax. [19843]

Mr. Jack: Pension funds are unable to recover ACT. However, if they were not entitled to receive payments of tax credits on dividend payments there would be an Exchequer gain, before allowing for any behavioural effects, of nearly £4 billion.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if doctors completing death certificates are required to include in the certificate the fact that the deceased was a victim of MRSA, when this contributed to the cause of death. [19854]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 13 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your recent question asking if doctors completing death certificates are required to include in the certificate the fact that the deceased was a victim of MRSA, when this contributed to the cause of death.

Section 22 of the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 places duties on medical practitioners as follows:

> "in the case of the death of any person who has been attended during his last illness by a registered medical practitioner, that practitioner shall sign a certificate in the prescribed form stating to the best of his knowledge and belief the cause of death and shall forthwith deliver that certificate to the registrar."

This requirement is included in the *Instructions to certifiers*, which are at the front of every book of medical certificates of cause of death (MCCD). The instructions further ask the certifier to give the sequence of conditions or events which led directly to the death in part I of the certificate, and to list any other conditions which contributed to the death, in part II. Beyond this, it is up to the judgement of the attending physician to decide what should be included. No particular disease or event is specifically named as being required to be included on the death certificate, although there are instructions about which causes and circumstances of death require referral to the coroner. Death certification is covered in undergraduate and postgraduate training for doctors. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has recently produced a video (*Death Counts*) and documentation to help in this training.

If the certificate is completed correctly, the condition of the last used line of part I is the underlying cause of death, i.e. that condition or event which initiated the train of events leading directly to death. The underlying cause of death is selected and coded according to the rules of the Ninth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9), and this is the condition used in routine tabulations and statistics. When the ONS is asked for information on deaths owing to a particular condition, the answer is normally based on the underlying cause, because this is the cause most useful for public health and preventative purposes.

Since 1933, all the conditions mentioned on the approximately 580,000 deaths per year registered in England and Wales have been coded and stored in the mortality databases of ONS, where this additional information can be used for special analyses. Deaths due to methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infection are coded to a variety of ICD-9 codes for staph. aureus infection, depending on the body site affected. There is no specific code to denote methicillin resistance of the infecting organism, so this can only be identified by searching the text from the certificate.

Century Date Change (Computers)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the impact of the century date change on his Department's information technology systems. [18698]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury has work in progress to identify and test its computer systems to ensure that they will operate correctly at the turn of the century. It has not proved necessary to commission any additional external research.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of gross domestic product *(a)* was in 1978–79 and *(b)* he estimates will be in 1997–98 accounted for by income tax. [19891]

Mr. Jack: The ratio of income tax receipts to GDP was 11 per cent. in 1978–79. The Budget forecast of the corresponding ratio in 1997–98 is 9 per cent. Over this period, the basic rate of income tax will have fallen from 33 per cent. to 23 per cent.—the lowest headline rate for nearly 60 years.

Investment

Ms Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new measures he is proposing to promote investment levels in the economy. [18523]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Creating a stable economic environment with steady growth, low inflation, and low taxation is overwhelmingly the best way to encourage businesses to expand and invest with confidence.

Privatisation

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the privatisation programme. [18528]

Mr. Jack: The UK privatisation programme has been a great success. We will continue to look for opportunities to return businesses to the private sector and to promote UK privatisation expertise internationally.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest figures for the number of applications for invalidity benefit which have *(a)* been initially refused, *(b)* gone to appeal and *(c)* been granted at appeal; and if he will make a statement. [17812]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table:

	Number of incapacity benefit recipients disallowed benefit	*Number of appeals by incapacity benefit recipients received by Independent Tribunal Service*	*Number of appeals by incapacity benefit recipients cleared at hearing*	*Number of decisions in favour of appellant*
April 1995 to January 1997	185,400	102,600	43,400	19,700

Notes:

1. Incapacity benefit replaced sickness benefit and invalidity benefit from April 1995.

2. Currently around 55 per cent. of incapacity benefit recipients who are disallowed benefit appeal. The benefit is restored in approximately 45 per cent. of cases heard by appeal tribunals.
3. The proportion of successful appeals against refusal of incapacity benefit is lower than the previous appeal success rate under invalidity benefit and similar to the success rate of appeals throughout the social security appeal system.
4. Includes appeals against disallowance of incapacity benefit.
5. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100, provisional and are subject to revision.

Sources:
Benefits Agency and Independent Tribunal Service.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently claiming *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* severe disablement allowance; and how many of these have an increase in benefit in respect of an adult dependant. [18977]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

	Recipients at 31 August 1996	*Recipients of an adult dependency increase at 31 August 1996*
Incapacity benefit	1,780,000	332,000
Severe disablement allowance	355,000	4,000

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the computer system and exclude a small number of cases not held on the system.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average length of time the Benefits Agency currently takes to assess an application for incapacity benefit; and what benefit an applicant is entitled to while awaiting the outcome. [19634]

Mr. Burt: The administration of social security benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 12 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the average length of time the Benefits Agency (BA) currently takes to assess an application for Incapacity Benefit (IB), and whilst an applicant is awaiting the outcome, what benefit he is entitled to.

The Secretary of State has set the BA the following targets for clearing new claims to IB:–

65% to be cleared within 10 days

85% to be cleared within 30 days

The actual performance year to date, from 1 April 1996 to 31 January 1997, is:–

79.3% of new claims to IB are cleared within 10 days

95.7% of new claims to IB are cleared within 30 days

The BA administers more than 20 benefits, all of which can be claimed at any time. Award of benefit is dependent on satisfaction of the conditions of entitlement for the particular benefit at the time of the claim. Without specific details of a persons circumstances it is not possible to determine entitlement to individual benefits.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Care Disregard

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people receiving non-means-tested benefits have offset part-time earnings against a child care disregard since November 1996; and what is his estimate of *(a)* the numbers gaining and *(b)* the annual cost. [18946]

Mr. Burt: There is insufficient information on which to base an estimate.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his estimate of *(a)* the numbers gaining from and *(b)* the cost of extending invalid care allowance for (i) four weeks, (ii) eight weeks and (iii) 13 weeks after the cared-for person has died; [18948]

(2) what is his estimate of *(a)* the numbers who would benefit from and *(b)* the cost of extending invalid care allowance for (i) four weeks, (ii) eight weeks and (iii) 13 weeks after the cared-for person has entered permanent residential care. [18981]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table:

Extending invalid care allowance after death of disabled person

	4 weeks	*8 weeks*	*13 weeks*
Estimated costs	£3 million	£5 million	£10 million
Estimated gainers	30,000	30,000	30,000

Notes:
1. Invalid care allowance may be payable for up to four weeks after a disabled person has entered residential care.
2. The costs and numbers of gainers from extending invalid care allowance for a period thereafter are estimated to be negligible.
3. Costs are net of impact on income related benefits in payment but assumes no change in the income-related benefit rule whereby carer premium can continue for a further eight weeks after invalid care allowance ceases.
4. Estimates of gainers are rounded to the nearest thousand, of costs of the nearest £1 million.

Source:
Invalid Care Allowance Unit records.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people receiving invalid care allowance have offset part-time earnings against care costs since November 1996; and what is his estimate of *(a)* the numbers gaining and *(b)* the annual cost. [18947]

Mr. Burt: There is insufficient information on which to base an estimate.

Jobseeker's Allowance.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claimants of each of the *(a)* contributory and *(b)* income-related jobseeker's allowance are currently (i) single people without children, (ii) couples without children and (iii) couples with children; and what is the average duration of benefit in each case; [18975]

(2) how many people are currently in receipt of *(a)* jobseeker's allowance and *(b)* income support. [18976]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Information on jobseeker's allowance is yet not available. Provisional summary findings from the November 1996 "Quarterly Statistical Enquiry" will be

published on 20 March and more detailed analyses will be published in the summer. The findings will be placed in the Library.

Income support claimants—May 1996

Thousands

	Number of claimants
Unemployed cases	1,495
Other cases	4,054
All cases	5,549

Notes:
1. Provisional jobseeker's allowance findings will include estimates of claimants by type of allowance in payment, age, sex and duration of current claim. The detailed analyses will include information on partners and dependants.
2. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Sample size 5 per cent.

Source:
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry May 1996.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the numbers of people who receive disability living allowance who also have earnings from employment. [18983]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The estimated number of people receiving disability living allowance who also have earnings from employment is around 80,000, and for those in self-employment around 5,000.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what advice he has received from the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on his proposal to abolish good causes backdating of industrial injuries disablement benefit. [18979]

Mr. Roger Evans: A copy of the letter sent by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council to the Social Security Advisory Committee concerning the backdating proposals has been placed in the Library. We intend to publish our response to the Social Security Advisory Committee's report on the proposals shortly.

Parent Plus Scheme

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what fee will be paid to private sector contractors for placing lone parents in work under the parent plus scheme; [19059]

(2) what restrictions will apply to the type of work in which lone parents will be placed by private contractors before receiving their fee under the parent plus scheme; [19106]

(3) what fee private sector contractors will be paid for placing lone mothers in part-time work under the parent plus scheme; [19060]

(4) what period of time a lone parent will have to remain in work before a fee is paid to the contractor for placing them in work under the parent plus scheme. [19061]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The contracting process is still underway. Details of contracts will not be finally agreed until this process is completed. It is expected that contracts will be awarded at the end of March.

Information Technology Services Agency

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish the revised framework document for the Information Technology Services Agency. [20612]

Mr. Heald: I have today arranged for the revised framework document for the Information Technology Services Agency to be placed in the Library. This document covers the period from January 1997 to December 1999.

Benefits Backdating

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to align the rules on the backdating of benefits as provided for by the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987, and to clarify the responsibilities of claimants in providing evidence to support their claims. [20613]

Mr. Roger Evans: I will tomorrow lay before Parliament the Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 2) Regulations 1997. The regulations will align, as far as possible, the rules on the backdating of benefit and will clarify claimants' responsibilities by requiring them to provide basic information to support their claim.

The new rules on backdating will introduce two simple rules for most benefits, allowing up to three months' backdating of late claims, and up to one month's backdating of reviews following a change in a claimant's circumstances. The new rules will apply to most benefits from 7 April 1997, but will not apply to retirement pension until 4 August 1997. Aligning the backdating rules will reduce the complexity of the social security scheme and so increase administrative efficiency. Subject to changes in how promptly people claim or ask for reviews, we estimate that the new rules will affect around 450,000 claimants and that net benefit savings of £119 million in 1997–98, £126 million in 1998–99 and £130 million in 1999–2000 will arise. There will be an initial administrative cost of £1.8 million in 1997–98, £1.1 million in 1998–99 and £0.4 million in 1999–2000 in introducing the changes.

The regulations will also require claims to income support and jobseeker's allowance from 6 October 1997 to be made on a properly completed claim form, with supporting documents as required on the form. The date of claim for benefit will be the date the claimant first contacts the Benefits Agency or the Employment Service, as appropriate, for the purpose of claiming, provided a properly completed claim is received within one month of that first date, or at or before an interview where this is required for jobseeker's allowance.

We have consulted the Social Security Advisory Committee on these proposals and copies of the statement together with its report will be placed in the Library.

State Pensions

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of average earnings he estimates £175 constitutes at present; and what the figure will be in 2040, using the Government Actuary's assumptions about earning growth, in current prices. [19648]

Mr. Heald: The figure of £175 a week represents 50 per cent. of average earnings for April 1996 and is projected to represent 26 per cent. of average earnings in 2040, assuming 1.5 per cent. real earnings growth up to that year.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if people currently under 20 years old will have their basic state pension paid out of the national insurance fund when they retire under his basic pension plan. [19626]

Mr. Heald: Whether anyone currently under 20 will be outside the new scheme will depend on the precise age limit for joining the scheme, to be determined nearer the time.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list in relation to paragraph 36 of the technical document on Her Majesty's Government's basic pension plus proposal, the gross cost of revenue forgone for every 10 years from 2000 to 2090. [19627]

Mr. Heald: The gross costs of new rebates under basic pension plus will rise on average by £330 million in each year following implementation, reaching some £15 billion a year by 2040 or later. Reversal of timing of tax reliefs for the generation covered by basic state pension plus will more than halve the impact on public finances. Thereafter, there would be a rapid decline in public expenditure on pensions as they are met from investments funded by rebates.

DEFENCE

Armed Services (Deaths)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, columns *591–92*, (1) if he will estimate how many members of each armed service have *(a)* been killed in accidents and *(b)* committed suicide during training periods in each of the last seven years; [19614]

(2) if he will estimate how many members of each armed service have *(a)* been killed on active service, *(b)* been killed in accidents, *(c)* committed suicide and *(d)* died of natural causes within the first six months of joining, in each of the last seven years. [19613]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 13 March 1997:

I am replying to your two questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the numbers of personnel in the Services who have (i) been killed in accidents during training periods, or committed suicide during training periods and (ii) died within the first six months of joining, since 1990. As Chief Executive of Defence Analytical Services Agency this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The information you request is detailed in the attached tables. In the first, I have shown those who died while on training, defined as basic training, assault course/parachute jumps and similar training, and exercises. In the second I have listed those who died within their first six months of joining, classified according to our standard classification system. Figures in both tables are for the same period, 1 January 1990 to 3 March 1997, as was covered in my letter to you of 3 March 1997.

I am afraid our database does not contain the numbers of suicides which occurred during training. These could only be collected at disproportionate cost. As you are aware the overall numbers of suicides were contained in the table sent with my letter of 3 March 1997.

The number of armed forces personnel who died within the first six months of joining, from 1 January 1990 to 3 March 1997 (based on information reported to DASA as at 3 March 1997)

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997 to 3 March 1997*	*Total*
Tri-service									
Active service	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Assault	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coroner verdicts of suicide	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Other self inflicted[1]	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Accidents	3	4	4	2	1	2	4	0	20
Natural causes	1	3	3	0	0	2	1	0	10
Details of causes not yet available	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	7	7	7	2	1	5	5	0	34
Navy									
Active service	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assault	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coroner verdicts of suicide	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other self inflicted[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Accidents	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Natural causes	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
Details of causes not yet available	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
Army[2]									
Active service	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Assault	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coroner verdicts of suicide	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other self inflicted[1]	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Accidents	2	4	4	2	1	2	4	0	19
Natural causes	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	4
Details of causes not yet available	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	4	6	2	1	5	4	0	26

The number of armed forces personnel who died within the first six months of joining, from 1 January 1990 to 3 March 1997 (based on information reported to DASA as at 3 March 1997)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997 to 3 March 1997	Total
RAF									
Active service	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assault	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coroner verdicts of suicide	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other self inflicted[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Accidents	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Natural causes	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Details of causes not yet available	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4

[1] This covers cases with open or misadventure coroner verdicts and those yet to be confirmed.
[2] Includes Gurkhas.

Armed forces personnel killed in accidents while on training[1] (from 1 January 1990 to 3 March 1997) (based on information reported to DASA as at 3 March 1997)

	Navy	Army[2]	RAF	Total
1990	0	5	2	7
1991	1	8	0	9
1992	0	9	0	9
1993	6	2	0	8
1994	0	7	0	7
1995	1	3	0	4
1996	0	1	0	1
1997 to 3 March 1997	0	0	0	0
Total	8	35	2	45

[1] Training defined using the NATO STANAG for classification of disease, injuries and causes of death as basic training, assault courses/parachute jumps etc, and exercises.
[2] Includes Gurkhas.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19389]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department keeps no central record of this information. Where such documents are published by agencies, this is a matter for the chief executives and I have asked them to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 13 March 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about customer charters and Customer Standard documents and the cost and number of each document issued as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Metrological Office.

In the current financial year we will spend some £200 on printing our own Charter Standard for the Public, which is the only one of our publications falling within the ambit of your question. About 3,500 copies will have been distributed in various ways.

The administrative/drafting costs of updating our Charter cannot be identified in isolation but are unlikely to exceed £1,000.

I hope this information answers your question.

Letter from M. A. Rowe to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 13 March 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding production of a customer charter. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Pay and Personnel Agency (PPA).

The PPA customer charter has not yet been printed, but our predecessor organisation—the Pay Services Directorate of the Defence Accounts Agency—issued 20,000 copies of its charter at an overall cost of £5,143. We estimate the equivalent cost of the PPA customer charter will be £3,500. It will be issued to every member of the MOD paid by the PPA—some 120,000 staff—but it will be a simpler version of its predecessor, hence the lower costs.

RAF Establishments (Yorkshire and Humberside)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Royal Air Force *(a)* bases and *(b)* other establishments in Yorkshire and Humberside in April 1992 indicating for each the number of (i) service and (ii) civilian personnel employed (1) at that date and (2) currently; and if he will list the date of closure of each of these establishments which closed after April 1992. [18266]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not held centrally and, as a result, some of the statistics in the following table provided are incomplete or not available for the dates requested.

Location	July 1992 RAF	July 1992 Civilians[1]	January 1997 RAF	January 1997 Civilians[1]
RAF bases				
Catterick[2]	720	1,281	4	995
Church Fenton	0	19	6	2
Cowden	[3]12	16	6	7
Dishforth	0	38	1	32
Finningley[4]	n/a	166	6	13
Fylingdales	87	83	73	82
Leeming	1,888	184	1,284	258
Linton on Ouse	n/a	152	475	209
Staxton Wold	255	48	116	58
Topcliffe	0	40	0	29
Other establishments				
Bradford CIO[5]	3	0	0	0
Grimsby CIO[5]	3	0	0	0
MOD Harrogate[6]	n/a	1,345	0	0
Huddersfield CIO[5]	3	0	0	0
Hull CIO	5	0	3	0
Leeds CIO	8	1	7	2
Sheffield CIO	6	1	7	2
York CIO[5]	3	0	0	0

[1] Excludes contractors personnel.

[2] Catterick passed to Army control on 30 June 1994.
[3] Figure as at May 1993.
[4] RAF Finningley closed on 1 April 1996, although a small staff is retained to manage disposal of the site.
[5] As a result of the defence costs study into service recruiting, the careers information office structure has been rationalised and the RAF CIOs in Bradford, Grimsby, Huddersfield and York were closed on 1 December 1995, 3 March 1995, 31 March 1995 and 8 May 1996 respectively.
[6] The MOD site at Harrogate was closed on 1 April 1996 following rationalisation of the RAF support management task at HQ logistics command.

Training Teams (Namibia)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to public funds of providing the military training team to Namibia in 1991. [19684]

Mr. Soames: Details of the military assistance provided to individual countries, including the amount spent, is confidential between Governments under exemption 1 in the code of practice on access to Government information. However, as announced in the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davies) to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 28 January 1997, *Official Report*, columns *140–41*, we are now reviewing this practice against the background of the Government's commitment to openness. The House will be informed of the results of the review in due course.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of those employed by his Department in the last five years were *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [19658]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 13 March 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding the proportion of males and females employed by his Department in the last five years, as this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Defence Analytical Services Agency.

The figures are as follows:

Percentage of personnel employed by MOD by gender at 1 April

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Civilian personnel					
Males	69.9	69.7	69.6	69.8	69.4
Females	30.1	30.3	30.4	30.2	30.6
Service personnel					
Males	93.3	93.1	93.0	92.9	92.9
Females	6.7	6.9	7.0	7.1	7.1
All personnel					
Males	85.7	85.5	85.3	85.1	85.1
Females	14.3	14.5	14.7	14.9	14.9

All figures include full time and part time personnel. Figures for 1992 and 1993 include GCHQ personnel.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors underlie the decision not to include a question relating to morale in the staff care survey carried out by the chief constable of the Ministry of Defence Police; [19725]

(2) what plans he has to carry out studies into morale within the Ministry of Defence Police. [19726]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief constable/chief executive of the Ministry of Defence Police agency. I have asked the chief constable/chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Smallwood to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 13 March 1997:

I am replying to your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about morale in the Ministry of Defence Police, on behalf of the Chief Constable/Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency, as this falls into his area of responsibility. The Chief Constable/Chief Executive is away from the office at present.

Although the Ministry of Defence Police Staff Care Survey 1997 does not specifically use the term morale, the responses to the Job Satisfaction questions (Section I) will provide an indication of morale in the Force. I attach a copy of the survey questionnaire for your information, from which you will see that management and staff representatives worked closely together to formulate the questionnaire. The Chief Constable/Chief Executive has no immediate plans to carry out specific studies into morale in the Ministry of Defence Police.

In addition, two recent surveys of customer and public satisfaction have recorded satisfaction ratings of 86% and 91% respectively. These ratings are not considered indicative of low morale.

A copy of the Ministry of Defence Police Staff Care Survey 1997 is being placed in the Library of the House.

Military Survey Defence Agency

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the estimated savings to public funds accruing from the Military Survey Defence Agency element of the defence intelligence staff "Competing for Quality" proposal for information systems—information technology and open source information services; and what impact these measures will have on the efficiency of the Military Survey Defence Agency. [19366]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Military Survey Defence Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Philip Wildman to Mr. Alan Keen, dated 13 March 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Military Survey Defence Agency element of the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) Competing For Quality (CFQ) proposal for IS/IT and Open Source Information (OSINF) services, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive.

During last year the DIS conducted a CFQ Feasibility Study with involvement from the business areas affected by the CFQ initiative to examine the extent to which IS/IT, OSINF services together with Media Services and Printing could be exposed to competition with the private sector. It concluded that MOD should seek to test through competition whether improved Value For Money (VFM) can be obtained by contractorising a defined package of these services. The Feasibility Study recommendations have been accepted by Ministers and the project is to be taken forward, and will be subject to the normal consultation process. The invitation to companies to provide proposals is scheduled to be issued by mid summer. Consequently at this stage, it would be premature to assess the level of savings and

efficiencies that may result. However, if a competitive procurement cannot show better Value For Money (VFM), then the DIS and Military Survey will not proceed with the initiative.

Beef

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) of 20 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *718*, if the armed forces are supplied with German beef; and if he will make a statement. [20040]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Trewby to Mr. Rod Richards, dated 13 March 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the supply of German beef to the Armed Forces as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency.

NAAFI are currently contracted to supply food for the Armed Forces. They have advised that the only area where German beef has been supplied is to our Forces in Germany, and that the products and quantities involved are small. Most beef products, including those supplied for our Forces in Germany, are sourced from South America on value for money grounds. Due to the ban on British beef exports a small number of low offtake beef products, which otherwise might have been sourced in the UK have been obtained from continental European sources, mainly Holland but with a small proportion from Germany.

Military Museums

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Minister of State for the Armed Forces expects to reply to the letter dated 20 January from the hon. Member for Salisbury on the subject of military museums. [19063]

Mr. Soames: The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my noble Friend the Earl Howe, wrote to the hon. Member on Tuesday 11 March 1997.

Military Provost Guard Service

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which organisation will undertake the training of the Military Provost Guard Service with respect to civilian powers of arrest; how such training will be funded; and what estimate he has made of the cost of the training. [19727]

Mr. Soames: The Royal Military Police training school, part of the adjutant general's corps training group, provides instruction to Military Provost Guard Service soldiers on a citizen's powers of arrest as part of the MPGS training course. The training is funded from the adjutant general's budget. The cost of training MPGS soldiers on a citizen's powers of arrest is estimated at some £1,000 for the pilot scheme.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the applications described as firm applications for military local service engagement *(a)* did not specify a preference for service in their local area and *(b)* specified a preference for a move from Northern Ireland to the United Kingdom mainland. [19729]

Mr. Soames: Thirty-seven applications have indicated "any site" as a preference, and 38 indicated a willingness to move to a site that was not nearest to their application address to obtain a vacancy. There have been no military provost guard service recruits from Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average cost to his Department of travel-to-work expenses incurred by a military local service engagement guard living *(a)* 21 miles and *(b)* 10 miles form his or her duty station in the last year for which figures are available. [19724]

Mr. Soames: As the Military Provost Guard Service will not form until April 1997, no historical figures are available.

Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition will be held, including any off-site events; and on which days it will be open to *(a)* overseas customers, *(b)* the press and *(c)* the public. [19531]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* The 1997 Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition will beheld at Farnborough on 1 to 5 September and at Portsmouth naval base on 2 to 4 September. The exhibition will be open to overseas visitors every day. A press day is planned for 31 August. The exhibition is not open to the public.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost to public funds of the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition. [19532]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* The aim is that there should be no cost to public funds.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many visitors are expected at the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition; and from which countries buyers will be invited. [19533]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* An estimated 30,000 people will visit the exhibition. Invitations are issued to representatives from countries with an interest in the legitimate purchase of defence equipment.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who will be opening the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition. [19534]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* It has not yet been decided who will open the exhibition.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which non-United Kingdom companies will be exhibiting at the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition. [19535]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* All exhibiting companies must be United Kingdom registered.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the estimated cost of replacing the

gold leaf on the royal yacht Britannia damaged in the recent accident; and if it will be replaced before the yacht's arrival in Hong Kong; [20079]

(2) what is the total estimated cost of the damage to the royal yacht Britannia as a result of the accident at Karachi; and who will pay for the repair work. [20078]

Mr. Soames: On 28 February, while in the Gulf, en route from Doha to Karachi, HMY Britannia was involved in a minor collision with RFA Bayleaf while replenishing at sea. The repair costs for Britannia, which will be met from defence votes, are not yet known, but all necessary repairs, including any to her gold leaf, will be completed before she arrives in Hong Kong.

Horizon Cruiser

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Horizon anti-air warfare cruiser. [20133]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The United Kingdom remains committed to the collaborative common new generation frigate programme, comprising Project Horizon and the principal anti-air missile system, PAAMS.

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation the chief of defence procurement has had with this French and Italian counterparts on the future of Horizon. [20134]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The chief of defence procurement consults regularly with his French and Italian counterparts on the common new generation frigate programme.

School Cadet Forces

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if schools which establish a cadet force within the terms of the Government's recent proposals to expand cadet forces will also be eligible to seek funding from his Department for *(a)* armouries and *(b)* firing ranges on school sites. [20030]

Mr. Soames: No undertaking has been made to expand the cadet forces, and media reports of a possible expansion have been overdrawn. However, we are currently looking into the scope for expanding the cadet forces, so that more young people can enjoy the benefits of membership. A study will be made of the opportunities, limitations and costs, including those of any new armouries and firing ranges which might be required, within any possible future expansion.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost to public funds of providing *(a)* armouries and *(b)* firing ranges in all state secondary schools eligible to establish cadet forces. [20029]

Mr. Soames: Any secondary school may request the formation of a cadet unit within its premises, and may subsequently ask for the installation of an armoury or firing range. Should the cadet authorities agree, and the resources allow, these facilities can be provided. The costs would vary from site to site, but as an example, the estimated cost of providing a firing range and armoury at Longhill school, Brighton is £95,000.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the completion of the sale of the DERA support services division. [20654]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Contracts between the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, acting on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence, and the venture capitalist Cinven for the sale of DERA's support services division have been exchanged. Completion will take place by mid-April, subject to the conclusion of mutually satisfactory arrangements for a pension scheme for the new company.

HEALTH

NHS Administration Costs

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the administrative cost of the NHS as a percentage of its total budget for each year since 1989. [13647]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *862*, and the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) on 3 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *635*.

Changes over the years in the roles and responsibilities of family practitioner committees, family health services authorities, district health authorities, and regional health authorities, and the transfer of functions to NHS trusts, mean that the figures are not directly comparable. These figures also include expenditure on medical negligence, capital charges, grants to voluntary bodies and some health care services—for example, health promotion.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount spent on administration in each NHS *(a)* health authority and *(b)* trust. [19431]

Mr. Horam: The latest available health authority headquarters administration figures, relating to 1995–96, are already in the Library. However, changes over the years in the roles and responsibilities of family practitioner committees, family health services authorities, district health authorities, and regional health authorities, and the transfer of functions to NHS trusts, mean that the health authority headquarters administration figures are not directly comparable over time. These figures also include expenditure on medical negligence, capital charges, grants to voluntary bodies and some health care services—for example, health promotion.

For information on health authority costs and trust management costs, I refer the hon. Member to the booklet "Health Authority Costs and Management Costs in NHS Trusts" which is published today.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much is spent on management and administration per annum at present in each health authority in England. [20119]

Mr. Horam: For information on health authority costs and trust management costs, I refer the hon. Member to the booklet "Health Authority Costs and Management Costs in NHS Trusts" which is published today.

The latest available health authority headquarters administration figures, relating to 1995–96, are already in the Library. However, changes over the years in the roles and responsibilities of family practitioner committees, family health services authorities, district health authorities, and regional health authorities, and the transfer of functions to NHS trusts, means that the figures are not directly comparable. These figures also include expenditure on medical negligence, capital charges, grants to voluntary bodies and some health care services—for example, health promotion).

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the administrative costs of each health authority in England in each of the last five years. [17465]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 22 May 1996, *Official Report*, columns *215–16*, and the reply I gave the late hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 30 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *134*.

Changes over the years in the roles and responsibilities of family practitioner committees, family health services authorities, district health authorities, and regional health authorities, and the transfer of functions to NHS trusts, mean that the figures are not directly comparable. These figures also include expenditure on medical negligence, capital charges, grants to voluntary bodies and some health care services—for example, health promotion).

Greater London Health Budget

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the national health service budget for Greater London was spent on administration during 1996; and if he will make a statement. [17965]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available.

Meals on Wheels

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount charged by each county council for the provision of meals on wheels. [18706]

Mr. Burns: Information on the charges typically made to individual users of services by local authority social services departments is not held centrally. However, aggregate figures by client group of gross and net expenditure and fees and charges relating to meals on wheels for each local authority social services department in England in 1994–95, the latest year for which this information is available, may be found on Internet—http://www.open.gov.uk/doh/public/pss__stat.htm—which can be accessed in the Library.

NHS Pension Scheme (GP Staff)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the assumption underlying his estimate of £5 million for the first-year costs of allowing GPs' practice staff to join the NHS pension scheme was that any practice staff who wished to could join or only those nominated by their GP employer; and what is the difference in cost between estimates based on these two assumptions. [18796]

Mr. Malone: Assumptions underlying the £5 million costs were based on the results of the staff interest survey. The results reflected the level of interest among staff who were employed by general practitioner practices which expressed an interest in participating.

Adoption

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each English local authority the amount currently charged for inter-county adoption home studies. [18783]

Mr. Burns: These figures are not held centrally.

Dentists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the British Dental Association concerning fast-track procedures for striking off dentists who may pose a threat to the public. [19295]

Mr. Malone: In December 1995 we consulted the British Dental Association about powers for the national health service tribunal to suspend dentists from providing general dental services. We amended the National Health Service (General Dental Services) Regulations to reflect these changes which came into force on 21 December 1995.

GP Patient Lists

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions in each of the last five years the Medical Practices Committee has decided to disperse the patient list of a vacant general practitioner post following a recommendation by a health authority that the post be advertised. [19430]

Mr. Malone: We understand from the Medical Practices Committee that there was one occasion in the past five years when the committee dispersed a patient list following a recommendation from a health authority to advertise.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19384]

Mr. Horam: The following table shows the information requested:

Item	*Cost of drafting publishing and circulating* £	*Number of copies distributed*
The patients charter	6,622,610	26,880,000
The patients charter maternity services	191,799	1,350,000
The patients charter blood donors	144,144	28,250
The patients charter services for children and young people	359,927	354,000

Item	Cost of drafting publishing and circulating £	Number of copies distributed
The patients charter mental health services	88,225	65,300
A framework for local community care charters in England	76,765	100,000
The MDA code of practice on enforcement	6,553	4,150
MCA working with business	6,536	5,500
NHSPA commitment to service: Members charter	2,000	14,200

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of PFI contracts which have been signed by 30 March *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998. [19415]

Mr. Horam: Information on estimated future dates of contract signature is held centrally only for major private finance initiative schemes, generally with a capital value of over £10 million, which have at least reached preferred bidder stage. Of these schemes, it is estimated that three will have signed commercial contracts by 30 March 1997 and that a further 20 will have signed commercial contracts by 30 March 1998. Commercial contracts for 47 PFI schemes, of £1 million or above, have already been signed.

Residential Care (Assets)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the total value in real terms of assets sold by old people to pay for residential care in each of the last five years; and what in each case was the percentage change from the previous year; [19370]

(2) how many people, having sold their assets to pay for residential care, exhausted their funds in the last year for which figures are available; and how many such people remained in the same residential home; [19372]

(3) how many people sold their homes to pay for residential care in 1995–96; and what estimate he has made of the number who will have done so in 1996–97. [19371]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not held centrally.

NHS Numbers

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the most recent dates for which figures are available *(a)* the number of duplicate NHS numbers issued since the project to issue computerised numbers began and *(b)* the cost to the NHS to date of correcting this problem. [19546]

Mr. Horam: Between 4 December 1995, when the new national health service number was introduced, and 5 March 1997, the latest date for which figures are available, approximately 6,750 new NHS numbers had been re-issued by registrars of births and deaths at a subsequent birth registration. This is less than 1 per cent. of all birth registrations. Whenever an NHS number is erroneously re-issued, at least two registrations are affected. Occasionally, NHS numbers have been re-issued more than once, thereby affecting three or more registrations.

If an NHS number is re-issued at a birth registration this is detected by the NHS central register and all affected babies are issued with a unique replacement number. The cost to the NHS of correcting non-unique NHS numbers in patient registers is neglible. The cost of amending the software used by registrars of births and deaths to issue NHS numbers is being met by the Office for National Statistics.

Hospital Buildings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many square feet of former hospital buildings remain *(a)* empty, *(b)* derelict and *(c)* unsold. [19417]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Health Information Helpline

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of telephone calls from *(a)* the public and *(b)* Cambridge constituents to the health information helpline in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what were the numbers of each category of inquiry. [19618]

Mr. Horam: The number of calls received by the national health information service between January 1996 and December 1996, inclusive, was 573,295. The number of calls at constituency level and categories of calls are not collected centrally.

Psychiatric Beds

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric beds have closed in each yea since 1980. [19373]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not held centrally in the form requested.

General Managers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total remuneration of each NHS district health authority's general manager in each of the last three years. [19429]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the late hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 16 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *808*, and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 26 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *354*. Information concerning 1995–96 is shown in the table. The figures need to be treated with caution. The payments listed represent remuneration in respect of the total gross salary, bonus payments, monetary value of benefits in kind, taxable expenses allowances and compensation payments in relation to offices described rather than an individual. Thus, payments listed for a particular district health authority could refer to more than one individual.

Chief executives' remuneration by district health authority	£000
1995–96	
Northumberland HA	75
Sunderland Health Commission	56
North Durham HA	79
South Durham HA	79
Tees HA	81
South of Tyne Health Commission	79
North Cumbria HA	53
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	86
East Riding HA	84
United Health—Grimsby and Scunthorpe HA	75
North Yorkshire HA	85
Bradford HA	49
West Yorkshire HA	87
Leeds Healthcare	87
Wakefield HA	76
North Derbyshire DHA	80
Southern Derbyshire Health	80
Leicestershire HA	87
Nottingham HA	46
Barnsley DHA	74
Doncaster DHA	81
Rotherham HA	71
Sheffield Health	79
North Nottinghamshire DHA	75
Lincolnshire HA	81
Cambridge DHA	37
North West Anglia Health Commission	85
Huntingdon DHA	17
Suffolk DHA	86
East Norfolk District Health Commission	74
Bedfordshire Health	80
North West Hertfordshire DHA	20
South West Hertfordshire DHA	20
Barnet HA	81
Hillingdon Health Agency	70
East and North Hertfordshire DHA	41
Brent and Harrow HA	79
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	97
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster DHA	75
North Essex HA	87
South Essex DHA	65
Barking and Havering HA	42
Redbridge and Waltham Forest DHA	17
East London and The City HA	85
New River DHA	79
Camden and Islington HA	93
Bromley DHA	84
East Sussex HA	437
East Kent HA	75
West Kent DHA	88
Bexley and Greenwich Health	91
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Commission	94
Croydon Health Commissioning Agency	91
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth DHA	83
Kingston and Richmond HA	80
West Surrey Health Commission	83
Eastern Surrey Health Commission	150
West Sussex HA	87
Dorset Health Commission	99
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Commission	78
Southampton and South West Hampshire Health Commission	89
North and Mid Hampshire HA	73
Health Commission for Wiltshire and Bath	68
Isle of Wight Health Commission	66
Berkshire Health Commission	47
Buckinghamshire DHA	74
Northamptonshire DHA	40
Oxfordshire DHA	41
Bristol and District DHA	80
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly DHA	80
North and East Devon HA	71
South and West Devon HA	94
Gloucestershire DHA	43
Somerset HA	74
Herefordshire HA	138
Worcester and District DHA	492
Shropshire HA	83
North Staffordshire HA	84
Coventry HA	76
Dudley HA	36
Sandwell HA	70
Solihull Health	37
Walsall HA	60
Wolverhampton HA	55
South Birmingham HA	48
North Worcestershire HA	309
South Staffordshire HA	89
Warwickshire HA	35
North Birmingham HA	53
North Cheshire HA	82
South Cheshire HA	71
Liverpool HA	84
St. Helens and Knowsley HA	36
Sefton HA	37
Wirral HA	75
Stockport Health Commission	36
North West Lancashire HA	79
East Lancashire HA	84
South Lancashire HA	71
Wigan and Bolton HA	80
Bury and Rochdale DHA	73
West Pennine HA	83
Manchester Health Commission	105
Salford and Trafford HA	74
Morecambe Bay HA	32

Source:

Annual accounts of district health authorities.

Notes:

1. Figures are provisional.
2. East Sussex DHA—amount includes £351,000 of pension contributions.
3. Bexley and Greenwich—amount recorded in FHSA accounts.
4. Eastern Surrey DHA—amount includes £72,000 of compensation for loss of office to former East Surrey DHA chief executive.
5. Herefordshire DHA—amount includes £81,000 of compensation for loss of office.
6. Worcester and District DHA—amount includes £107,000 of compensation for loss of office and £310,000 of pension contributions.
7. Walsall DHA—amount recorded in FHSA accounts.
8. North Worcestershire DHA—amount includes £99,000 of compensation for loss of office and £143,000 of pension contributions.
9. Wirral DHA—amount recorded in FHSA accounts.
10. Manchester DHA—amount shown is a shared cost between the DHA and the FHSA. The cost of the DHA is 75 per cent. of the figure shown.

Liver Disease

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many diagnoses of chronic liver disease there have been in each of the last five years. [19418]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Lariam

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *180*, what factors led to deferring until 1995 the inclusion in his Department's publication "Health Information for Overseas Travel" of information about side effects of dizziness, disturbed sense of balance or a neuropsychiatric disorder included in changes made to the product information for Lariam in October 1991. [19682]

Mr. Malone: The 1995 edition of "Health Information for Overseas Travel" was the first edition of that book.

Power Lines (Cancer)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data he collates in respect of the number of cases of cancer sufferers resident in homes adjacent to high current configuration power lines; and if he will make a statement. [19828]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, several epidemiological studies are currently under way to investigate childhood cancer in relation to various possible causes including electromagnetic fields. The largest study of this type in this country is the United Kingdom childhood cancer study which is funded in part by the Department of Health, with technical support provided by the National Radiological Protection Board. The Department is also funding two pilot studies, one of adults and one of children, looking at cancer incidence near power lines.

Children's Homes

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for the administration of children's homes currently run by local authorities to be offered out for tender to the private sector. [19732]

Mr. Burns: None. It is for local authorities to make such arrangements as they consider appropriate to ensure that homes are available for the care and accommodation of children looked after by them—whether by their own provision or that of the independent sector.

Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1979

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1979. [20616]

Mr. Dorrell: It is Government policy to regularly review non-departmental public bodies. The national boards for nursing, midwifery and health visiting in the four countries of the United Kingdom fall into this category. The United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting does not. However, there is a clear relationship between the statutory bodies. The Government therefore, as a first stage, intend to commission an independent and fundamental review of the current operations of the five statutory bodies created by the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1979. This will be a comprehensive study of all aspects of their work, including those issues around determining fitness to practise which go to the heart of the council's role in protecting the public. I shall, in particular, want it to consider the need for new powers to impose life bans on people convicted of the most serious offences. We shall then bring forward for consultation specific proposals for change in the light of the outcome of that review.

Non-ionising Radiation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines he has issued in respect of limiting levels of exposure to non-ionising radiation; and if he will make a statement; [19836]

(2) what representations he has received from the National Radiological Protection Board in the last five years on the standards of protection for exposure to non-ionising radiation; and if he will make a statement. [19837]

Mr. Horam: The National Radiological Protection Board provides advice to Government on the risks to human health from both ionising and non-ionising radiation. Non-ionising radiation includes low and high-frequency electromagnetic fields as well as solar and artificial ultraviolet radiation.

In 1993 the NRPB issued guidelines on limiting exposure to electromagnetic fields and radiation—"Restrictions on Human Exposure to Static and Time Varying Electromagnetic Fields and Radiation" (documents of NRPB, Vol. 4, No. 5). The guidelines are based solely on preventing the well-established biological effects of heating and shock from acute exposure to electromagnetic fields and radiation.

Initiatives to reduce excessive exposure to ultraviolet radiation have been under way since "The Health of the Nation" White Paper in 1992. These include the Health Education Authority's "Sun Know How" campaign, a report by the NRPB's advisory group on non-ionising radiation covering health effects from ultraviolet radiation (documents of NRPB, Vol. 6, No. 2), distribution of NRPB's "Board Statement on Effects of Ultraviolet Radiation on Human Health" to all general practitioners, public health physicians and occupational health physicians, and the development of an Internet web site. Copies of the documents are in the Library.

Electromagnetic Fields

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the risk of cancer from *(a)* domestic exposure to electromagnetic fields, *(b)* parental exposure to electromagnetic fields and *(c)* employment in occupations with high exposure to electromagnetic fields; and if he will make a statement; [19839]

(2) what assessment he has made of the risk to human health associated with exposure to electromagnetic fields; and if he will make a statement. [19835]

Mr. Horam: The Department obtains advice on the health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields from the National Radiological Protection Board and other sources, including its own funded research. The NRPB's advisory group on non-ionising radiation conducted an extensive review of the subject in 1992—"Electromagnetic Fields and the Risk of Cancer" (document series, Vol. 3, No. 1)—and concluded that there was no firm evidence of a carcinogenic hazard from exposure of paternal gonads, the foetus, children or adults to the extremely low-frequency fields that might be associated with residence near major sources of electricity supply, the use of electrical appliances or work in the electrical, electronic and telecommunication industries. The independence expert Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment has endorsed the advisory group's report. A supplementary report was published in 1994 by the NRPB—"Electromagnetic Fields and the risk of Cancer" (document series, Vol. 5, No. 2)—to take into account the results of further experimental

and epidemiological studies from Scandinavia, France and Canada. Copies of the advisory group's reports are available in the Library.

Several epidemiological studies are currently under way to investigate childhood cancer in relation to various possible causes, including electromagnetic fields. The largest study of that type in this country is the United Kingdom childhood cancer study, which is funded in part by the Department, with technical support provided by the NRPB. The Department is also funding two pilot studies, one of adults and one of children, looking at cancer incidence near power lines.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to prevent the spread of MRSA within hospitals and the community. [19723]

Mr. Horam: The Department is currently working with professional groups on the revision of clinical guidelines on methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus issued to the national health service in September 1994. We have also commissioned the Royal College of Nursing to produce an education video and teaching pack on MRSA. In May 1996 the Department issued a leaflet on MRSA to health authorities, social services departments and nursing and residential homes.

Copies of the guidelines issued in 1994 and the leaflet on MRSA are available in the Library.

Hospital Building Schemes (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will update the list of hospital building schemes in Buckinghamshire given in his answer of 3 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *443–44*; and if he will make a statement. [19841]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is shown in the tables:

Completed schemes

Project/scheme	*Completed date*	*Cost £*	*Updated cost £*
Amersham—dermatology unit	21 January 1994	2,581,694	3,195,841
Amersham operating theatres	24 June 1983	1,333,653	1,873,782
Amersham phase 1	22 July 1991	6,193,487	7,312,478
Buckingham—phase 1	16 February 1990	1,263,502	1,577,974
Milton Keynes DGH—end unit	24 September 1992	1,202,638	1,431,955
Milton Keynes DGH—M1 unit	24 November 1988	2,495,264	3,187,133
Milton Keynes DGH—OPD	13 November 1989	3,578,463	4,278,928
Milton Keynes DGH—phase 1	12 September 1983	15,638,544	19,974,686
Milton Keynes DGH—phase 2	21 August 1991	17,810,043	21,296,264
St. John's EMI	11 March 1991	1,816,779	1,843,014
Stoke Mandeville—maternity	5 May 1991	6,030,648	6,117,733
Stoke Mandeville—OPD/hospice	18 July 1989	1,598,049	1,952,399
Stoke Mandeville—pathology	5 May 1989	1,545,574	1,930,250
Stoke Mandeville—X-ray	10 July 1987	1,287,006	1,689,947
Stoke Mandeville—enabling works	30 July 1996	1,185,964	1,306,886
Tindal M1 development	7 May 1991	3,831,237	3,472,831
Tweed Drive—nursing home	17 November 1989	1,224,958	1,212,018
Wycombe pathology	5 July 1985	1,314,300	1,801,553
Wycombe—X-ray extensions and alterations	16 September 1994	2,074,436	2,545,487
Milton Keynes—secure unit phase 2	14 February 1995	1,918,847	2,228,083
Aylesbury manor house rehabilitation unit	30 June 1995	1,520,819	1,689,131
Totals		77,445,905	91,918,373

Abbreviations:
DGH = District General Hospital.
EMI = Elderly Mentally Infirm.
OPD = Out-Patients Department.
MI = Mental Illness.

Planned schemes

Project/scheme	*Forecast completion date*	*Estimated cost (£)*
Stoke Mandeville Hospital redevelopment	Negotiating with potential PFI partners	20,000,000
Aylesbury Vale mental health intensive care unit	Summer 1998	1,800,000
Amersham and High Wycombe redevelopment (South Buckinghamshire)	Start on site date dependent on the outcome of refinancing discussions	38,000,000

Fluoridation

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the references of the scientific work published since 1990 upon which the Government's advisers base their recommendations to fluoridate. [20073]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) on 28 January, *Official Report*, column *163*.

Ophthalmology Sessions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant ophthalmology sessions are available on average each week at present; and how many were available each week on average in each of the past five years. [20118]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

NHS Policy Board

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was on the agenda for the NHS policy board meeting on 12 March; [19134]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *668*, if he will place in the Library the 1996–97 quarter 3 *(a)* income and expenditure returns and *(b)* year-end turnover and outturn forecasts for (i) health authorities and (ii) NHS trusts, together with the further papers on the quarter 3 returns to be considered by the NHS policy board on 12 March. [19276]

Mr. Malone: The NHS policy board meeting scheduled for 12 March 1997 did not take place. The 1996–97 quarter 3 forecasts for health authorities and NHS trusts will be placed in the Library shortly.

Information submitted to the NHS policy board provided for internal management discussion and advice, which includes its agenda, is exempt from publication under part 2 of the "Open Government Code of Practice."

Factor 8

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to fund provision for recombinant factor 8 on an equivalent basis to that provided in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [20043]

Mr. Horam: The Department does not allocate money to support specific treatments for particular patient groups. National health service funds are allocated to purchasers of health care who are best placed to decide what services, including treatments, they wish to purchase to meet local needs.

Depression (Prescribed Drugs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes have taken place in each of the past five years in the number of drugs prescribed for treating depression. [20031]

Mr. Malone: The number of licensed preparations used in the treatment of depression are shown in the table:

Number of licensed preparations used in the treatment of depression, 1991 to 1995

England

Year	*Number of licensed preparations*
1991	144
1992	143
1993	147
1994	153
1995	155

1. Antidepressants are those preparations in the British National Formulary [issue 28, September 1994] therapeutic section 4.3—antidepressant drugs.
2. These preparations are the main category of preparations used in the treatment of depression, but not solely used for it. Doctors may also prescribe other preparations.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the financial and other support that is provided to groups pressing for an increase in drug use for depression from *(a)* patients, *(b)* doctors, *(c)* drug companies and *(d)* doctors employed by drug companies. [20032]

Mr. Burns: The Department has not undertaken such an assessment.

Health Service Financial Performance

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* NHS trusts are currently in the NHS executive's (i) red and (ii) amber zone for financial performance; and what are the criteria for inclusion in each zone. [20044]

Mr. Horam: Monitoring financial information for trusts and health authorities is already placed in the Library following analysis and review by the national health service executive. The red or amber status of trusts and health authorities is internal management information.

Health Service Senior Managers (Pay)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons *(a)* health authorities are and *(b)* NHS trusts are not required to pay their senior managers on NHS Whitley rates. [20046]

Mr. Malone: The pay of general and senior managers on national terms and conditions is not negotiated in Whitley councils but is determined centrally by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Health authorities have to pay national rates. The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 gave trusts the freedom to set their own terms and conditions of service and has enabled the pay of senior executives to be determined locally where local needs and market factors can properly be taken into account in order to deliver improved patient care.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Woodlands

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects his Department to publish the booklet "Farm Woodlands: An Introductory Guide"; and what plans he has to publicise the farm woodland premium scheme in advance of the booklet becoming available. [19578]

Mr. Boswell: Full details of the revised farm woodland premium scheme will be contained in the new "FWPS Rules and Procedures" booklet. Both this and the new application forms are currently being printed and are expected to be available before the beginning of April when the new scheme is due to commence.

Advice of a more general nature will be contained in "Farm Woodlands: An Introductory Guide". Work is currently in progress on this. Interested organisations will be consulted shortly on the draft and it is expected that the booklet will be published in the autumn of this year. In the meantime, the existing "Farm Woodlands: A Practical Guide", which the new booklet will replace, is being reprinted.

Publicity for the scheme will be concentrated over the spring and summer, with various promotional activities, including targeting local farming events and the agricultural shows, undertaken by ADAS and the Scottish Agricultural College advisory service. We also intend to place an advertisement in the farming press in the next few weeks and individual letters will be sent to existing participants outlining the changes to the scheme. The Forestry Commission also intends to run local seminars about the scheme.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many herds had had a BSE case by the end of each year from 1988 to 1996, broken down to show herds with head sizes of *(a)* less than 10, *(b)* 10 to 19, *(c)* 20 to 29, *(d)* 30 to 39, *(e)* 40 to 49, *(f)* 50 to 59, *(g)* 60 to 69, *(h)* 70 to 79, *(i)* 80 to 89, *(j)* 90 to 99, *(k)* 100 to 149, *(l)* 150 to 199, *(m)* 200 to 249 and *(n)* 250 and above, cattle; and if he will indicate the total number of herds for each category. [18207]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The following table shows the cumulative number of adult herds with confirmed cases of BSE by herd size at the end of each year—1988 to 1996:

Adult herd size	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
1–9	21	81	166	303	553	826	976	1,074	1,126
10–19	23	90	213	401	691	1,039	1,248	1,382	1,441
20–29	35	141	337	589	1,045	1,512	1,783	1,922	1,995
30–39	56	221	507	913	1,539	2,106	2,427	2,561	2,638
40–49	90	325	727	1,216	1,959	2,630	2,924	3,057	3,116
50-59	107	386	760	1,225	1,850	2,398	2,701	2,825	2,884
60–69	107	384	762	1,255	1,876	2,393	2,625	2,709	2,780
70–79	117	358	728	1,151	1,688	2,119	2,347	2,422	2,447
80–89	122	363	696	1,109	1,582	1,938	2,114	2,176	2,207
90–99	97	347	663	1,025	1,380	1,685	1,797	1,831	1,857
100–149	456	1,463	2,571	3,683	4,870	5,753	6,138	6,243	6,307
150–199	192	601	1,066	1,454	1,823	2,080	2,189	2,237	2,260
200–249	91	253	412	545	671	772	823	838	845
250+	58	147	249	319	400	498	535	545	550
Unknown	22	45	95	251	554	899	1,097	1,225	1,388
Total	1,594	5,205	9,952	15,439	22,481	28,648	31,724	33,047	33,841

It is not possible, without disproportionate cost, to provide the total number of herds for each category of herd size.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will make a statement to the House regarding the disposal to landfill of BSE-related cattle carcases and other remains. [20080]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) on 11 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns *54–5*.

Green Vegetables

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the percentage change in the consumption of fresh green vegetables from 1980 to 1995. [19294]

Mr. Boswell: Household consumption of fresh green vegetables fell by 36 per cent. between 1980 and 1995. However, this has been offset by a 5 per cent. increase in the household consumption of other fresh vegetables, excluding potatoes, and a 23 per cent. increase in processed vegetables (table 5.1, page 70 of the National Food Survey, 1995 ISBN 0–11–243014–7 refers).

Meat Inspectors

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many authorised meat inspectors were in post on *(a)* 1 January 1996 and *(b)* the latest date for which figures are available. [19549]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* At 1 January 1996, the Meat Hygiene Service employed a total of 972 meat hygiene inspectors.

The Meat Hygiene Service currently employs a total of 1,160 meat hygiene inspectors.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19380]

Mr. Boswell: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

MV Caroline

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what veterinary inspection will be made of animals due to be exported from Dover on the MV Caroline on or about 7 March; and if he will make a statement. [19543]

Mrs. Browning: The pre-export inspection of animals consists of a visual appraisal and, if deemed appropriate, a physical examination. The purpose of the inspection is to ensure that the animals intended for export comply with Community health requirements, show no signs of infectious or contagious disease and are fit to travel to their intended destination.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the veterinary officers from his Department have investigated the condition of animals transported on the MV Caroline. [19544]

Mrs. Browning: When animals have been transported from Britain in this ship the operator has received advice about the on-board facilities for animals. Loading of animals into the ship is also supervised, and veterinary and technical experts from this Department have accompanied some voyages.

Farm Animals (Breeding)

Miss Hoey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action he plans to take following the report of the committee considering the ethical implications of emerging techniques in the breeding of farm animals. [19905]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) on 3 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *513–14*.

In addition, following discussions with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, a working party has been set up to look into the role of non-veterinarians in relation to the artificial insemination of cattle and horses. The results of this exercise may affect the way the recommendations of the Banner committee are taken forward in relation to AI. Further action will therefore be considered once the results of the working party are known.

Food and Agricultural Science Establishments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many purpose-built laboratories in Government-funded food and agricultural science establishments are mothballed; and if he will list each establishment with such a laboratory. [19921]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No laboratories owned by the Ministry have been mothballed. However, some have been closed permanently as a result of reorganisation and restructuring or following the completion of new or modernised facilities. I have no information about laboratories not owned by the Ministry.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of laboratory capacity in Government-funded food and agricultural science establishments built in *(a)* 1980 to 1985 *(b)* 1985 to 1990, *(c)* 1990 to 1995 and *(d)* 1995 to date, has been mothballed. [19922]

Mr. Hogg: No laboratories owned by the Ministry have been mothballed. I have no information about laboratories not owned by the Ministry.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the Government-funded food and agricultural science sites vacated since 1980, indicating *(a)* those in which the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, other research councils and agencies, service or central laboratories retain the freehold or lease, *(b)* the estimated commercial sales value of each facility and *(c)* the length of time each has been vacant. [19923]

Mr. Hogg: Since 1980, the Ministry has vacated, either wholly or in part, the laboratories as listed. Prior to 1990, surplus accommodation was surrendered to the Property Services Agency for reuse by other Government Departments or disposal. I have no information about the way in which such properties may have been reused or disposed of or about their commercial values. The Ministry has not disposed of any laboratories since 1990 although some are due to be sold for redevelopment in the near future.

It would be inappropriate to release estimated values for properties which have yet to be sold as this might affect adversely the amounts that buyers would be prepared to pay for them. I have no information about vacant laboratories owned freehold or leasehold by other Government Departments or by other organisations.

Laboratories vacated by the Ministry of Agriculture since 1980

Laboratory	*Date vacated*
ADAS Laboratories at Shardlow Hall, Derbyshire	1986
ADAS Laboratories at Olantigh Road, Wye, Nr Ashford, Kent	1986
ADAS Laboratories at Coley Park, Reading	1995
ADAS Laboratories at Starcross Nr Exeter, Devon	1995
ADAS Laboratories at Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge	1995
ADAS Laboratories at Lawnswood, Leeds	1995
ADAS Laboratories at Trawsgoed, Nr Aberystwyth	1995
Food Science Laboratories at Romeny Street, London SW1	1990
Food Science Laboratories at Haldean House, Norwich	1990
Torry Research Station, Aberdeen	1996
The Central Science Laboratory, Tolworth, Surrey	1992
The Central Science Laboratory, Harpenden, Herts	1996
The Central Science Laboratory, London Road, Slough	1996
The Central Science Laboratory, Luddington, Warkwickshire	1996
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Gabalfa, Cardiff	1986
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Chester	1986
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Elmbridge Court, Gloucester	1986
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Gladstone Road, Northampton	1986
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Coley Park, Reading	1994
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Lawnswood, Leeds	1990
The Veterinary Investigation Centre,	

Laboratories vacated by the Ministry of Agriculture since 1980

Laboratory	*Date vacated*
Riseholme, Lincoln	1996
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Madingley Road, Cambridge	1993
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Weybridge, Surrey	1980
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Jupiter Road, Norwich	1993
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Wye Nr Ashford, Kent	1992
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Whittington Road, Worcester	1993
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Bangor, North Wales	1991
Horticultural Laboratories at Worthing Road, Littlehampton	1995

Surrendered to the Ministry by Horticulture Research International.

Since 1980, a number of new laboratories have been built and others have been either rebuilt or substantially refurbished. These are listed.

New laboratories	*Date built*
The Central Science Laboratory, Sand Hutton York	1996
The Food Science Laboratory, Colney Lane, Norwich	1990
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Bury St. Edmunds	1993
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Luddington, Warwickshire	1993

Rebuilt/refurbished laboratories	*Date rebuilt/ refurbished*
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Starcross, Devon	1993
ADAS Laboratory, Wergs Road, Wolverhampton	1992
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, West House, Thirsk	1996
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Calthwaite, Penrith	1996
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Sutton Bonnington	1990
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Iichen Abbas, Winchester	1994
The Veterinary Investigation Centre, Barton Hall, Preston	1985

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on each case in which an official of the Meat Hygiene Service was dismissed for failing to enforce full compliance with specified bovine material controls in slaughterhouses. [20268]

Mrs. Browning: It is the Government's policy, explained more fully in their response to the Second Report from the Public Service Committee, Session 1995–96, that the results of internal civil service disciplinary investigations into the conduct of individuals should not be disclosed publicly.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place a copy of the national review of standards and practices within the fresh meat industry, prepared by the Meat Hygiene Service hygiene advice teams and referred to in the last annual report of the MHS in the Library. [19733]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* A copy of the report was placed in the Library of the House on 6 March 1997.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many meat hygiene inspectors work in Nottinghamshire; and where they are located. [19706]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* On a full-time equivalent basis, the Meat Hygiene Service—which is responsible for these matters—currently employs 13 full-time meat hygiene inspectors at three licensed fresh meat premises in Nottinghamshire.

The Meat Hygiene Service also employs additional casual meat hygiene inspectors at these plants where necessary for holiday and sickness cover.

Food Hygiene

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to implement the recommendations of the hygiene advisory team report by William Swann relating to national policy in respect of the contamination of animals presented for slaughter. [19663]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 6 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns 1023–35.

Quarantine

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons quarantine kennels are omitted from the licensing and inspection regime under the Boarded Animal Establishment Act 1963. [19892]

Mrs. Browning: Provision is made for the licensing and inspection of quarantine premises under the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974, as amended.

Ewes (Export for Religious Slaughter)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to restrict the export of ewes for outdoor religious slaughter in France. [19908]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* The Department's powers to regulate sheep exports are exercisable only in relation to the legal provisions concerned with the welfare of animals during transport. We shall apply the relevant rules thoroughly in the usual way. Enforcement of the rules concerned with welfare at slaughter in France is a matter for the French authorities.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 17 March 1997

TREASURY

Arms to Iran Affair

Mr. Gale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the official inquiry by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise into BMAR has found evidence of knowledge or involvement in illegal arms exports to Iran by the right hon. Member for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken). [17903]

Mr. Oppenheim: Customs' investigation is not yet complete—the result of some overseas inquiries is still awaited. It is not normally the practice of the Commissioners of Customs and Excise to comment on investigations of individuals or companies not yet accused of criminal offences. To do so could risk prejudicing any on-going inquiries or future criminal proceedings. I can, however, say in the particular circumstances of this investigation that inquiries to date have not produced any evidence which would support any criminal proceedings against any person, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) in relation to the exports by BMARC which were alleged to have ended up in Iran.

Government Receipts (Scotland)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the estimated Government receipts in Scotland by source for the last year for which figures are available. [19499]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 10 march 1997]:* The table shows the figures requested. With the exception of corporation tax receipts, these figures were published by the Scottish Office in table 10 of "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 1994–95".

Estimates of General Government Receipts in Scotland, 1994–95

	£ billion
Income tax	5
Social security contributions	3.7
VAT	3.6
Council tax and non-domestic rates	2.1
Corporation tax	1.8
All other receipts'	5.9
Total receipts'	22.1

' Excluding North sea revenues.

Fiscal Deficit (Scotland)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the fiscal deficit in Scotland in the last year for which figures are available. [19498]

Mr. Waldergrave *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Excluding privatisation proceeds and North sea revenues, the general Government deficit in Scotland is estimated to have been £8.2 billion in 1994–95.

Government Expenditure (Scotland)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was general Government expenditure in Scotland in *(a)* identifiable, *(b)* non identifiable, *(c)* programme and *(d)* other expenditure categories, in the last year for which figures are available. [19553]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Total expenditure on services by country and function for 1994–95 is given in table 7.7 of "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1996–97" Cm 3201.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest available figures for *(a)* GDP and *(b)* GDP per head, for the four countries of the United Kingdom, including the continental shelf, in (i) current and (ii) 1996–97 prices; what proportion of GDP for the United Kingdom continental shelf is ascribed to each country in these figures; and what would be the equivalent figure for Scottish GDP and Scottish GDP per head if 90 per cent. of the United Kingdom continental shelf were in the Scottish totals. [19406]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* The table shows the figures available. Estimates of GDP at factor cost by region are available only in current prices. The continental shelf is treated in the regional accounts as a separate region, and hence its estimated GDP can not be ascribed to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Estimates of GDP and GDP per head at factor cost in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Continental Shelf, 1995 (current prices)

	GDP (£ million)	GDP per head (£)
England	504,893	10,324
Scotland	50,713	9,872
Wales	24,618	8,440
Northern Ireland	13,868	8,410
Continental shelf	10,348	—

Notes:

1. Ninety per cent. of the GDP of the continental shelf is equal to £9,313 million.
2. Since there is no resident population in the continental shelf region GDP per head for the continental shelf cannot be calculated.
3. The GDP for the UK continental shelf comprises profits and stock appreciation which cannot be assigned to regions of the UK. The income from employment of continental shelf employees is, however, allocated to the region of residence of the employee and cannot be separately identified within the regional GDP estimates.
4. Estimates of GDP by region at factor cost are only available in current prices, which means that an increase over time reflects inflation as well as real growth. There are no regional price indices which could be used to remove the effect of inflation from the figures. Constant price estimates could be made using UK price indices, but these would be misleading if prices and price changes had varied significantly between different parts of the UK.

Source:

Economic Trends, January and February 1997 edition.

Personal Pensions

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total amount which has been paid in compensation to people who were mis-sold personal pensions. [20016]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Figures published by the Personal Investment Authority, the regulator responsible for most of the firms involved in the review of personal pensions mis-selling, estimates that about £60 million of compensation had been made in the period up to 31 December 1996.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the companies which have mis-sold personal pensions. [19945]

Mrs. Knight: It is not possible to compile such a list at this stage.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been mis-sold personal pensions. [19946]

Mrs. Knight: It is not yet possible to provide a reliable estimate of the number of people who have been mis-sold a personal pension.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total cost of compensation likely to be paid to people who were mis-sold personal pensions. [20022]

Mrs. Knight: There is no reliable estimate available of the total cost of compensation that is likely to be paid to people who have been mis-sold personal pensions.

Domestic Fuel (VAT)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of value added tax on domestic fuel. [20107]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* VAT was applied to domestic fuel for sound environmental and revenue reasons, which continue to apply. The Government have no plans to change the current rate of 8 per cent. VAT, which applies to domestic fuel. The yield from this measure is about £1.1 billion a year.

Suicides and Fatal Accidents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of the population have *(a)* committed suicide and *(b)* suffered a fatal accident in each of the last seven years; and if he will make a statement. [20037]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 17 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question asking how many and what percentage of the population have *(a)* committed suicide and *(b)* suffered a fatal accident in each of the last seven years. The Director has asked me to reply in his absence.

The figures for England are provided in the table below.

Year	Suicides (ICD9[1] codes E950–E959 and E980–E989 excl. E988.8)	Suicides per 100,000 population	Fatal accidents (ICD9[1] codes E800–E929)	Fatal accidents per 100,000 population
1989	5046	10.6	11111	23.2
1990	5240	10.9	10597	22.1
1991	5183	10.8	9944	20.6
1992	5126	10.6	9516	19.7
1993	4929	10.2	9617	19.8
1994	4780	9.8	9417	19.3
1995	4816	9.8	9369	19.2

[1] International Classification of Diseases, ninth Revision

Married Couples (Tax Allowances)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will commission a report from the Inland Revenue on arrangements for allowing a husband and wife to elect *(a)* to transfer between them the personal tax allowances to which each is entitled and *(b)* to set the tax allowances and the amounts chargeable at the lower and basic rates of income tax to which both are entitled against the sum of their total incomes; and if he will ask the Inland Revenue to assess (i) the advantages and disadvantages of these arrangements, (ii) their cost to the Exchequer, (iii) a timetable for their introduction and (iv) the tax treatment of married couples in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. [20377]

Mr. Jack: The tax system already provides a special allowance for married couples, and the Government believe that, by rewarding hard work through reducing tax rates, married couples with continue to benefit under their policies. Nearly two thirds of the income tax package in the 1996 Budget will benefit married couples directly. Against that background, I have asked the Inland Revenue to produce a report about the arrangements that my hon. Friend mentions.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, column *76*, on the national police management training policy for Indonesia; if he will place a copy of the submission from the head of eastern Asia department in the Library. [20699]

Dr. Liam Fox: In my answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, column *76*, I undertook to write to the hon. Member about the release of this document. I did so on 12 March and a copy of my letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Decentralisation Support

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries received support from his Department for financial decentralisation in 1991. [20170]

Dr. Liam Fox: The promotion of economic reform and other good government policies in developing countries and in the countries of central and eastern Europe and central Asia is one of the key aims of the UK development assistance programme. ODA funds are commonly used to promote public service reform, which includes delegated management. As a result, support for projects in this area, including for financial decentralisation, is a common feature of almost every bilateral assistance country programme. Precise details of the sort requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Great Lakes

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much of his Department's budget was allocated to the Great Lakes area of Africa in the last year *(a)* bilaterally and *(b)* multilaterally; and if he will make a statement. [20103]

Dr. Liam Fox: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on 27 January, *Official Report* column *14*.

Trade Union Movements (Aid)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for 1991 those countries whose trade union movements received support from his Department. [20105]

Dr. Liam Fox: Under the joint funding scheme, the following countries and regions received support during the funding period 1990–91 to 1991–92:

Tanzania
Uganda
Kenya
Southern Africa (Regional)
Caribbean (Regional).

Under the workers group development scheme, the following countries and regions received support during the funding period 1991–92 to 1993–94:

South Africa
Namibia
Botswana
Zambia
Zimbabwe
Africa (Regional)
India
Occupied Territories
Barbados
Montserrat
Guyana
Caribbean (Regional).

In 1991, information about support for trade union movements drawing on other funding sources was not recorded centrally. It would involve disproportionate cost to collate such information now.

Rwanda

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Rwandan Government concerning international assistance for returning refugees; and if he will make a statement. [20104]

Dr. Liam Fox: HM ambassador in Kigali has regular discussions with the Government of Rwanda, international aid agencies and non-governmental organisations on Rwanda's rehabilitation needs, including assistance for the resettlement of returning refugees. Since 1995 we have committed nearly £20 million bilaterally in support of Rwanda's rehabilitation programme and £18.5 million as our contribution to EU rehabilitation assistance.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) of 3 March, *Official Report*, column *497*, on the millennium exhibition, if he will make a statement on the methodology by which the figure of 10 million expected visitors was determined. [19834]

Mr. Freeman: A MORI poll conducted by the operating company before Christmas indicated potential visitor numbers of 13.5 million could be achieved if efforts were made to maximise attendance. The original indicative budget produced by Millennium Central Limited was prepared on this basis. As part of the process of refining the indicative budget, the amount to be expended on maximising visitor numbers was reduced and the estimate of visitor numbers was reduced accordingly to 10 million.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what guidance he has issued to non-departmental public bodies following the Cadbury and Greenbury reports; and if the guidance reflects all the recommendations in those reports. [20432]

Mr. Freeman: Following the publication of the Cadbury report and its recommended code of best practice, the Treasury prepared a model code of best practice for board members of public bodies, which was issued in June 1994. This applied the Cadbury principles, where appropriate, to members of public bodies such as executive non-departmental public bodies. The model code has recently been revised and replaced by guidance on codes of practice for board members of public bodies, which was published by the Cabinet Office (OPS) in February 1997 in the White Paper "The Governance of Public Bodies: A Progress Report", Cm 3557. New or revised codes, taking account of the guidance and tailored to the particular circumstances of the body, should be in place for all executive NDPBs by 1 June 1997.

No specific guidance has been issued to NDPBs following the Greenbury report. Responsibility for the pay and conditions of service of chairmen and board members of executive NDPBs is primarily a matter for sponsor Departments. Remuneration of chairman, board member and chief executive appointments to NDPBs is published in "Public Bodies 1996", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to ensure that non-executive directors appointed to non-departmental public bodies do not have previous contractual arrangements with the body concerned. [20431]

Mr. Freeman: Previous contractual arrangements with a non-departmental public body should not automatically debar a candidate from subsequent appointment to it. Whether any potential conflicts of interest exist is a matter which should be determined by the selection procedure for the appointment in question, for example by a selection board during an interview of the candidate. The Commissioner for Public Appointments will be considering whether this matter should be covered in his revised guidance, which is due to be published in July 1997. Guidance to NDPBs on handling conflicts of interest has recently been revised as part of the guidance on codes of practice for board members of public bodies, published last month in the White Paper "The Governance of Public Bodies: A Progress Report", Cm 3557.

Open Government

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the operation of the code of practice on access to Government information during 1996. [20732]

Mr. Freeman: I have today announced the publication of the Government's report on the operation of the code of practice during 1996, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Public Record Office

Sir Colin Shepherd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the future of the public record office in Chancery lane. [20745]

Mr. Freeman: The public record office in Chancery lane will shortly be vacated.

Discussions are taking place with the Victoria and Albert museum about the possibility of relocating the national art library and the Victoria and Albert archive of art and design to this building, but it is too early to say whether these will lead to a successful conclusion.

The Government are aware of the heritage of this building and will make every effort to ensure its preservation.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Dance and Drama School Places

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the new interim scheme to assist young people to take up places at dance and drama schools. [20824]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On 14 October, I announced plans to help more students take up places at accredited dance and drama training schools in England using funding from the national lottery and the Department of Education and Employment, in partnership with local authorities. I am delighted that the Arts Council of England has now announced the operational details of the interim scheme, following close consultation with local authority associations and representatives of the dance and drama constituencies. I am sure that the House shares my pleasure that, through the lottery, it has been possible to create an opportunity for more talented students to pursue their training.

International Sporting Events

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to attract major international sporting events to the United Kingdom. [20753]

Mr. Sproat: The Government are strongly committed to providing promotional and diplomatic support for the bidding for and staging of major international sporting events in this country. The United Kingdom Sports Council, which was established on 1 January 1997, has, as one of its priority tasks, to help attract to this country major international sporting events. To ensure that there is a clear and co-ordinated UK strategy for all major events, we have asked the United Kingdom Sports Council to take the lead. Additionally the Government have demonstrated their commitment in a number of practical ways.

My Department chairs a wide-ranging working group to assist Manchester in organising a successful 2002 Commonwealth games, and to ensure that the event has the greatest possible impact, both nationally and internationally, in terms of sporting, tourism, economic and other benefits. The Welsh Office chairs a working group to ensure the success of the 1999 rugby world cup. I am also encouraging the British Tourist Authority to work closely with the organiser of events to ensure synergy, for example between the rugby world cup 1999 and the cricket world cup 1999, with a view to maximising the tourism benefits. Building on the success of Euro 96, the Government are strongly backing the Football Association's bid to host the 2006 world cup. We have already hosted two receptions on behalf of the FA, and I am chairing a co-ordinating group of FA and Government officials to ensure that we are assisting the FA as far as we are able.

To assist further, the sports councils have recently launched their national revenue grants programmes, one of which is designed to attract and stage those events which are of genuine major significance to the UK. The UK Sports Council advises the four home nation sports councils on the distribution of national lottery funds in support of bids for, and the staging of, major events in this country as well as on the facilities required to stage them.

All of these initiatives underline the importance which the Government attach to attracting and staging major events in this country.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court Fees

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the impact of new county court fees to be charged on debtors under the provisions of the County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19494]

Mr. Streeter: Following the judgment in R *v.* the Lord Chancellor ex parte Witham, the Lord Chancellor has decided that litigants in the county courts and in family proceedings should be placed on the same footing as litigants in non-family proceedings in the Supreme Court. He has therefore made orders restoring the exemption and remission provisions which applied before 15 January 1997. As a result, most debtors on low incomes will not be liable to pay court fees.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the estimated projected annual income the Court Service will receive from levying new charges for *(a)* fee numbers (1) 2C (ii) application by debtor to vary judgment, (iii) 2C (2) application to set aside judgment, (3) 2C (iv) application to district judge, (4) 2C (vi) application to circuit judge, (5) 4 (i) (c) second or subsequent warrant and (6) 4 (ix) application to suspend warrant and *(b)* entering a counter claim against the plaintiff. [19502]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Bill Etherington, dated 17 March 1997:

PQ/304: Projected income from new court fees.

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the projected annual income the Court Service will receive from new court fees.

These estimates do not take account of the possible impact of the judgment in R v the Lord Chancellor ex-parte Witham.

Fee number and type of process	*Projected income £ million*
2C(ii) and (ii) Application to vary or set aside judgment[1]	0.975
2C(iv) Application to district judge or circuit judge ex-part or by consent	8.3
2C(v)(vi) Application to district judge and circuit judge[1]	2.0
4(i)(c) Request for second or subsequent warrant	2.3
4(ix) Application to suspend warrant	0.865
Entering a counterclaim against the plaintiff[2]	No projection has been made

[1] This is a combined projection for the two fees.

[2] The new fee payable on entering a counterclaim is the same as if separate proceedings were being issued for that amount.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review *(a)* the Supreme Court Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996, *(b)* the County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996 and *(c)* the Family Proceedings Fees (Amendment) Order 1996; and if he will make a statement. [20641]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor is in the process of implementing wide-ranging reforms to the civil justice system following the publication of Lord Woolf's final report. As part of this process, the current fees structure will be subject to review to ensure that fees are charged at an appropriate level and at appropriate points in the progression of a case.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the expected savings from each element of the *(a)* Supreme Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996, *(b)* County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996 and *(c)* Family Proceedings Fees (Amendment) Order 1996; and if he will make a statement. [20643]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 17 March 1997:

PQ 97/318: Expected savings from court fees

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question on expected savings from court fees.

The estimated additional income from the three fees orders is as follows:

Supreme Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996: £8.8 million

County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996: £24.6 million

Family Proceedings Fees (Amendment) Order 1996: £6 million

These estimates do not take account of the possible impact of the judgment in *Regina v the Lord Chancellor ex parte Witham.*

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the (i) Supreme Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996, (ii) County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996 and (iii) Family Proceedings Fees (Amendment) Order 1996; and if he will make a statement. [20642]

Mr. Streeter: According to our records 91 representations have been received by Ministers relating to the Fees (Amendment) Orders 1996, three in the form of parliamentary questions and 88 in the form of letters from Members of Parliament. The representations made have expressed concerns about the effect of particular fees rather than views on each order as a whole.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to reverse recent increases in civil justice court fees in accordance with the decision in R *v.* the Lord Chancellor ex parte Witham; and if he will make a statement. [20640]

Mr. Streeter: The judgment in R *v.* the Lord Chancellor ex parte Witham reinstates the former fee exemptions and remissions in the Supreme Court. It does not relate to the increases in civil court fees. To place county court and family proceedings litigants on the same footing as litigants in the Supreme Court, the Lord Chancellor has made orders reintroducing provisions for fee exemption and remission in these proceedings as well, and has made refunds available to those eligible.

County Courts

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received on the extent to which decisions of county courts are not implemented; and if he will make a statement. [18852]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 17 March 1997:

PQ 97/308: Representations received about county courts decisions that are not implemented:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of representations received about county court decisions that are not implemented.

I have not received any representations in person but written representations have been received by the Court Service. However the information requested is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*, what factors led him to revise the expenditure on the Principal Registry Family Division (Central London Accommodation) PFI project to nil. [20411]

Mr. Streeter: That project is no longer proceeding via the PFI procurement route.

Legal Aid

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people have received legal aid in each of the last 10 years to take action against *(a)* the Labour party, *(b)* the Conservative party, *(c)* the Liberal Democrat party and *(d)* any other political party. [20286]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list by nationality the number of applications for legal aid made by non-British citizens, showing those which have been successful, in each of the last three years. [20624]

Mr. Streeter: Information as to an applicant's nationality is not collected and is therefore not available.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what criteria apply to overseas applicants for legal aid; and what are the procedures by which the Legal Aid Board checks the accuracy of applications. [20626]

Mr. Streeter: All applications for legal aid, from whatever source, must undergo statutory means and merits tests. A special financial application form must be used by applicants not resident in the UK. The Legal Aid Board makes its decisions based on information supplied by the applicant through their solicitor, and where this is insufficient or inconsistent further investigations will be made. The special investigations unit, set up in 1996, investigates the means of applicants with complex financial affairs, which may include foreign nationals.

Bus Employees Superannuation Trust

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to the answer from the Secretary of State for Transport to the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) of 27 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *271–72*, what legal action the Official Solicitor plans to take in respect of his duty as trustee of the BEST pension fund; and when he plans to take it. [20505]

Mr. Streeter: NBC Pension Trustees Ltd. is trustee of the BEST pension fund of which the Official Solicitor is sole shareholder. The Official Solicitor has appointed two of his staff as directors. I am informed that the trustee, NBC Pension Trustees Ltd., intends to issue proceedings seeking recovery of the pension funds paid to the Secretary of State for Transport. Allen and Overy, who have advised the former directors for several years, were instructed by the present directors when they assumed responsibility. Allen and Overy have now relinquished their retainer as there is a potential conflict of interest. The trustee has recently instructed Taylor Joynson Garret in order to carry forward the matter as quickly as possible.

Administration Orders

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the financial limit in relation to administration orders; and if he will list the dates on which the working party set up to assess section 13 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990 has met to discuss this matter. [20644]

Mr. Streeter: An administration order currently provides a mechanism for a debtor who has a county court judgment and not more than £5,000 worth of debts to apply to a county court to take over the management of his or her debts. Section 13 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990 would put into effect changes recommended by the civil justice review, including the removal of the £5,000 ceiling. The monitoring group which was set up to identify the implications of section 13 discussed the limit at its meeting on 29 November 1993.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take to prevent the export of cull ewes from Dover to France on 7 March for the purpose of ritual slaughter near Paris. [19542]

Mrs. Browning: The Department's powers to regulate sheep exports are exercisable only in relation to the legal provisions concerned with the welfare of animals during transport. We shall apply the relevant rules thoroughly in the usual way. Enforcement of the rules concerned with welfare at slaughter in France is a matter for the French authorities.

Salmon

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the operation of the Salmon and Freshwater

Fisheries Act 1975 with particular reference to *(a)* the increase in the production and import of farmed salmon and *(b)* the enhanced value of the recreational salmon fishery to the rural economy. [19677]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* Any review of current salmon and freshwater fisheries legislation in England and Wales would need to address the issues identified by my hon. Friend. The Government will consider whether to carry out such a review in the light of their legislative plans for the next Parliament.

Newcastle Disease

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the poultry and egg production sectors to discuss the Government's response to the recent outbreak of Newcastle disease. [20051]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Officials of my Department have met representatives of the British Poultry Meat Federation on three occasions, most recently on 5 March 1997. They also met the British Egg Industry Council on 4 February and the NFU on 5 February. Industry organisations are being kept informed of all developments.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many premises have been affected by the recent outbreak of Newcastle disease. [20052]

Mr. Hogg: Between 1 January 1997 and 12 March 1997, Newcastle disease had been confirmed on seven premises in Great Britain.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates he has made of the cost of measures to control the outbreak of Newcastle disease to *(a)* the Government and *(b)* industry. [20053]

Mr. Hogg: As of 12 March, the Department is considering or has processed compensation claims amounting to some £4 million in respect of outbreaks of Newcastle disease in Great Britain in 1997. However, action to control Newcastle disease is still being taken, and the overall cost of control to both Government and industry will depend upon whether or not further outbreaks occur.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to *(a)* eradicate Newcastle disease and *(b)* prevent any further outbreaks. [20054]

Mr. Hogg: Movement restrictions are being imposed within infected areas as required by directive 92/66/EEC which lays down community measures for controlling Newcastle disease. Control measures include the slaughter of all poultry on premises where disease has been confirmed, the supervised disposal of their carcases, the tracing of all movements of birds, eggs, equipment and people onto and off of an infected premises before and subsequent to disease being confirmed and the thorough cleansing and disinfection of an infected premises and equipment after site depopulation.

Industry has been advised to vaccinate where this has not taken place and to ensure adequate precautions are in place to avoid the introduction of infection.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the implications of the recent outbreak of Newcastle disease for *(a)* public health and *(b)* consumer protection. [20055]

Mr. Hogg: There is no risk to public health from poultry meat which may contain the Newcastle disease virus and, therefore, no consequences for consumer protection.

Newcastle disease virus can be spread through the air from infected birds and contact with such birds can occasionally cause conjunctivitis, fever and flu-like symptoms in humans. The risk of human infection is low, even when handling birds known to be infected.

The Department of Health has been kept fully informed of developments.

Food Safety

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *194–95*, regarding food safety in the canning industry, what assessment his Department made of *(a)* the level of expertise and *(b)* the application of good manufacturing practice among small companies, in its recent review; and if he will make a statement. [20311]

Mrs. Browning: The results of the Department's survey of UK canneries, including an assessment of the level of expertise and the application of good manufacturing practice amongst small companies, are given in microbiological food safety surveillance report No. 5 on the national study of canneries. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

European Union Surpluses

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the foods currently held in storage in the United Kingdom as European Union surpluses. [20177]

Mr. Baldry: Statistics showing stocks of EC and UK agricultural produce in public intervention and assisted private storage are lodged in the Library of the House.

Meat Hygiene Service (Officials)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many officials of the Meat Hygiene Service *(a)* have been subject to disciplinary action, *(b)* have been dismissed, *(c)* have received formal disciplinary warnings, *(d)* have received formal written cautions and *(e)* are still under disciplinary investigation for failure to enforce specified bovine material controls in slaughter houses. [20267]

Mrs. Browning: To date, 45 Meat Hygiene Service employees have been subject to disciplinary investigation as a result of failure to ensure full compliance with SBM controls. Four employees have been dismissed—one of whom was reinstated at appeal—18 have received formal disciplinary warnings and 23 have received written cautions. one officer is still under disciplinary investigation. Before any of these staff are allowed to begin their work again they are required to undergo re-training.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what retraining officials of the Meat Hygiene Service who have failed to enforce specified bovine material controls in slaughterhouses have to undergo before they are allowed to resume their work. [20269]

Mrs. Browning: Staff training matters are the responsibility of the Meat Hygiene Service and I have asked the chief executive to reply to you direct.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 17 March 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) your Parliamentary Question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about the re-training undertaken by officials who have failed to ensure compliance with the specified bovine material controls in slaughterhouses before they are allowed to resume work has been passed to me to reply. [20269]

As you are aware, the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) was established as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) on 1 April 1995. It took over from some 300 local authorities responsibility for enforcing meat hygiene, inspection and animal welfare at slaughter legislation in licensed fresh meat premises in England, Scotland and Wales.

The MHS is also responsible for enforcing specified bovine material (SBM) controls in slaughterhouses. It does this most rigorously. A comprehensive SBM training programme has been provided to all inspection staff. The agency's staff are fully aware that they may face disciplinary action as a result of their failure to enforce fully the controls. As you note, staff who have faced disciplinary action undergo a retraining programme prior to resuming work at a plant. Such staff are required to repeat the intensive practical plant based SBM training under the supervision of a Principal Official Veterinary Surgeon. The importance of 100% compliance with SBM controls is reiterated to these staff and they continue to be closely monitored by the plant's Official Veterinary Surgeon to ensure comprehensive and rigorous enforcement of SBM controls.

Pesticides

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the commercial composts currently marketed in the United Kingdom which incorporate *(a)* one or more pesticides and *(b)* imidacloprid; [20356]

(2) what requests he has received from manufacturers seeking to use imidacloprid in composts *(a)* used for growing edible plants and *(b)* available to the public. [20361]

Mrs. Browning: Currently there are no commercial composts containing pesticides approved for sale in the United Kingdom. However there are a number of pesticides, including imidacloprid, which have approval for use by professionals by means of incorporation to compost.

Every application for approvals of pesticides is commercially confidential until a final decision is taken on it.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that plants raised in compost containing pesticides are clearly identified as such. [20360]

Mrs. Browning: Approval is given only if scientific evaluation shows that the product can be used without unacceptable risk to people or the environment. There is thus no need for crops produced with the aid of approved pesticides to be labelled as such.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effects of imidacloprid on human health; and if he will make a statement. [20358]

Mrs. Browning: Before approval is given to any pesticide chemical, detailed scientific data on health effects, including both acute and chronic effects for pesticide users and for food consumers, are evaluated by the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides—ACP—on behalf of the Government. The evaluation document for imidacloprid agreed by the ACP has been published and the detailed scientific data, which are protected by rules on commercial confidentiality, may be inspected at the Pesticides Safety Directorate. MAFF does not commission research into the health effects of individual pesticide chemicals.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the extent of the use of imidacloprid in commercial compost. [20357]

Mrs. Browning: Monitoring of all agricultural pesticides including imidacloprid is carried out by the working party on pesticide usage surveys in a four-year rolling programme. Imidacloprid is a recently approved chemical and does not yet feature largely in survey results. Such uses as have so far been recorded do not include application via compost.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received regarding the use of imidacloprid in the product Levington Intercept. [20355]

Mrs. Browning: Apart from approaches from the company, the Ministry has received two inquiries regarding the use of imidacloprid in Levington Intercept.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that any composts containing pesticides are clearly identified as such. [20359]

Mrs. Browning: A compost containing a pesticide chemical and intended to protect plants grown in it is subject to pesticides legislation and must be labelled as a pesticide. A compost sterilised, disinfected or otherwise treated with a pesticide but not in order to protect plants grown in it is not considered as a pesticide and not required to be so labelled. However, no pesticide may be used to treat compost in this country unless this use has been approved following full scientific evaluation of the potential consequences for people and the environment.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the results of the second survey of variable pesticides residues are now available; and if he will make a statement. [20825]

Mrs. Browning: The results of the second survey of variable pesticide residues were announced on 14 March. A copy of the announcement and of the supporting documents have been placed in the Library of the House.

The survey results show that levels of residues in the majority of fruit and vegetables fall well below recommended maximum residue levels. However, a small number of apples and peaches, including imports had higher residues than is desirable. We will be reporting these results in full to the Codex Alimentarius Commission so that it can instigate international action further to ensure consumer protection.

A large safety margin is built into the figures used when setting what can be regarded as an acceptable level. The Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Professor Sir. Colin Berry, chairman of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, have issued statements which make clear that the results of the second survey for variable residues do not change Government advice that fruit and vegetables remain a key component of a healthy diet.

Fishermen's Association Ltd.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's policy in respect of meetings between *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials and the Fishermen's Association Ltd. [20496]

Mr. Baldry: We arrange meetings with representatives of fishermen's organisations as and when appropriate. There is no distinctive policy regarding the Fishermen's Association Ltd.

Surplus Food Scheme

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the charitable organisations to which United Kingdom intervention beef will be distributed under the surplus food scheme in 1997. [20657]

Mr. Baldry: A total of 1,059 applications have been received by the Intervention Board from organisations wishing to distribute canned intervention beef under the surplus food scheme in 1997. These include charitable organisations and others such as local authorities. The distribution applications within the United Kingdom is:

England: 792

Scotland: 149

Wales: 85

Northern Ireland: 33.

These applications are being examined and the organisations considered acceptable will be formally designated in due course to distribute the canned beef.

BSE

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the possibility of establishing whether particular herds of cattle are BSE free; and what action is being taken so as to identify cattle which are affected. [18205]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The beef assurance scheme—BAS—and the export certified herds scheme—ECHS—are based on the identification and verification of factors which taken together indicate that the cattle concerned have not been exposed to a risk of BSE. The BAS is already in operation. Proposals for the ECHS were sent to the European Commission in February and will be discussed by the Commission's scientific advisory committees and the standing committee as part of the Florence framework for lifting the export ban.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect of recent publicity on the state of British abattoirs on EC officials' consideration of the lifting of the BSE ban on *(a)* British and *(b)* Northern Irish beef. [20399]

Mrs. Browning: Much of the media coverage of BSE in recent months has been unhelpful to United Kingdom veterinary interests. I hope and expect the Commission and their independent scientific advisers to consider the case on its merits.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the chance and confidence intervals for cattle developing BSE that their dam would have had BSE; and if he will break down the results to indicate the impact of whether the calf was *(a)* first born, *(b)* second born, *(c)* third born and *(d)* a later birth. [18203]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The chance of BSE offspring cases developing BSE is 1 per cent. Confidence intervals are not appropriate as this is the observed percentage from the epidemic. It is not possible to provide the breakdown of this percentage with any accuracy into first born, second born, third born or a later birth, but there are indications that the risk is greater in calves born closer to the time when a cow develops BSE than in those born earlier.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he has received on the outcome of tests relating to the destruction of BSE infective material through incineration. [18132]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* No tests have been carried out on the destruction of BSE infective material through incineration.

Advice was sought from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee on the effectiveness of the incinerators used by the Ministry for the disposal of BSE suspect carcases to destroy the BSE infective agent. The committee has advised, on the basis of its knowledge of earlier studies on the inactivation of TSE agents and proteins in general, that provided incineration was completed, the incinerators used by the Ministry were more than adequate to render the BSE agent inactive.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the modal average age of cattle which died of BSE and were born in each year from 1985 to 1993. [18200]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The table shows the modal age at slaughter of confirmed BSE cases with dates of birth between 1985 and 1993:

Year of birth	*Modal age at slaughter*
1985	5
1986	5
1987	5
1988	5
1989	5
1990	5
1991	4

Year of birth	Modal age at slaughter
1992	4
1993	3

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *194*, regarding the level of infectivity in rendered meat and bone meal from cattle slaughtered in the over-30-months scheme, what is the maximum level of infectivity (in IU per gram) that is estimated to be present in the rendered material being considered for incineration. [18972]

Mr. Baldry: Very little infective material is likely to enter rendering plants as cattle suspected of showing clinical signs suggestive of BSE are destroyed by incineration. However, some animals may be incubating disease even though they do not show clinical signs of infection. In 1996 the number of such animals, based on independent research, Anderson et al, 1996, is estimated to have been around 4,600, and most of these would, we believe, have been among the 1.1 million animals slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme—0.418 per cent. BSE infectivity is most likely to be in the brain and spinal cord of cattle, which together weigh approximately 1 kg. On the assumption that the average carcase weighs 500kg, this equates to 550,000 tonnes of carcase material arising from the OTMS last year of which 4.6 tonnes—0.0008 per cent.—could have contained infectivity. In addition, the rendering process itself is expected to reduce any infectivity present fiftyfold.

The amount of infectivity per gram, if any, remaining in rendered material cannot be reliably established without conducting the tests on mice, referred to in the reply given to the hon. Member on 25 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *193–94* which would take two years and would be extremely expensive.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the liability of providers of contaminated feedstuffs to the dairy and beef farming industry for the spread and costs of BSE; and if he will make a statement. [19593]

Mrs. Browning: This Department has received a number of letters from individuals and Members of Parliament querying the liability of providers of contaminated feedstuffs to the farming industry in the context of the cause and spread of BSE. To say how many and from whom they were received could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much was paid to Electophoretics International by his Department for work to find a diagnostic test for BSE. [20666]

Mrs. Browning: No money was paid to Electrophoretics International as the Ministry had not commissioned any work from it.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evaluation he has made of *(a)* the work to find a diagnostic test for BSE which was conducted for his Department by Electrophoretics International and *(b)* the value for money of that work. [20668]

Mrs. Browning: Electrophoretics International has not been commissioned to conduct work for MAFF, and no payment has been made to EI by MAFF. It is therefore not appropriate to consider evaluation or value for money.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which companies and research bodies have been commissioned by his Department to undertake work into finding a diagnostic test for BSE. [20663]

Mrs. Browning: The following organisations have been funded by MAFF to undertake work into finding a diagnostic test for BSE:

Central Veterinary Laboratory

Institute for Animal Health

Birmingham University

London Hospital Medical College

Animal Health Trust

Moredun Research Institute

University of Edinburgh.

A further contract with Newcastle University is in preparation.

An open competition for research funding for development of novel methods for the diagnosis of BSE was announced by MAFF to the international scientific community in August 1996. Proposals were reviewed by independent referees and three proposals from UK research laboratories were taken up for funding in January 1997 these are included in the list above. Two further proposals are being followed up; a joint proposal from two Swiss companies (Paul Scherrer Institute and CSEM, Centre Suisse D'Electronique Etude Microtechnique, S.A.) and the California Institute of Technology.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what meetings took place between Ministers and officials of his Department and board members and officials of Electrophoretics International *(a)* prior to the contract for research into a diagnostic test for BSE being let, *(b)* during the life of the contract and *(c)* after the expiration date of the contract. [20667]

Mrs. Browning: The agreement was signed on 22 December 1995 and has not expired in respect of all its provisions. MAFF officials attended two meetings with Electrophoretics International representatives prior to the signing of the agreement and two meetings subsequently. This is in addition to contact between scientists from the Central Veterinary Laboratory, Weybridge and EI on research collaboration as provided for in the agreement.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what basis the contract between the Ministry of Agriculture and Electrophoretics International for research into a diagnostic test for BSE was tendered; how many others tenders were received; and what involvement Ministers had in the decision to let the contract to Electrophoretics International. [20665]

Mrs. Browning: The nature of the agreement between MAFF and Electrophoretics International was one of collaboration. The Ministry did not commission any work from EI. This was not a contract to develop a diagnostic test and a tendering process was not relevant.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the contract for research into a diagnostic test for BSE with Electrophoretics International ended; for what reasons it was not renewed; and what plans he has for further contracts with the company. [20669]

Mrs. Browning: MAFF has a collaborative agreement with Electrophoretics International which continues to operate. MAFF will continue to treat the company in the same way as all other bodies in relation to research and supply of materials. There are no plans for any further contracts with EI.

British Beef (Bans)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many states had banned British beef *(a)* before 1990 and *(b)* between 1990 and 1995; and how many have withdrawn their bans in the last year. [19755]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* One country introduced a ban on British beef before 1990. Thirty-four countries banned imports of British beef between 1990 and 1995. Restrictions were lifted in 14 countries before Commission decision 96/239/EC introduced a worldwide ban on the export of British beef on 27 March 1996.

Intervention Storage

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the minimum ecu prices per kilo paid to meat plants in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Northern Ireland, for beef accepted for intervention storage since 1996. [20275]

Mr. Baldry: The minimum prices in ecu per kilo paid for offers of beef tendered since April 1996 are:

Date of tender	*Great Britain*		*Northern Ireland*	
	Steers	*Young bulls*	*Steers*	*Young bulls*
9 April 1996	1.964	[1]—	2.500	[1]—
7 May 1996	2.365	2.310	2.445	2.3
28 May 1996	1.854	2.080	2.420	2.240
11 June 1996	2.228	2.030	2.405	2.195
25 May 1996	2.225	2.090	2.416	2.208
9 July 1997	2.420	2.110	2.430	2.213
23 July 1997	2.419	2.165	2.390	[2]—
6 August 1996	2.350	2.115	2.245	2.094
27 August 1996	2.218	2.150	2.214	[2]—
10 September 1996	2.218	2.150	2.214	[2]—
24 September 1996	2.299	2.080	2.236	[2]—
8 October 1996	2.325	2.115	2.244	[2]—
22 October 1996	2.340	2.120	2.241	[2]—
12 November 1996	2.490	2.187	2.303	[2]—
26 November 1996	2.658	2.452	2.410	[2]—
10 December 1996	2.620	2.510	2.501	[2]—
14 January 1997	2.556	2.430	2.456	[2]—
28 January 1997	2.629	2.494	2.413	[2]—
11 February 1997	2.652	2.550	2.413	[2]—
25 February 1997	2.650	2.550	2.430	[2]—
11 March 1997	2.525	2.500	2.415	[2]—

[1] No bids accepted.
[2] No bids submitted.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the ecu prices per kilo achieved by meat plants for beef accepted for intervention storage in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland since 1996; and if he will make a statement on the reason for differential prices regionally for beef going into intervention storage. [18337]

Mr. Baldry *[pursuant to his reply, 5 March 1997, column 683]:* Differential regional prices for intervention purposes occur only in the areas of Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Northern Ireland is considered a separate region for intervention purchases in recognition of the particular importance of the beef sector there, and the effect of its proximity to the Republic of Ireland market.

A list of the prices awarded since March 1996 follows:

Date of tender	*Maximum prices awarded in Great Britain*		*Maximum prices awarded in Northern Ireland*	
	Steers	*Young bulls*	*Steers*	*Young bulls*
9 April 1996	2.610	2.400	2.410	2.200
7 May 1996	2.450	2.320	2.450	2.320
28 May 1996	2.340	2.190	2.430	2.250
11 June 1996	2.310	2.110	2.410	2.200
25 May 1996	2.474	2.162	2.446	2.236
9 July 1996	2.466	2.175	2.442	2.218
23 July 1996	2.499	2.241	2.429	[1]—
6 August 1996	2.408	2.273	2.301	2.096
27 August 1996	2.322	2.187	2.229	[1]—
10 September 1996	2.287	2.185	2.224	[1]—
24 September 1996	2.362	2.149	2.255	1.940
8 October 1996	2.373	2.150	2.262	1.974
22 October 1996	2.387	2.124	2.261	[1]—
12 November 1996	2.548	2.248	2.321	[1]—
26 November 1996	2.660	2.660	2.660	[1]—
10 December 1996	2.660	2.535	2.660	[1]—
14 January 1997	2.730	2.730	2.730	[1]—
28 January 1997	2.730	2.730	2.730	[1]—
11 February 1997	2.730	2.600	2.730	[1]—
25 February 1997	2.730	2.581	2.730	[1]—

[1] No bids submitted.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*; and if he will list his latest estimates of annual totals for PFI projects, on the same basis as those given in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [20393]

Mr. Boswell: As I explained in my answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 10 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *50*, MAFF's entry for 1999–00 in table 5.5 of the Red Book is an outline estimate for non-PFI procurement only which will be subject to change when PFI tenders have been received.

A breakdown, by project, of the schemes identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book is given in table 1. Current estimates are shown in table 2.

Table 1: Red book figures

£ million

Estimated capital investment	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*Total*
Project:				
Whitehall HQ building (accommodation)	0	0	'70	70

Table 1: Red book figures

£ million

Estimated capital investment	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*Total*
Sea-going research vessel services	0	0	10	10
Total	0	0	80	80

[1] Estimated full project cost.

Table 2: Current revised figures

£ million

Estimated capital investment	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*Total*
Project:				
Whitehall HQ building (accommodation)	0	0	[1]26	26
Sea-going research vessel services	0	0	10	10
Total	0	0	36	36

[1] Estimated expenditure in the first year of the project.

Correspondence

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons his Department has not replied to three letters from Mr. Comrie, the general secretary of the Association of Meat Inspectors, sent to him between June and December 1996. [20516]

Mrs. Browning: Mr. Comrie, general secretary of the Association of Meat Inspectors, wrote to me on 11 February 1997. This followed a meeting I held with the AMI on 16 January 1997 and the subsequent suggestions that the general secretary would write to me. I replied on 12 March 1997.

Aroparcin

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list by livestock species the dates on which the licence for avoparcin's use as a feed antibiotic has been *(a)* revoked and *(b)* reinstated; and if he will make a statement. [20645]

Mrs. Browning: All licences for the use of avoparcin in animal feeding stuffs for all species will be revoked by 1 April 1997. The question of reinstatement does not arise.

Fisheries Organisations (Meetings)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the fishing organisations *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have met since 1 July 1996. [20495]

Mr. Baldry: This information is not held centrally and definitive lists could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. MAFF Ministers and officials have had meetings or other contract with a large number of national, regional and local fishing organisations since 1 July 1996 on a wide variety of matters. These have included:

Aberdeen Fish Producers Organisation;
Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation;
Anglo-Scottish Fish Producers Organisation;
Association of Sea Fisheries Committees;
Atlantic Salmon Trust;
Bideford Fishermen's Association;
British Trout Association
Cornish Fish Producers Organisation;
Cornwall Inshore Fishermen's Association;
Federation of Highlands and Islands Fishermen;
Fife Fish Producers Organisation;
Fish Producers Organisation Limited;
Fisherman's Association Limited;
Fishermen's Federation of Northumberland;
Fleetwood Fish Producers Organisation;
Fleetwood Fishing Forum;
Grimsby Fish Producers Organisation;
Leigh and Southend Fishermen's Association;
Lowestoft Fish Producers Organisation;
Mudeford and District Fishermen's Association
National Federation of Anglers;
National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations;
National Federation of Fishing and Angling Consultatives;
North Atlantic Salmon Fund;
North East Scotland Fish Producers Organisation;
North Sea Fishermen's Producer Organisation;
Northern Ireland Fish Producers Association;
Northern Producers Organisation;
Orkney Fishermen's Association;
Ramsgate Fishermen's Association;
Rye Fishermen's Association;
Salmon and Trout Association;
Scottish Fishermen's Federation;
Scottish Fishermen's Organisation;
Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association;
Shellfish Association of Great Britain;
Shetland Fish Producers Organisation;
South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen Limited;
South Western Fish Producers Organisation;
Southern Commercial Fishermen;
UK Association of Fish Producers Organisations;
Wales and West Coast Fish Producers Organisation;
West Mersea Fishermen's Association;
West of Scotland Fish Producers Organisation;
Whitstable Fishermen's Association;
Yorkshire and Anglia Fish Producers Organisation.

Animal Genome Mapping

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which is the lead Department for *(a)* animal genome mapping in the United Kingdom and *(b)* following up the recommendations of the committee of inquiry on ethics of emerging technologies in breeding of farm animals under the chairmanship of the Rev. Professor Michael Banner. [20421]

Mr. Boswell: *(a)* Whilst there is no one lead Department, research on animal genome mapping is funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Biotechnological and Biological Sciences Research Council. The BBSRC is administered by the

Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry. There is close liaison between MAFF and BBSRC.

(b) The lead Department taking forward the recommendations of the committee to consider the ethical implications of emerging technologies in the breeding of farm animals is MAFF.

DEFENCE

Trafalgar Class Submarines

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place a contract for batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines; and if he will make a statement. [20655]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am pleased to announce that a contract has been placed with GEC-Marconi as prime contractors for the design, build and initial support of three batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines. The new boats will be known as the Astute class, and are expected to enter service early next century. The submarines will be built at GEC-Marconi's VSEL shipyard in Barrow.

The new vessels will be powered by the Rolls Royce PWR2 nuclear reactor, fitted with the updated weapons system of batch 1 Trafalgar class submarines, and armed with the Spearfish torpedo and Submarine-Harpoon anti-ship missile. They will be able to carry conventionally armed Tomahawk cruise missiles. The Astute class will replace the Royal Navy's existing Swiftsure class boats as these vessels reach the end of their operational lives in the early part of the next century. They will perform a wide range of roles including anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare.

The order was won in competition with VSEL, before the company was taken over by GEC-Marconi, and the decision was based on what would provide the best value for money for the taxpayer. The contract will be worth nearly £2 billion to GEC-Marconi and its sub-contractors, and will help to sustain around 7,000 jobs. It has been warmly welcomed by the Royal Navy, and is good news for Barrow and the many sub-contractors who will be working on the project across the UK.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *710–11*, if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*. [20398]

Mr. Soames: I have nothing to add to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *710–11*.

Eskmeals, Shoeburyness and Pendine Ranges

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish the consultative document on the land ranges rationalisation at Eskmeals, Shoeburyness and Pendine; and if he will make a statement. [20190]

Mr. Soames: The range at Pendine is not being reviewed as part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency land ranges rationalisation study, which is considering defence requirements at Eskmeals, Cumbria and Shoeburyness, Essex. In the reply my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, gave my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) on 12 March, *Official Report*, column *234*, he said that he hoped to be in a position to approve the issue of a consultation document on the way ahead within a few weeks, and this remains his intention.

Works of Art

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made for the care and protection of works of art following the publication of the National Audit Office report in March 1996. [20323]

Mr. Soames: My Department has responded positively to the NAO's recommendations. A new system of accountability has been introduced whereby the senior staff who borrow works of art are now held personally responsible for them. Staff who move works of art without permission will lose their entitlement to borrow works and may face disciplinary action. Works of art in our London headquarters buildings are now inspected every night by our guard force and these checks will soon be extended to all our works of art.

The NAO guidance on management of works of art has been circulated throughout the Department and a seminar on this subject will be held during March.

All works of art owned by the Department or borrowed from public collections will be managed centrally and a photographic record has been compiled.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many of the 190 works of art missing from Defence establishments have been located since the publication of the National Audit Office report in March 1996; [20324]

(2) what steps he is taking to recover works of art missing from his Department's establishments. [20325]

Mr. Soames: The National Audit Office report states that, in November 1995, 184 works of art were missing. Of these, 107 were the property of my Department and the remainder were loans from other institutions. Since the publication of the NAO report, two of those belonging to my Department have been found.

Every effort is made to recover missing works of art. Details have been circulated to all staff and an inspector in the Ministry of Defence police has been given responsibility for finding missing works. Photographs of these have been published in my Department's staff magazine with a request that they should be notified to the police inspector if they are identified. We continue to make periodic searches of our buildings.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many paintings have been sold at auction by his Department in each of the past 10 years; and what were the sums realised. [20326]

Mr. Soames: No paintings have been sold at auction by my Department.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the painting of an officer of the 28th Foot on loan from the national army museum has been located. [20327]

Mr. Soames: My Department's response to the National Audit Office report stated that, despite a thorough investigation by the Ministry of Defence police, the portrait of an officer of the 28th Foot has not been found. This remains the case.

Nursery Vouchers (Overseas Personnel)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements his Department is making for those personnel stationed overseas, in respect of the Government's nursery voucher scheme; and if he will make a statement. [20807]

Mr. Soames: My Department is committed to making sure there is no educational disadvantage to families who would otherwise be entitled to receive vouchers if serving in the UK, so it intends to provide, wherever practicable, nursery education for four-year-olds overseas.

The MOD will endeavour to provide the same standard of nursery education as that on offer in the UK, but there will be a difference in the way it is run. In the UK, where there will be open competition between playgroups and schools, parents will potentially have a wide choice of places to use a voucher: overseas, the Service sponsor both schools and playgroups and the choice will inevitably be limited.

Therefore, rather than adopt the voucher system, the MOD intends to provide direct funding to schools and playgroups and nursery education will be free at source for all four-year olds who attend an accredited provider.

It is expected that there will be some locations with both schools and playgroups, some where there are only schools and some where there are only suitable playgroups. To reach the standards required by the Department for Education and Employment scheme, schools and playgroups overseas will need additional staff and training and pass inspection of an accredited authority.

Because the MOD needs to study the various option available to deliver nursery education and obtain funding, it has been necessary to delay introduction overseas from that anticipated in the UK. It is aimed to phase introduction from September 1997 to September 1998.

There will inevitably be some areas overseas, particularly smaller isolated detachments, where it will not be possible to offer the scheme that will be available in countries such as Germany and Cyprus. The MOD is though looking at ways to provide the best possible provisions wherever practicable and within the resources available—some form of voucher system to cover these locations may be considered. However, in some areas it may simply be impossible to provide any facility; parents will be warned of this in advance of being posted to such locations.

Housing (Privates)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average cost to his Department in the last year for which figures are available of housing *(a)* a military local service engagement private 1 and *(b)* a full engagement Regular private 1 band 1. [19730]

Mr. Soame: I regret that the information requested is unavailable in the format requested and figures cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost. Furthermore, the Military Provost Guard Service is only now forming.

Low Flying

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on low flying by the RAF in the vicinity of Seaham on Monday 3 and Tuesday 4 March between 12 noon and 5 p.m; [19941]

(2) if the flight paths of low flying exercises by the RAF now incorporate the vicinity of Seaham. [19944]

Mr. Soames: The RAF police have been tasked to investigate the activity of 3 and 4 March. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State will write to the hon. Member when these inquiries are complete. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Joint Services Defence College

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate his Department has made of the cost of using the temporary site at Bracknell for the joint services defence college. [19893]

Mr. Soames: To enable the joint services command and staff college to use Bracknell as its main interim site, additional capital expenditure estimated of some £10.2 million has been agreed to cover works, including the provision of temporary teaching and living accommodation, IT and relocation costs.

Pied à Terre (Quartermaster General)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of maintaining the pied à terre in London used by the Quartermaster General; and what paintings are located there. [20328]

Mr. Soames: The Quartermaster General does not have a pied à terre in London. He retains a London office on the seventh floor of MOD main building, and the following prints and paintings are hung there:

Paintings

Portrait of Princess Royal by Mark McGregor

Portrait of Duchess of Kent by Mark McGregor

Prints

"O The Roast Beef of Old England" by William Hogarth

"Sustaining Forward" by Terence Cuneo

"Sleigh Post (Russia 1919)" by Terence Cuneo.

Departmental Housing

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many homes are *(a)* currently owned by his Department and *(b)* vacant by local authority area. [20378]

Mr. Soames: There are 69,306 homes owned by the Ministry of Defence in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The information on vacant homes is not held in the form requested and could be only provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the likely costs of making the properties at Mansergh close, Woolwich fit for habitation. [20382]

Mr. Soames: The properties at Mansergh close, Woolwich were passed as surplus to Annington Homes as part of the sale of the married quarter estate. Refurbishment costs are a matter for Annington Homes.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when construction of MOD homes at Mansergh close, Woolwich, was completed; when the properties were first occupied; for what reasons the properties are vacant; and how long they have been vacant. [20380]

Mr. Soames: There are 36 houses at Mansergh close, which were built in the late 1960s and early 1970s and occupied thereafter. The properties were vacated by June 1996, due largely to the reduction in service demand after the closure of the military hospital at Woolwich, and were passed as surplus to Annington Homes as part of the sale of the married quarters.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of Nomura Securities in the disposal of the married quarters estate. [20379]

Mr. Soames: The new owners of the married quarter estate are Annington Homes, a British-based company. MOD's continuing relationship on the married quarter estate is with this company. Finance for the transaction was arranged by Nomura International plc, the European arm of Nomura Securities, not the parent company in Tokyo.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the costs of security for the empty properties at Mansergh close, SE18; and if he will make a statement. [20381]

Mr. Soames: The properties at Mansergh close, SE18 were passed as surplus to Annington Homes as part of the sale of the married quarters estate. The security of these properties is the responsibility of Annington Homes.

Infantry

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the strength of front-line infantry for each of the past 10 years. [20363]

Mr. Soames: The figures for front-line infantry can be provided only for the past four years and are shown below.

Year	*Totals*
1994	28,000
1995	26,000
1996	25,000
1997	24,000

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *185*, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the current front-line infantry establishment to meet its responsibilities. [20362]

Mr. Soames: The infantry is fully able to meet its responsibilities.

Gulf War

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many anthrax vaccine injections were given to British soldiers in the Gulf war; and over what period. [20450]

Mr. Soames: The programme of vaccination against anthrax which was implemented by the MOD for British troops in the Gulf war commenced at the start of January 1991. It consisted of a course of three vaccinations, which were to be administered at 0, three and seven weeks. Owing to deficiencies in contemporary medical record keeping, the exact number of anthrax inoculations given to British soldiers in the Gulf war is not known.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will next meet the Russian Defence Minister. [20806]

Mr. Portillo: At the invitation of Defence Minister Rodionov, I shall be in Moscow on 17–18 March for discussions with him. I also hope to see other members of the Russian Government. We plan to sign a new memorandum of understanding covering bilateral defence co-operation between the United Kingdom and Russia, which will provide a framework for building on the significant bilateral defence relationship established with Russia in recent years.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mobile Telephone Antennae

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the number of masts and antennae required to meet the projected growth in the use of mobile telephones over the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [19826]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The number of telecommunications masts required by an operator depends largely on the future coverage planned by that operator, the future volume of traffic it expects on its network in any specific area, and technological developments in antenna design. No estimates are made of the number of masts required by operators over future years since these factors are commercial matters for each individual operator.

The erection of telecommunications masts is regulated by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the licence issued to operators under the Telecommunications Act 1984. The Government regard mast sharing as highly desirable in order to help keep the number of masts to a minimum, and require mobile phone operators to take all reasonable steps to investigate using an existing mast or other structure before seeking to erect a new mast.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidance he has issued on the installation of antennae required for mobile telephones *(a)* on school buildings and *(b)* on other locations used by (i) children and (ii) the sick; and if he will make a statement. [19827]

Mr. Taylor: We issue no specific guidance on the installation of mobile telecommunications equipment in these locations. The operators of the equipment have a number of recommendations and requirements to follow.

In March of last year, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales published a code of best practice on the installation of radio masts up to 15 m in height using permitted development rights. Installation of radio masts above 15m in height are governed by normal planning guidance.

A Wireless Telegraphy Act licence may specify spectrum performance requirements, for example in relation to frequency assignment and power output. All equipment installed in the UK will have been approved to the relevant national or European—European Telecommunications Standards Institute—standards on performance, and must comply with provisions of the electromagnetic compatibility directive. The operators also follow guidance from the National Radiological Protection Board on exposure to non-ionising radiation.

Precautionary advice concerning possible interference with medical equipment from mobile telecommunications devices used by the public has also been issued by the Department of Health.

Radioactive Materials (Transport)

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the civil police provide escorts for type B containers of civil radioactive materials transported by road at the request of the material's owners; and if he will make a statement. [19937]

Mr. Page: The civil police do not escort type B containers of radioactive materials transported by road. The UK Atomic Energy Authority constabulary escorts these containers when necessary.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the tasks of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority police include escorting type B containers of civil radioactive materials transported by road in the ownership of *(a)* the UKAEA and *(b)* other owners; and if he will make a statement. [19936]

Mr. Page: The UK Atomic Energy Authority constabulary provides escorts for road transport of type B containers holding certain civil radioactive materials owned by or under the control of BNFL, UKAEA and URENCO. The security standards laid down for the physical protection of nuclear material and the need for the material to be escorted are dependent on the type, form and quantity of the material, not the type of container holding it. The standards followed are in accord with international guidelines.

Atomic Energy Authority Police

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the annual cost of the UK Atomic Energy Authority police in the past five years; and what has been its establishment in each of the past five years. [19934]

Mr. Page: The annual costs of the UK Atomic Energy Authority constabulary for the past five years are as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1991–92	18.1
1992–93	18.8
1993–94	17.3
1994–95	17.5
1995–96	17.6

Detailed information on the establishment of the AEAC is published in the AEAC chief constable's annual report. Copies of the 1991–92 and 1992–93 annual reports are available in the Library of the House, and I am arranging for copies of the 1993–94, 1994–95, and 1995–96 annual reports to be placed there. The 1996–97 report will also be placed in the Library of the House when it is published later this year.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his most recent communication with the private sector to draw attention to the problem of the millennium compliance of computer systems. [20122]

Mr. Ian Taylor: This month I am writing to 120,000 chief executives of British businesses to impress upon them the urgency and seriousness of the century date change problem. To help them focus on the main issues, I will set out a check list of seven vital questions which they should ask about the ability of their systems to handle the problem and I will explain how they can get further information.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his most recent discussions with his EU counterparts on the millennium compliance of computer systems. [20123]

Mr. Taylor: At the Telecommunications Council on 6 March, I again raised the problem of the century date change for computer systems. I have also written to Commissioner Bangemann suggesting that the Commission should draw the attention of European industry to the problem and should consider voluntary means of avoiding disruption from the failure of companies to act quickly. I also suggested that the

"Definition of Year 2000 Conformity Requirement" developed by the British Standards Institution should be considered by the International Standards Organisation.

Minimum Wage

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimates he has made of the effect of a minimum wage of £4.26 per hour with 50 per cent. restoration of wage differentials on the number of jobs in the United Kingdom. [20318]

Mr. John M. Taylor: In December 1995, my officials estimated that a minimum wage set at £4.26, as advocated by last year's Trades Union Congress, would lead to the loss of more than 1 million jobs with only half restoration of wage differentials.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *703*, if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*. [20386]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No. Figures for my Department's PFI projects cannot be provided in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Sectary, Lord Chancellor's Department as contracts for the projects referred to in my answer to hon. Member for Darlington, on 6 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *703*, have not yet been signed, except for the Coal Authority's IT system for mining and surface damage reports, and our estimates of the level of private sector investment are therefore commercially sensitive.

Radio Spectrum

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who has been awarded the contract for the management and licensing of the radio spectrum used for making programmes and similar activities. [20989]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I announced on 13 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *269* my intention to appoint a single spectrum management organisation with responsibility for licensing all programme making spectrum.

JFMG Ltd., has been awarded the contract for managing the radio spectrum used for programme making. The award followed competitive tender which the Radiocommunications Agency conducted.

The new contract runs for three years from 1 April, with the option of a two-year extension. JFMG Ltd. is authorised under the Contracting Out (Functions relating to Wireless Telegraphy) Order 1996 to grant, on the Secretary of State's behalf, licences to programme makers. These include programme production companies, broadcaster, outside broadcast companies, film companies, theatres and conference centres, and participants in sporting events.

The new contract will give all programme makers access to the available spectrum on equal terms. It will also allow the more efficient and flexible use of the spectrum in a rapidly developing industry.

The contract replaces arrangements that have operated since 1990. Under them, the spectrum available for programme making has been divided into two distinct pools. Each pool has been managed separately by ASP Frequency Management Ltd. and the Broadcasters' JFMG Ltd. Their contracts terminate on 31 March.

Telecommunications Council

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Telecommunications Council on 6 March. [20990]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I represented the UK at the Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on 6 March.

The Council adopted a directive on licensing in telecommunications. Greece and Germany voted against. Additionally, a decision for EU action on the introduction of satellite personal communication services was adopted without discussion.

There was political agreement to adopting shortly of a common position on a directive concerning the application of open network provision to voice telephony in a competitive environment.

Additionally, the presidency gave a progress report on co-decision procedures under way with the European Parliament and the European Commission made presentations on: a forthcoming Commission communication on universal mobile telecommunications systems; a Commission action plan in the field of satellite communications and on implementation by member states of Community legislation in the telecommunications sector.

I again raised the problem of the century date change for computer systems, having written to Commissioner Bangemann suggesting that the Commission draw European industry's attention to the problem and consider non-legislative means of avoiding disruption within the single market by failure of companies to act quickly.

Scientific Advice

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the use of scientific advice in policy making. [20991]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Scientific advice plays an essential part in policy making. We are today publishing guidelines for good practice in this area, which I am placing in the Library of the House. The guidelines, drawn up by the chief scientific adviser, Sir Robert May, will help Government Departments to maintain the highest standards of integrity and openness in their use of scientific advice. Their publication reinforces our commitment to open government.

The guidelines set out key principles on the use and presentation of scientific advice in policy making. They emphasise the need to identify potentially sensitive issues as early as possible, to draw on a wide range of expert advice and to have a presumption to openness in explaining the interpretation of scientific advice. The guidelines have been drafted in consultation with Government Departments and with the main science academies and the Council for Science and Technology.

Child Labour

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions have taken place within the World Trade Organisation concerning the use of child labour within member countries. [19607]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* The issue of abusive labour practices, including abuse of child labour, was discussed in the context of trade liberalisation objectives at the WTO ministerial conference in Singapore in December 1996. There is, however, no substantive work programme to eliminate abuse of child labour or current discussion taking place within WTO since, as it was agreed in Singapore, this is the proper preserve of the International Labour Organisation.

Unigate

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what industrial development grants *(a)* have been made and *(b)* are under consideration, and for what purposes, to Unigate for its St. Ivel operation in Liverpool. [20126]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* I cannot comment on discussion between individual companies and the Department, as they are commercially confidential.

Business Breakfast Tour

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade with whom he consulted as to the propriety of spending public money on the business breakfast tour; and if he will make a statement. [19247]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The business breakfast initiative aims to develop a dialogue between Government and business at a local level. I took advice on this initiative from my accounting officer and other officials. I have been careful to ensure that all the breakfasts have been strictly confined to presentations of Government policy and providing business representatives the opportunity to express their views.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EU Information Offices

Mr. Lamont: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *425*, if he will list the types of offices the EU has worldwide to disseminate information, indicating *(a)* the number of each type of office and *(b)* what each type costs in pounds sterling. [20061]

Mr. David Davis: Except as noted below, European Commission offices in third countries take the form either of delegations, in countries outside the EU, or representations, in the member states. There are 128 delegations and 23 representations. Most of these 151 posts have some capacity for information activity, though the proportion of this activity to other elements of the posts' work varies, but only in Washington, New York and Tokyo do the delegations' information sections have the title information offices.

In addition, there are 32 EU business centres in Asia and Latin America, whose purpose is to promote trade between the EU and the country concerned; and 250 Euro-Info correspondence centres in the European Economic Area, central and eastern Europe and the Mediterranean area, whose purpose is to act as a link between small and medium-size businesses in the EU and third countries. EBCs and EICCs are not freestanding offices, and are normally run as part of local trade promotion organisations such as chambers of commerce, with which they are generally co-located.

There is no figure readily available showing the disaggregated running costs of the Commission's information activities overseas, but in 1996 the total budget for the running costs of Commission delegations outside the EU was £152 million. Running costs for the four Commission representation offices in the UK were £1.3 million

I gave my right hon. Friend details of the overall budget for all EU information and communication activities in 1997 in my separate answer of 3 March, *Official Report*, column *484*.

In Council discussions of the Commission's budget, we always underline the need for the utmost rigour in all expenditure, including information activity. In recent years, the Council has regularly reduced the relevant budget allocation, but the European Parliament has restored it.

EU–British Constitutional Relationship (Referendum)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is the Government's policy to hold a referendum before a major change in Britain's constitutional relationship with the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [20011]

Mr. David Davis: We have made it clear that we would not accept in the current intergovernmental conference significant constitutional change that would justify a referendum.

However, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 3 April 1996, if the Government decided to apply to join a single European currency during the next Parliament, that decision would be subject to confirmation in a referendum.

Prisoner Swaps

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on prisoner swaps between the United Kingdom and other countries. [20155]

Dr. Liam Fox: We believe that, on humanitarian grounds, prisoners should be able to serve their sentences in their own country.

The UK is party to the Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons and the Commonwealth scheme for the transfer of convicted offenders. In addition, we have bilateral agreements with Thailand and Egypt, and are working to conclude similar arrangements with other countries.

Venezuela (Detainees)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with the families of Stephen Miles and Paul Loseby, currently detained in Venezuela. [20156]

Dr. Liam Fox: The families of both men met Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials on 26 November, and Mr. Miles's father met embassy officials in Caracas on 28 November. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials are in close contact with the families.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to secure the release of Stephen Miles and Paul Loseby, detained in Venezuela; what assessment he has made of the conditions in which they are detained; what representations he has *(a)* made and *(b)* received from the Venezuelan authorities on this matter, indicating the dates of all correspondence; and when he next expects to take measures to secure their release. [20189]

Dr. Fox: The release of James Miles and Paul Loseby is a matter for the Venezuelan authorities.

Following written representations by the British ambassador on 19 November 1996, the two men are being held in La Vega police cells, where conditions are better than in the prison where they would otherwise be held.

That was the last correspondence we have sent to the Venezuelan authorities, from whom we have received no representations.

Overseas Press Service

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with commercial organisations concerning the future of the overseas press service of the Central Office of Information. [20280]

Mr. Hanley: This Department advertised the tender for the future provision of the overseas press service in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* on 16 August 1996. Eleven companies—all British—responded. Following evaluation, six were shortlisted and were visited for on-site presentations and discussions on how they proposed to provide the service if their bid was successful. Negotiations with the preferred bidder are close to finalisation.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to privatise the overseas press service of the Central Office of Information. [20281]

Mr. Hanley: This Department has been working towards privatisation of the overseas press service on 1 April 1997. Negotiations with the preferred bidder are close to finalisation.

St. Helena

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding British dependent territory citizenship from the Legislative Council of St. Helena. [20349]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The Legislative Councillors of St. Helena have addressed a petition to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary on citizenship. We are considering with other Departments what might be done beyond existing arrangements to increase employment opportunities in the UK for St. Helenians. We are replying to the petition accordingly.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the reasons for the Governor of St. Helena not renewing the residence permit of Mr. Mikael Olsson to enable him to extend his stay on St. Helena. [20427]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Mr. Mikael Olsson was a visitor to St. Helena. He did not have a residence permit. After almost a year on the island, his leave to remain as a visitor expired on 8 March. This is a matter between Mr. Olsson and the immigration officer on St. Helena.

Former Yugoslavia (War Crimes)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the individuals indicted as war criminals by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia who have not been arrested; if he will indicate the jurisdiction in which each of these is believed to reside; what actions are being taken by the national Governments responsible for these jurisdictions to carry out UN resolutions regarding the enforcement of tribunal orders; and what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to enforce the tribunal orders through the international peace force in Bosnia-Herzegovina. [20351]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Details of individuals indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and their last known whereabouts have been place in the Libraries of the House.

Those indicated by the tribunal who are still at large are believed to reside in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bosnia-Herzegovina has executed two arrest warrants. It has not arrested any indictees resident in the Republika Srpksa and the Croat part of the federation on the grounds that it lacks control over these areas. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has transferred two witnesses in detention for other reasons to the tribunal. It has not arrested any of the indictees believed to be at large in its territory. The Republic of Croatia has arrested one indictee on its territory, but he has not yet been transferred to the tribunal. Croatia negotiated the voluntary surrender of another indictee to the tribunal. Other indictees in Croatia remain at large.

NATO has decided that the stabilisation force will detain and transfer to the tribunal any indicted individuals with whom they come into contact in the course of their duties and if the situation permits.

Know-how Funds

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the funding being made available from the know-how funds during 1997 and the countries and the type of project such funding is being used for. [20179]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Planned expenditure by the know-how fund in the financial year 1996–97 is as follows:

For projects in:

	£000
Central Europe	
Albania/Macedonia/Slovenia	2,400
Baltic States	2,200
Bosnia/Croatia/FRY	1,750
Bulgaria	2,700
Czech Republic	2,300
Hungary	4,500
Poland	10,600
Romania	5,000
Slovakia	2,500
Regional (multi-country), including Environment KHF	4,600
Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA)	
Kazakhstan	2,000
Russia	28,000
Ukraine	9,000
Other EECA countries	4,600
Regional (including Chancellor's Scheme and Environment KHF)	2,630
Investment schemes (Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia)	2,500

Expenditure is planned at similar levels in 1997–98. The KHF funds projects in a range of sectors, focusing on certain priorities. In the whole region, priorities include financial services, privatisation, small and medium enterprise development, good government and civil society. In central Europe, priorities are also management training, public administration and employment services. In Russia and elsewhere in eastern Europe and central Asia, other priorities are energy, agriculture reform and health management.

Gibraltar

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the EU social protocols apply to Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [19961]

Mr. David Davis: As the EC treaty applies to Gibraltar by virtue of the UK's membership, the agreement of the 14 on social policy annexed to protocol 14 to the EC treaty does not apply there.

Adriactic Section

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those individuals who are not officials of his Department who advise his Department's Adriatic section. [20330]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Officials from eastern Adriatic department consult widely with colleagues in other Government Departments. We do not employ outside advisers in this area.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *703*, if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer tot he hon. Member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*. [20387]

Mr. Hanley: I regret that publication in the form requested would not be appropriate in the case of projects involving this Department since it could prejudice the nature of the competition within the PFI process.

EU Logo

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what EU instrument a decision was made empowering EU institutions to insist on the use of the EU logo by recipients of EU grants; if it was decided by majority voting; and what was Her Majesty's Government's position at the time. [20439]

Mr. David Davis: Council regulation 2082/93 requires that member states ensure adequate publicity is given to measures carried out with financial assistance from the structural funds. Commission decision 94/342/EC sets out the detailed arrangements, including use of the EU logo, in accordance with the Council regulation.

The Council regulation was adopted unanimously as one of a package of six regulations concerning the structural funds.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Castle Buildings Talks

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will specify the powers under which he paid the income tax liabilities of delegates to the Castle Buildings talks; how much was involved; what budget the money came from; and if this facility has been made available to staff. [19929]

Sir Patrick Mayhew *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* Allowances to delegates are paid under the authority of section 6 of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996. For the current financial year, allowances to them for which tax is due will be paid at a grossed-up rate, so that individuals receive sums equivalent to the allowances untaxed. The cost for the current year in respect of the talks will be approximately £109,000. The cost falls under subhead A2 of the Northern Ireland Office vote 1. Staff employed by parties and Governments participating in the talks are not subject to the same regime of allowances, and are not therefore subject to the arrangements above.

Northern Ireland Grand Committee

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to permit the relevant policy-making civil servants to be questioned at Northern Ireland Grand Committee meetings called to discuss draft Orders in Council; and if he will make a statement about the advantages of introducing a process to amend such orders. [18753]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: No. Since it is Ministers, not civil servants, who make policy, it is for Ministers, not civil servants, to account to Parliament for the Government's legislative proposals.

Orders in council are, by their nature, unamendable once laid before the House, but in respect of Northern Ireland there are already consultation procedures, including discussion in the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, which give ample opportunity to those who wish to register their views on legislative provisions while they are still in draft form, and for Ministers to take due note of such views.

Hip Joint Operations

Mr. A Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what age criteria apply to the allocation of hip joint operations. [20364]

Mr. Moss: There are no age criteria for those seeking hip joint operations.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns 721–22, if he will provide figures for this Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*. [20392]

Sir John Wheeler: The table gives an update to the figures included in my answer to the hon. Member for Darlington on 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *721–22*. The figures show the current estimate of what NI Departments expect to be agreed. The list is subject to variation as project time scales may change, new projects may arise and some of those listed may not be taken forward if they fail the value for money test:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–00*
Bangor and Kinnegar sewage treatment works	7	6	7
Hydro electric project	1	0	0
Sewage treatment works tranche 2	0	0	19
Westlink urban motorway	0	0	10
Motorway emergency telephone system	0	4	2
Strangford ferry replacement	0	2	1
Accommodation Holywood road, social security office	0	3	0
Accommodation Hydebank	0	4	5
DVTA vehicle testing project	0	4	0
Land Registry IT system	0	2	0
Planning service IT system	1	0	0
Antrim bus station/library	0	1	1
Ulsterbus/Citybus bus replacement	0	0	10
Northern Ireland railways class 80 rolling stock replacement	0	0	0
Ulster folk and transport museum visitors centre	3	0	0
North-west institute of further and higher education	3	4	0
Belfast institute of further and higher education	0	5	5
St. Genevieve's high school	0	3	4
Drumglass high school	0	3	2
Wellington college	0	3	2
Balmoral high school	0	3	0
Other education projects not yet confirmed	0	0	12
Refurbishment/replacement schemes at the Altnagelvin, Downe, Royal and Causeway hospitals	3	9	13
Belfast city hospital renal unit	3	0	0
Belfast city hospital car parking facilities	2	0	0
Miscellaneous equipment leases	1	2	2
Clinical waste disposal	3	0	0
Royal group of hospitals theatres and intensive care equipment	2	0	0
Total	29	58	95

PRIME MINISTER

Refuge Projects (Funding)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister (1) which Departments have funded children and homeless charities central London refuge projects providing temporary havens for children in the last 15 years; [20406]

(2) if he will estimate the central Government share of the average costs of providing four days refuge in a safe supervised haven project for a child aged under 16 years in central London; [20408]

(3) when Ministers last discussed the need for and possible means of funding temporary safe havens for runaway children below the age of 16 years in central London; [20407]

(4) if he will review the practicality of instigating a central London children's refuge empowered to negotiate a cost contribution with individual social services departments in order to admit a child on the first day of need. [20409]

The Prime Minister: The Department of Health has funded children and homeless charities in London on projects providing a refuge for children as defined in the Children Act 1989. Figures are not available to estimate the central Government share of the average cost of providing four days' refuge, but the Department of Health has provided £300,000 over four years in respect of the London-based Centrepoint Glaxo refuge. Department of Health Ministers have met and discussed funding arrangements with voluntary organisations running the London refuge on several occasions; the last meeting was in September 1996. The Government have introduced legislation that enables the establishment of refuges that provide safe havens for children who appear to be at risk of harm. It is for local authorities and other agencies to work together to provide strategic solutions to the provision and funding of services for children in need—including young runaways. The Department of the

Environment, as part of the rough sleepers initiative in central London, has funded Centrepoint in providing accommodation for young people, usually 18 to 25-year-olds, at a hostel in Vauxhall and for its "Off the Streets" project in Soho. DOE funding for the Vauxhall hostel is £165,000 in 1996–97. In addition, Centrepoint receives funding to provide emergency shelters for young people aged 25 years and under between December and March as part of the annual winter shelter programme under the RSI. In 1996–97, the DOE is funding Centrepoint to run a winter shelter in King's Cross, providing up to 48 bedspaces.

Roisin McAliskey

Dr. Godman: To ask the Prime Minister what representations Her Majesty's Government have recently received from the German Government concerning the imprisonment in Holloway prison of Ms Roisin McAliskey; and if he will make a statement. [20426]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, none.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Birthing Partner (Definition)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the definition of a birthing partner within the Home Office prison regulations. [19715]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the definition of a birthing partner within the Home Office Prison Regulations.

The Prison Service has not sought to define a birthing partner outside of any definition used elsewhere. The Prison Service interprets the term birthing partner as referring to someone who will be present during the whole period of labour to provide emotional support to the mother.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on whose authority a label was attached to newspapers sent to Ms Roisin McAliskey stating that they were not to be issued to her until she complained or a parliamentary question was tabled. [19716]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about a label attached to newspapers sent to Ms Roisin McAliskey.

Ms McAliskey, like all prisoners, may receive any newspapers she requires from a local newsagent. She is not allowed to receive newspapers direct through the post. On one occasion newspapers were received in the post. They were not issued but kept so that they could be handed to her family when they visited. Again, this is standard practice with items received for prisoners which they may not have.

A sticker had been attached to the newspapers stating that the papers should not be issued until a complaint was received or a Question asked.

As soon as this was brought to the governor's attention he ordered an immediate investigation under the terms of the Prison Service Code of Discipline. The member of staff responsible for this extremely ill judged and wholly unacceptable behaviour has been orally reprimanded and warned about future behaviour.

I apologise unreservedly for this woeful episode. I am satisfied that swift and appropriate action was taken to deal with the incident.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *214*, what decisions have been made concerning arrangements for the care of Roisin McAliskey's baby should she give birth while still in prison; and if those decisions were an operational or policy matter. [20072]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the decision as to whether Roisin McAliskey may keep her baby with her at Holloway prison.

Roisin McAliskey applied on 14 February to be located on the Mother and Baby Unit at Holloway with her baby after it is born. Her application was considered, following the normal processes which apply to all expectant mothers, by the Admissions Board at Holloway, who considered the views of independent experts in the development needs of babies, as well as logistical issues.

The Assessment Board has now advised the Governor that Roisin McAliskey's application should be approved, the Governor has recommended approval and this recommendation has been accepted by the Operational Director responsible for Holloway. Ms McAliskey has been told that she may keep her baby with her after the birth. She will, as do all other mothers, have to sign a compact agreeing to be of reasonable behaviour and to co-operate with the ethos and regime of the Unit. Babies in the Unit normally remain with their mothers until the age of nine months.

The decision to allow Roisin McAliskey to keep her baby has followed the standard procedures and processes that would apply to any other prisoner.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the alterations in the prison regime and rules governing the treatment of Roisin McAliskey subsequent to her recategorisation. [20019]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the alterations to the treatment of Roisin McAliskey following her recategorisation.

Following a routine review of her security status Roisin McAliskey remains a Category A prisoner but has been downgraded from high risk to standard risk within that category. As a result some of the security arrangements which have been in operation have been relaxed.

The number of strip searches to which Roisin McAliskey had been subject has been reduced and she is no longer being strip searched before and after every open visit within the prison. She is now only being strip searched on the same basis as all other prisoners at Holloway. This means before leaving the prison for court appearances and on return to the prison; as part of a cell search and drug testing procedures; on a random basis; or if there were reasonable suspicion she had secreted something about her person. These arrangements took effect on 7 March.

Further relaxations as a consequence of the security review will take effect from 13 March. As a result, she will be able to attend chapel, to use the gym and the swimming pool, and to attend ante-natal classes with other prisoners. The number of overnight security checks will be reduced so that the light in her cell can be extinguished for most of the night.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *430*, if he will support the request of Roisin McAliskey to be accompanied by two close relatives during her confinement should she remain remanded in custody. [20020]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the request of Roisin McAliskey to be accompanied by two close relatives during her confinement.

As I stated in my reply to your previous question, we have already agreed to Ms McAliskey's request. She will be allowed to have the birthing partners she has requested unless the hospital staff raise any objection on medical grounds.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the security categorisation given to Roisin McAliskey; and if the determination of such categorisation is an operational or policy matter. [20018]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the security categorisation of Roisin McAliskey.

Both Ministers and the Prison Service have received numerous representations on Ms McAliskey's behalf, and many of these refer to the conditions in which she is being held. These conditions stem, in part from her status as a category A prisoner.

The decision as to the appropriate security category for an individual prisoner is an operational one. Ms McAliskey's security category was set after consideration of the reason for her detention and the risk she would pose should she escape from custody. Her security category is kept under regular review and was recently changed from category A (high risk) to category A (standard risk).

Prisons (Drugs)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers, or other prison staff, have been disciplined or dismissed as a result of being involved in the supply of drugs in prisons, for such recent years as figures are available; and whether criminal prosecutions were brought in such cases. [19760]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about how many prison officers, or other prison staff, have been disciplined or dismissed as a result of being involved in the supply of drugs in prisons, for such recent years as figures are available; and whether criminal prosecutions were brought in such cases.

Since the introduction of the new Prison Service Code of Conduct and Discipline in July 1993 (which required that the outcome of all disciplinary cases should be reported to Headquarters), centrally-held records show that no members of staff have been disciplined for involvement in the supply of drugs in prisons.

However, in one case a member of staff was dismissed after he was found to be in possession of cannabis in the prison club. Three members of staff were dismissed as a result of criminal convictions involving possession of drugs, but these concerned incidents away from the prison. And, in a further two cases, members of staff resigned before any disciplinary action could be taken over allegations of illegal possession of drugs, again away from the prison.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many investigations have been carried out by the Prison Service Agency, since its inception, into allegations of the involvement of prison officers in the supply of drugs in prisons. [19762]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Sir Ivan lawrence, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of investigations which have been carried out by the Prison Service Agency, since its inception, into allegations of the involvement of prison officers in the supply of drugs in prison.

I regret that this information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, any such allegations would be fully investigated and the appropriate action taken, including referral to the police.

Prisoners (Purposeful Activity)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 January to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), *Official Report*, column *352–66*, on the levels of purposeful activity in individual prisons, for what reason the figures for privately managed prisons for 1995–96 were not included; and if he will make a statement on his policy towards the release of information relating to privately managed prisons. [19043]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking about purposeful activity at privately managed prisons in 1995–96 and about what information is released about these prisons.

The figures for 1995–96 are not available on a monthly basis. The average hours per prisoner per week spent on purposeful activity in each contracted prison in 1995–96 were:

Prison[1]	*Average hours per week purposeful activity*[2]
Blakenhurst	25
Doncaster	24
Wolds	29

[1] Figures are not available for Buckley Hall as it was not fully operational during 1995–96.

[2] These figures were published in October 1996 in the Home Office Economics Unit's review of comparative costs and performance of privately and publicly operated prisons in 1995–96.

All four contracted prisons have been providing figures for purposeful activity on a monthly basis from April 1996.

The Prison Service releases all available information about contracted prisons that is not confidential. Information may be confidential for different reasons. It may be because the information is commercially confidential or because of reasons that apply equally to all prisons such as information about security.

Holloway Prison

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what occasions *(a)* remand and *(b)* convicted prisoners in HMP Holloway are required to be strip searched; if he will place in the Library the regulations concerning how such body searches should be carried out; what training is given to officers to ensure such searches are conducted in accordance with the law; if prisoners who are pregnant are exempt from such body searches; and if he will make a statement. [19739]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Max Madden, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about strip searching of prisoners.

Both remand and convicted prisoners at Holloway are strip searched on first reception, before leaving the prison on any escort, and on their subsequent return; when their cells are searched in accordance with the local searching strategy (roughly once a month); and if they are received into the segregation unit. In addition, prisoners are liable to random strip searches after visits. The governor may also require a strip search on any occasion when this is necessary for security.

The regulations covering strip searches are contained in Prison Rule 39, and in the Prison Service Manual on Security, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Prison officers are trained in the authorised procedures for strip searching on their initial training course and receive refresher training as required.

Pregnant women are not exempt from strip searches.

Strip searching is a routine and necessary security measure to which all prisoners are subject. It enables prison officers to detect items of contraband, such as drugs or a weapon, which may be concealed about the person. It is not possible to detect some illicit items by use of X-ray portals or hand-held metal detectors.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* remand and *(b)* convicted prisoners, detained at Her Majesty's prison Holloway over the last year have been required to authorise the destruction of flowers sent to them; and what arrangements exist for prisoners to request that flowers which they have received are placed in other parts of the prison. [19741]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Max Madden, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the requirement for prisoners to authorise the destruction of flowers sent to them at Holloway prison and the arrangements for prisoners to request that flowers are placed in other parts of the prison.

No prisoners have been required to authorise the destruction of flowers at Holloway prison. There are no established arrangements for prisoners to request that flowers they have received are placed in other parts of the prison.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the education programmes at HMP Holloway in 1997; what assessment he has made of the impact of those plans on prisoners, with particular reference to the amount of time spent confined to cells; and if he will make a statement. [19745]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Max Madden, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about education programmes at Holloway prison.

There are no plans to make any changes to the level of educational provision at Holloway prison during 1997. There is currently an average of 80 prisoners on the daytime programme, studying for 21 hours a week. There is an average of 18 prisoners on evening classes for 6 hours a week.

The average time a prisoner at Holloway prison is unlocked is currently 10.5 hours per weekday.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances *(a)* remand and *(b)* convicted prisoners, detained at HMP Holloway, are required to accept deductions from income in respect of board and lodging charges; and if he will make a statement. [19742]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Max Madden, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about deductions of income at Holloway prison in respect of board and lodging charges.

Deductions are made from prisoners in jobs where they are paid 'real wages'. These prisoners contribute 25 per cent of their earnings to the prison—up to a maximum of £24 a week.

There are currently six prisoners employed full-time in such positions, each earning an average of approximately £75 a week. In addition, up to 40 prisoners are employed on a casual basis earning on average approximately £20 a week.

With the exception of one of the full-time positions—which involves working outside the prison and is therefore restricted to convicted prisoners—these jobs are open to both convicted and unconvicted prisoners.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, column 699, if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*. [20388]

Mr. Howard: A breakdown by project of the Home Office's private finance initiative schemes, as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book, is given in table 1. Current estimates for the projects are shown in table 2.

Table 1: Red Book figures

£ million

Estimated capital investment	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*Total*
Bridgend Prison	37.0	0	0	37.0
Fazakerley Prison	37.0	0	0	37.0
Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) caseworking information technology system	21.0	0	0	21.0
Lowdham Grange Prison	24.0	0	0	24.0
Home Office Large Major Enquiry System II (information technology system)	0.5	0	0	0.5
Cookham Wood, Secure Training Centre (STC)	6.0	0	0	6.0
Gringley (STC)	10.0	0	0	10.0
Medomsley (STC)	5.0	5.0	0	10.0
Onley (STC)	5.0	5.0	0	10.0
STC 5	5.0	5.0	0	10.0
Design, Construct, Manage and Finance (DCMF) 3 (Prison)	6.0	37.0	37.0	80.0
DCMF 4 (Prison)	0	6.0	37.0	43.0
IND Detention Accommodation (South East District)	1.0	0	0	1.0
IND Detention Accommodation (Heathrow)	0	14.0	0	14.0
Home Office SW1 estate	10.0	30.0	10.0	50.0
Prisons/boilerhouses	9.0	3.0	0	12.0
Prisons/kitchens	8.0	0	0	8.0
Prisons/heath centres	3.0	0	0	3.0
Prisons major refurbishments	12.0	12.0	0	24.0
Prisons/other	2.0	0	0	2.0
Prisons/health information technology	0	6.0	0	6.0
Public Safety Radio Communications Project	0	10.0	40.0	50.0
Total	201.5	133.0	124.0	458.5

Table 2: Current revised figures

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1990–00*	*Total*
Bridgend prison	35.0	0	0	35.0
Fazakerley prison	41.0	0	0	41.0
Immigration and nationality directorate (IND) caseworking information technology system	21.0	0	0	21.0
Lowdham grange prison	24.0	0	0	24.0
Home office large major enquiry system II (information technology system)	0.5	0	0	0.5
Cookham wood, secure training centre (STC)	7.0	0	0	7.0
Gringley (STC)	10.0	0	0	10.0
Medomsley (STC)	3.0	7.0	0	10.0
Onley (STC)	10.0	0	0	10.0
STC 5	2.0	8.0	0	10.0
Design, Construct, Manage and Finance (DCMF) 3 (Prison)	6.0	35.0	35.0	76.0
DCMF 4 (Prison)	6.0	35.0	35.0	76.0
IND detention accommodation (South East District)	1.0	0	0	1.0
IND detention accommodation (Heathrow)	0	14.0	0	14.0
Home Office SW1 estate	10.0	30.0	10.0	50.0
Prisons/boilerhouses	12.0	9.0	9.0	30.0
Prisons/kitchens	10.0	6.0	6.0	22.0
Prisons/health centres	0	1.0	1.0	2.0
Prisons/other	2.0	2.0	2.0	6.0
Prisons/health information technology	0	6.0	0	6.0
Public safety radio communications project	0	10	40	50
Total	200.5	163	138	501.5

Special Secure Units

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, columns *289–90*, if he will list those recommendations which have been implemented through amendments to the SSU operating standards; if he will introduce a system of open visits which incorporates measures to prevent the smuggling of unauthorised items to prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [20365]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the implementation of the recommendations of the Acheson Report.

The following recommendations have been implemented through amendments to the special secure unit (SSU) Operating Standards:

Recommendation 1

Given the short duration of the present regime it is premature to come to a firm conclusion on its impact on prisoners health. We therefore advised that the general health of prisoners contained in SSUs be reviewed at regular intervals, taking into account their degree of susceptibility to psychological symptoms.

Response

The Operating Standards have been amended to require that in future medical officers should undertake formal reviews of the health of prisoners detained in the SSU every three months.

Recommendation 2

A standard set of procedures applicable to all SSUs should be devised, circulated to all parties and enforced to ensure the most expeditious transfer of prisoners requiring emergency treatment to NHS hospitals.

Response

The Operating Standards have been amended to emphasise the importance of prompt action.

Recommendation 6

Sentence planning should be introduced as with other long term prisoners.

Response

The overriding consideration in determining the length of time a prisoner spends in the Unit must be security. However, the Operating Standards have been amended to provide that regular formal review of SSU prisoners should be introduced (linked to Recommendation 1 above) to cover health, behaviour and attitude, etc.

The following recommendation has not been implemented:

Recommendation 8

It is the unanimous view of the group that in the interests of health prisoners in the SSUs should have access to open visits with members of immediate family.

Response

The Prison Service has considered Sir Donald Acheson's recommendation that prisoners in SSUs should have access to open visits with members of their immediate family. The Service has made numerous improvements to the security of SSUs but closed visits represent the only guaranteed means of preventing the passage of unauthorised items between prisoner and visitors. Closed visits therefore remain a necessary security measure.

The remaining recommendations endorsed existing policy.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place *(a)* the 1989 Home Office research and planning unit report into special secure units and *(b)* the 1990 report of the board of visitors of HMP Leicester on the special secure unit in the Library. [20058]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the 1989 Home Office Research and Planning Unit Report on special secure units and the 1990 Board of Visitors report on the special secure unit at Leicester.

A copy of the 1989 Research and Planning Unit report was sent to the Library at the time of publication. The 1990 Leicester Board of Visitors report was not published. The decision on whether to publish a report from a local board of visitors to the Home Secretary rests with the board itself.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if provision of a minimum period of undisturbed rest within a reasonably dark environment for the purpose of sleep is a right or a privilege within a special secure unit; and what opportunities are available to a prisoner to complain about frequent or unnecessary interruptions of their pattern of sleep. [19940]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the provision of a minimum period of sleep for prisoners in a special secure unit.

Exceptional risk Category A prisoners in SSUs (and other Category A prisoners elsewhere) are observed at hourly intervals throughout the night for security reasons. Observation takes place from outside the cell to avoid disturbing the prisoner by opening the cell door or switching on the main cell lights.

Prisoners in SSUs have access to the same grievance procedures as other prisoners. Complaints may be made orally to prison staff or in writing in accordance with the Prison Service request and complaints procedure. Prisoners may also refer complaints and grievances to the Board of Visitors or the Prisons Ombudsman. Complaints may also be lodged via members of parliament, legal representatives, embassies (where appropriate) and others.

Prisons (Open Visits)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances a prison governor may exercise his discretion in granting an open visit to a prisoner normally on a closed visit regime. [20059]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the circumstances under which a prison governor may exercise discretion in granting an open visit to a prisoner normally on a closed visit regime.

In general, governors have discretion under Prison Standing Order 5 to impose closed visits in respect of any prisoner where security or control considerations so require. The imposition and removal of this class of closed visit restriction, for prisoners who are not categorised as Exceptional Escape risk, is entirely at the discretion of the prison governor.

All visits to Exceptional Escape risk prisoners will normally take place under closed conditions. An open visit may be authorised in exceptional circumstances by an operational Director of the Prison Service. In doing so he will seek advice from the prison governor.

Court Welfare Service

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what rules exist concerning the use of probation service staff to act as the family court welfare service; what alternative sources of court welfare officers exist; and what guidance exists concerning the way in which such officers operate. [20076]

Mr. Sackville: Rule 20 of the Probation Rules 1984—Statutory Instrument 1984 No. 647—as amended, requires probation committees to assign probation officers to act as court welfare officers; and rule 35 sets out the duties which officers so assigned should undertake at the request of a court. Under section 7 of the Children Act 1989, a court may ask either a probation officer or a local authority for a welfare report. Parties to proceedings under the Act may also obtain their own reports. The principal guidance on the probation service's family court welfare work which the Home Office has issued is contained in "National Standards"—a copy of which is in the Library—which was published in 1994 and to which were annexed a number of High court family division practice directions.

Prison Medical Examinations (Video-recording)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *428*, if he will take steps to ensure that video-recording equipment is positioned in such a way as to demonstrate that it is not being used. [19939]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question on the use of video recording equipment.

It is not anticipated that equipment of the kind that could potentially be used for video recording medical consultations with prisoners would ever be a permanent feature of a room within a prison. As noted in the Answer given on 28 February, permission to video record prisoners undergoing medical consultation would only exceptionally be given, and then only with the consent and knowledge of the individual prisoners concerned and awareness that a video recorder was in use.

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on which occasions a category A prisoner has been patriated to *(a)* Ireland and *(b)* other countries to complete sentences in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [20366]

Miss Widdecombe: Since the Republic of Ireland brought into effect the Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons on 1 November 1995, six category A prisoners have been repatriated there. The repatriations took place on the following dates:

One on 14 May 1996:

One on 21 May 1996:

Three on 13 November 1996:

One on 19 December 1996.

Within the last five years, two category A prisoners have been repatriated to Italy. These repatriations took place on 11 November 1992 and 13 June 1996.

Colchester Young Offenders' Institute

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many inmates are currently resident at Her Majesty's young offenders' institute Colchester; [19917]

(2) what are the weekly running costs at Her Majesty's young offenders institute Colchester; [19918]

(3) what are the estimated running costs for the first full year at Her Majesty's young offenders institute Colchester. [19919]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your three recent Questions about inmate numbers and costs at Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution Colchester.

On Tuesday 11 March there were 11 young offenders at Colchester, all of whom were members of the first intake which arrived at the young offender institution on the day it opened, 20 February. Further intakes will bring the population to 32.

The current estimated running costs for the financial year 1 April 1997 to 30 March 1998 are £1,006,000 which is equivalent to an average weekly rate of £19,293. These figures exclude an estimated charge of £114,292 made by the Ministry of Defence for rental of the accommodation and a contribution in lieu of rates.

Scientific Procedures (Dogs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the suppliers of the dogs from non-designated sources in the United Kingdom supplied to establishments licensed to carry out scientific procedures during 1995. [20661]

Mr. Sackville: Disclosure is prohibited under section 24(1) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are taken to ensure that dogs supplied from non-designated sources in the United Kingdom during 1995 to establishments licensed to carry out scientific procedures were purpose bred. [20660]

Mr. Sackville: Non-designated sources in the United Kingdom do not supply dogs purpose bred for research use.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many establishments licensed to carry out procedures under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1968 were granted exemptions under article 10(3) to allow the use of non-purpose bred dogs in 1995. [20662]

Mr. Sackville: One establishment was granted permission to use non-purpose bred dogs.

Civil Protection Exercises

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current schedule of European civil protection exercises; how many members of his Department are or will be involved in each such exercise; what is the cost to his Department of each such exercise; what are the scenarios of such exercises; and if he will make a statement about the purpose of such exercises. [20457]

Mr. Sackville: There are no European civil protection exercises currently planned.

Immigration Status Inquiry Unit

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the immigration status inquiry unit was set up; how many staff it has; how many (i) local authorities and (ii) other bodies have now registered with it; how many people suspected of immigration offences have been notified to it in each month since it was set up; in how many such cases *(a)* enforcement action has been taken and *(b)* the suspicion proved to be unfounded; and what was the average length of time taken to provide the information requested. [20628]

Mr. Kirkhope: The immigration status inquiry unit dates from the late 1970s, although it was known as the overstayer tracing and information section until 1994.

The unit currently has a complement of 42 administrative staff. A total of 251 local authorities, principally housing authorities, have registered with it. Other bodies do not register as such but may receive information from immigration and nationality directorate records only where they have an entitlement within established disclosure policy. The remainder of the information requested is not available.

Emergency Planning College Group

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the members of the emergency planning college liaison group, *(b)* the dates of meetings of the group since April 1992 and *(c)* the dates of future scheduled meetings of the group; and if he will make a statement about the purpose and remit of the group. [20458]

Mr. Sackville: The emergency planning college liaison group exists to provide a forum for discussion between the emergency planning unit of the Home Office, and representatives of the Home departments, and representatives of organisations drawing upon the services and facilities of the Home Office emergency planning college, on the college's approach and programme. Details of the membership of the group, as currently notified to the Home Office, and the dates of meetings of the group since April 1992 are as follows. I understand that no date has yet been fixed for the next meeting of the group.

Members of the emergency planning college liaison group

Name	
Mrs. S. Street	Director, Fire and Emergency Planning Directorate
Miss S. Paul	Head, Emergency Planning Division
Mr. A. Blackley	Principal, Emergency Planning College
Mr. D. Bawtree	Civil Emergencies Advisor
Mr. A. Lawrence	Emergency Planning Unit
Dr. M. Rooke	Emergency Planning College
Commander D. Morris	Cabinet Office
Mrs. M. Gunn	Scottish Office
Mr. W. Clements	Northern Ireland Office
Councillor R. Binnie	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)
Councillor L. Byron	Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Mr. M. Brangwin	Association of London Government
Mr. G. Essery	Society of Industrial Emergency Services Officers (SIESO)
Ms S. Green	Association of County Councils
Mr. J. Herrick	Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association (CACFOA)
Chief Inspector N. Johnstone	Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)
Major Gen. R. Keightley	Health Authorities
Mr. D. Larkin	Ambulance Services Association
Miss C. Pointer	Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)
Councillor E. Robertson	Association of District Councils
Mr. S. Turney	Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA)
Mr. J. Williams	Emergency Planning Society

Emergency Planning College Liaison Group Meetings since April 1992:

Tuesday 12 January 1993
Thursday 25 March 1993
Tuesday 9 November 1993
Tuesday 8 November 1994
Thursday 15 June 1995
Thursday 29 February 1996.

Prisons (Operational Emergencies)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since 1 April

1996 operational emergencies have been declared in prisons under bulletin 8, paragraph 7; if he will list the prisons concerned; and what were the reasons. [20462]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 17 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to answer your recent Question about operational emergencies declared in prisons.

Fresh Start Bulletin 8 paragraph 17 refers to an operational emergency as being one reason among others for asking staff to work longer than the sum of their conditioned hours.

No central record is kept of the occasions where this happens nor is there a requirement for local records to be kept of additional staff attendance required by such emergencies.

This information therefore, could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Metropolitan Police Manpower

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, columns *429–30*, how many Metropolitan police officers were on court duty and excluded from the figure for 1 April 1992. [19483]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 10 March 1997]*: The commissioner informs me that on 1 April 1992 there were approximately 530 officers on court duty who were recorded on divisional strength.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *322*, what adjustments are made to account for postcode boundaries cutting across the boundaries of county police forces in police funding formulas in using ACORN—a classification of residential neighbourhoods—and what adjustments have been made in the S12 and S31 post code areas. [19611]

Mr. Howard: I regret that my earlier answer suggested wrongly that the ACORN—a classification of residential neighbourhoods—classifications used in the police funding formula were based on post code areas. The ACORN data provided to my Department by CACI Ltd. for use in the police funding formula is constructed from census information collected at the level of enumeration districts. No adjustments are, therefore, necessary in respect of post code boundaries cutting across the boundaries of county police forces.

Fire Authorities (PFI Projects)

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which schemes submitted by fire authorities have been selected as private finance initiative pathfinder projects. [20743]

Mr. Sackville: I am delighted to announce that the following eight projects have been selected as pathfinders:

Fire Stations:

Cornwall County Fire Brigade

Lancashire County Fire Brigade

Greater Manchester County Fire Service

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Training:

Avon Fire Brigade, Gloucestershire

Fire and Rescue Service and Somerset Fire Brigade (joint project)

South Wales Fire Service

Vehicles:

London Fire Brigade

Communications:

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service

Each of these projects will receive up to £70,000 in financial assistance in 1997–98 towards consultancy costs incurred by the brigades in taking them forward. The experience of these pathfinder projects will also assist the fire service generally to take full advantage of the potential of the private finance initiative to help meet brigades' capital requirements.

A total of 21 projects were submitted by fire authorities for consideration for financial assistance as pathfinders. This was an excellent response and clearly demonstrates the willingness of the fire service to consider positively and imaginatively how private finance can help meet its needs. We shall continue to provide advice and assistance to all brigades in exploiting the initiative.

Unrepresented Defendants (Personal Cross-examinations)

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to protect victims of rape and other offences from being personally cross-examined by unrepresented defendants; and if he will make a statement. [20741]

Mr. Howard: The Government wish to take steps to prevent the ordeal experienced by some victims of rape and other offences who have been personally cross-examined in court by unrepresented defendants. Therefore, we have undertaken a review into whether the prohibition on the cross-examination of child witnesses by unrepresented defendants in cases of sexual offences, violence and cruelty, which was introduced by the Criminal Justice Act 1991, should be extended to other cases.

In light of that review, I have concluded that it would be right for a discretionary scheme prohibiting unrepresented defendants from cross-examining vulnerable victims to be available to the courts for use in appropriate circumstances. Where a prohibition was imposed, cross-examination could be conducted only by a legal representative of the defendant.

Details of how the scheme would work, including the offences to which it should apply, will be considered further as part of the wide-ranging review of court procedures for vulnerable witnesses which was announced

by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, on 23 January. This will enable the scheme to be developed in a co-ordinated way, alongside other issues covered by that review.

It is vital to encourage witnesses to come forward to give evidence against offenders and the Government have continually introduced measures to improve the treatment of victims and witnesses by the criminal justice system. A discretionary scheme to prevent cross-examianton by unrepresented defendants in appropriate cases is consistent with the Government's approach and will provide a valuable addition to existing witness protection measures.

Radioactive Material

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the owners of radioactive materials in transit are responsible for the cost of civil police escorts; and if he will make a statement. [19938]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

The civil police are not involved in the escort of radioactive materials and therefore no costs are incurred.

TRANSPORT

Bray's Detective Agency

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department has paid to date to Bray's detective agency for monitoring road protests. [19226]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 17 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking how much has been paid to Bray's Detective Agency for monitoring road protests.

Bray's Detective Agency are employed as evidence gatherers by Treasury Solicitors on behalf of the Department. To date they have been paid £2,263,314.60 (including VAT, where applicable).

M6 Flyover (Walsall)

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instruct his staff to inspect the M6 flyover crossing the Darlaston road in Walsall for leakage of rainwater on to the gardens of the houses below or near the structure. [19920]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Bruce George, dated 17 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent question about the leakage of rainwater onto the gardens of the houses below or near the M6 fly-over crossing the Darlaston Road in Walsall.

I am arranging for a representative from our Agent Authority, Staffordshire County Council, to inspect the structure.

Motor Cycle Safety

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will extend the testing of road construction products in respect of the safety of cars to cover the safety of motorcyclists. [20087]

Mr. Watts: No. Many construction products are already tested for their suitability in terms of safety and other requirements in a general way that covers all classes of vehicle.

In the case of construction products which aim to restrain or redirect errant vehicles, testing is not undertaken specifically in respect of motor cycles as it has not been possible to devise a test that is both appropriate and repeatable because of the instability of motor cycles under such conditions. The development of tests in the UK and Europe has concentrated, therefore, on the performance of such products when impacted by cars and heavier vehicles.

London Transport (Customer Satisfaction Surveys)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the customer satisfaction surveys carried out on behalf of *(a)* London Buses Ltd. and *(b)* London Underground Ltd. [20429]

Mr. Bowis: The Department receives regular reports from London Transport concerning customer perceptions of service performance for both Buses and Underground. I understand that London Buses is considering whether to replace its current household survey with an interview survey of passengers alighting from buses. This new methodology would be similar to the one which London Underground has been using since 1990.

Rail Services (Nomura Securities)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what involvement Nomura Securities has in Angel Trains Contracts; and if he will make a statement; [20412]

(2) if he will make a statement on the role of Nomura Securities in respect of railway services in the United Kingdom. [20413]

Mr. Watts: Nomura International plc, the UK-based wholly owned subsidiary of Nomura Securities Company Ltd., arranged, underwrote and participated in the funding of the consortium called GRS Holding Company Ltd., who contracted to acquire Angel Trains Contracts in November 1995.

Bus Working Group

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish all the reports from the service provision and quality sub-group of the bus working group. [20430]

Mr. Watts: The work of the service provision and quality sub-group contributes to the on-going discussions of the bus working group. The remit of the sub-group does not include the production of reports for publication.

PFI Projects

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *713*, if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*. [20385]

Mr. Watts: No.

Terminal 5 Inquiry

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's evidence to the Heathrow terminal 5 inquiry with particular reference to the advantages of the M25 being widened to dual 5–6 between junctions 12 and 15. [20293]

Mr. Watts: The Department has not provided, and does not intend to provide, evidence to the terminal 5 inquiry on the justification for the proposed widening of the M25 between junctions 12 and 15.

Spofforth Bypass

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made towards constructing the Spofforth bypass in North Yorkshire using the private finance initiative. [20680]

Mr. Watts: I understand that the Spofforth bypass is being progressed as part of a package of three design, build, finance and operate road schemes by North Yorkshire county council.

The public private partnerships programme—4Ps—believes that this package of road schemes have a good chance of being developed successfully and replicated within the new PFI framework, and has therefore given the scheme pathfinder status.

If a satisfactory business case is proposed by North Yorkshire, the Department of Transport will seek Treasury agreement to the notional credit approvals which may be required.

A1

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the outturn cost of the upgrading of the A1 between Walshford and Boroughbridge in North Yorkshire to motorway standards; and what was the estimated cost at the commencement of the work. [20683]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Robert Banks, dated 17 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the costs of upgrading the A1 between Walshford and Boroughbridge in North Yorkshire.

The outturn costs will not be known until the final account for the works has been settled, which may not be for sometime.

The total tender cost for the main works was £54.35m excluding VAT.

Rail Privatisation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the improvements to passenger and station services implemented by *(a)* Great Western Trains, *(b)* South West Trains and *(c)* LTS Rail, referred to in his answer of 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *27*. [18678]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* Improvements to passenger and station services implemented by Great Western Trains, South West Trains and LTS Rail since commencing operations, are as follows:

Great Western Trains

GWT has introduced a large number of product enhancements including family carriage and business standard services, improved first class facilities, increased capacity for the carriage of bicycles, expanded catering services, and special offers and promotions to all rail passengers.

Weekday train services have been increased and some long-distance journey times have been reduced by up to 20 minutes. By the summer, GWT will be running an additional 11 services per weekday above the summer 1995 timetable.

A £50 million rolling stock upgrading programme is under way and the first five completely refurbished and re-liveried high-speed trains are now in service. A further seven trains will be available by May.

GWT has established a new telephone inquiry bureau and six telesales offices creating 180 full and part-time jobs.

GWT has completed the refurbishment of customer waiting lounges at Swindon, Newton Abbott and Bristol Parkway. Buffet facilities at Swindon have been refurbished and a customer service desk introduced. Self-service ticket machines have been installed at seven main line stations. New customer welcome teams have been introduced at Paddington. Porters have also been re-introduced at Paddington.

Security cover is now provided at all GWT car parks through combinations of trained security guards and closed circuit television.

South West Trains

SWT has introduced two new bus links from Bordon-Liphook and Winchester-Romsey. It has also introduced more bus service information into the SWT's timetable.

More than 2,000 extra sets a day have been introduced to help ease overcrowding. Two additional morning peak services serve Teddington-Waterloo via Kingston and several trains have been lengthened. SWT also has standby trains at London Waterloo and other key locations during the peaks which can be brought into use if needed.

SWT has invested over £1 million in improving train reliability—treating traction motors on class 442s to prevent problems with snow, and solving air conditioning problems on class 159s.

SWT will shortly be placing an order for 30 new four-car electrical multiple units worth approximately £90 million.

SWT has invested £200,000 in new technology and telephone lines at Southampton telephone inquiry bureau, where there are now 25 lines available. In addition SWT is providing extra staff—Bluecoats—at Waterloo, Guildford and Southampton offering help and information to travellers.

SWT has spent or committed the appropriate expenditure on its station refurbishment programme. The first stations to benefit from this work will be Brentford, Norbiton, Twickenham and Surbiton.

Work is now under way to redevelop station buildings at Southampton Airport (Parkway) station. The existing buildings are being transformed in a project which will include new upgraded station facilities and provide an additional 53 car parking spaces to the current 530.

SWT is also carrying out work on car park extensions at Grateley, Eastleigh and Haslemere. Car park resurfacing is also being carried out at 30 SWT stations.

There is a further £130,000 project to install CCTV cameras, improve lighting and cut vegetation at 10 stations. Since the programme of CCTV installation by BR in SWT car parks began in 1993, car crime had dropped by more than 30 per cent.; 70 per cent. of SWT car park capacity is now covered by CCTV.

SWT increased its passengers charter punctuality standards by two points from February 1997.

LTS Rail

LTS Rail has introduced additional late evening trains running from Monday to Friday serving all major stations to Southend.

Passenger safety has been improved by the introduction of security guards on LTS Rail trains and at stations. In total, an extra 3,000 security guard hours per week have been deployed across the franchise.

LTS Rail has launched an experimental low-cost fare called "Early Bird" for early morning Pitsea commuters into London. An Early Bird fare to London from Chafford Hundred will be introduced in April and similar fares are being considered for other stations. LTS has also introduced minicom facilities for the hard of hearing at the Southend telephone inquiry bureau.

LTS Rail introduced its first two class 317 sliding-door trains into regular service on 9 December, operating on the Basildon and Tilbury lines in the morning and evening peaks. Since then, LTS Rail has taken delivery of five further 317s and a further two are due to be delivered on 17 March.

LTS Rail is well advanced with ordering 44 four-car EMUs. The trains will include full air conditioning, wider seats and more spacious interiors, information in every carriage and public phones.

The passengers charter performance target for punctuality will be raised from 88 per cent. to 90 per cent. from 1 April 1997 and a further two points from 1 April 1998. Similarly, the reliability target will be increased by 0.5 points on 1 April 1997 and a further 0.5 points in 1998.

LTS Rail, in partnership with Thamesway, has introduced a joint rail/bus ticketing arrangement. From 2 March, commuters from Benfleet station have been able to buy one ticket valid on Thamesway buses, LTS Rail services and London Underground.

LTS Rail has improved the cleanliness of stations through increased overnight cleaning.

Traffic Congestion

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, *Official Report*, columns *607–609*, what are the lengths of road classified as *(a)* orange and *(b)* red for traffic congestion according to the maps produced by the national roads network assessment systems for (i) 1995, (ii) 2005 and (iii) 2015 in (1) London, (2) Southern, (3) Midland and (4) Northern regions. [20135]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* The table indicates the lengths of road (miles) classified as orange or red according to the stress maps produced by the national roads assessment system. The figures are given by region for 1995 and forecast years 2005 and 2015 for low and high traffic growth forecasts.

Year and traffic forecast

	1995	2005		2015	
Region		*Low*	*High*	*Low*	*High*
London					
Orange	24	70	67	38	30
Red	57	75	83	117	150
Southern					
Orange	212	224	235	250	285
Red	83	211	294	341	519
Midland					
Orange	171	301	385	395	485
Red	115	213	324	407	685
Northern					
Orange	159	273	316	353	360
Red	61	142	258	309	573

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Examination Results

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved grade A to C in (i) history, (ii) geography and (iii) Latin (1) GCSEs and (2) A-levels in 1996; and if she will make a statement. [19885]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* The information is not available in the precise form requested. However, the following table shows the number and percentage of pupils who *(a)* attempted and *(b)* achieved grades A to C in (i) history, (ii) geography and (iii) Latin GCSE and GCE A/AS level in England in 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available. The figures for GCSEs relate to 15-year-old pupils in schools and those for GCE A/AS level to 17-year-old pupils in schools.

GCSE achievements of 15-year-old pupils in schools

	Number attempted	*Percentage*	*Number achieved A*–C*	*Percentage*
GCSE history	223,357	38.6	119,448	20.7
GCSE geography	259,291	44.8	130,295	22.5
GCSE Latin	11,790	2.0	10,817	1.9

GCE A/AS level achievements of 17-year-old pupils in schools

	Number attempted	*Percentage*	*Number achieved A–C*	*Percentage*
GCE A/AS history	24,292	17.2	13,850	9.8
GCE A/AS geography	26,373	18.7	13,683	9.7
GCE A/AS Latin	1,314	0.9	1,088	0.8

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three or more live foreign language A-levels in 1996; and if she will make a statement. [19884]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* The information is not available in the precise form requested. However, the following table shows the number and percentage of 17-year-old pupils who attempted GCE A/AS modern foreign languages and achieved grades A to C in (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three or more modern foreign languages in England in 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available.

	Number of 17-year-old pupils	*As a percentage of 17-year-old pupils*
Attempted GCE A/AS language	22,233	15.8
Achieved 1 grade A–C	10,676	7.6
Achieved 2 grades A–C	2,765	2.0
Achieved 3 or more grades A–C	45	0.0

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three or more science A-levels in 1996; and if she will make a statement. [19882]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* The information is not available in the precise form requested. However, the following table shows the number and percentage of 17-year-old pupils who attempted a GCE A/AS level in any science subject and achieved grades A to C in (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three or more science subjects in England in 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available.

	Number of 17-year-old pupils	As a percentage of 17-year-old pupils
Attempted GCE A/AS science	54,344	38.6
Achieved 1 grade A-C	17,201	12.2
Achieved 2 grades A-C	11,514	8.2
Achieved 3 or more grades A-C	1,825	1.3

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one and (ii) two or more live foreign language GCSEs in 1996; and if she will make a statement. [19883]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* The information is not available in the precise form requested. However, the following table shows the number and percentage of 15-year-old pupils who attempted a GCSE in any modern foreign language and achieved grades A to C in (i) one and (ii) two or more modern foreign languages in England in 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available.

	Number of 15-year-old pupils	As a percentage of 15-year-old pupils
Attempted at least one GCSE language	427,808	74.0
Achieved one grade A*–C	153,675	26.6
Achieved 2 or more A*–C grades	43,561	7.5

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one and (ii) two or more science GCSEs in 1996; and if she will make a statement. [19881]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* The information is not available in the precise form requested. However, the following table shows the number and percentage of 15-year-old pupils who attempted a GCSE in any science subject and achieved grades A* to C in (i) one and (ii) two or more GCSE science subjects in England in 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available.

	Number of 15-year-old pupils	As a percentage of 15-year-old pupils
Attempted at least one GCSE science	523,189	90.5
Achieved one grade A*–C	14,288	2.5
Achieved 2 or more A*–C grades	232,884	40.3

Teaching Qualifications

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students on completion of a postgraduate certificate of education or equivalent qualification gained qualified teacher status in *(a)* mathematics and *(b)* physics in each year from 1990 to 1996. [19902]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* The number of successful initial teacher training completers[1], trained for secondary education, whose first or second subject of ITT was either mathematics of science[2] from 1990 to 1995 are shown in the following table. Information for 1996 is not yet available.

	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Mathematics	890	950	1,250	1,450	1,640	1,660
Science	1,250	1,270	1,620	1,780	2,030	2,200

[1] Students who have successfully completed a course of initial teacher training leading to qualified teacher status (QTS).
[2] Students who have been trained to teach both maths and science have been recorded once only and assigned to their first subject.

Teachers' Superannuation

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in what respect the terms and conditions of the teachers' superannuation arrangements for fee-paying schools differ from those for the state sector. [20159]

Mrs. Gillan: Teachers at maintained schools become members of the teachers' superannuation scheme unless they elect not to do so. Those at independent schools become scheme members if the establishment is an accepted school under regulation B4 of the Teachers Superannuation (Consolidation) Regulations 1988 (as amended). There are no other appreciable differences between the provisions for maintained and independent schools.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what additional financial provision has been made for the teachers' superannuation regime for fee-paying schools. [20160]

Mrs. Gillan: In common with other employers of teachers, fee paying schools will benefit from the reduction in the employers' contribution rate from 8.05 per cent. to 7.2 per cent. with effect from 1 July 1997. In the independent sector, the reduction will save £9 million in a full year. That money can be used to fund premature retirements, if independent schools wish to use it for that purpose.

Teachers (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers are currently employed in the London borough of Wandsworth; and how many were employed in each of the past three years. [20178]

Mr. Forth: The information is as shown.

Full-time equivalent (fte) numbers of teachers in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special education sector in the London borough of Wandsworth

January	Full time equivalent
1993	1,880
1994	1,800
1995	1,720
1996	1,750

Excludes sixth form colleges throughout.

Environmental Auditing

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *553*, if she will make a statement on the impact of the schools

environmental assessment method on the work of schools in respect of their evaluation of their environmental impact. [20308]

Mr. Robin Squire: The schools environmental assessment method—SEAM—was published in October. SEAM is being used by local authorities in environmental education and energy conservation outreach to schools. The 480 eco-schools participating in the green flag award scheme run by the Tidy Britain Group and sponsored by the Department of the Environment have been sent copies of SEAM so that they can take their environmental assessment further. Having carried out an initial SEAM assessment schools are encouraged to continue environmental monitoring. The Building Research Establishment is at present sending all schools a free copy of its software "The School Toolkit" which enables easy environmental monitoring by pupils or staff. These initiatives together with the work of groups like Learning Through Landscapes and Groundwork provide a framework for schools to evaluate, monitor and improve their environmental impacts.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *553*, what percentage of schools met the revised energy targets for new school buildings included in the schools environmental assessment method; and if she will make a statement. [20309]

Mr. Squire: The information requested is not collected centrally for all schools.

However, of a recent sample of schools in five LEA areas 78 per cent. were below the highest band of energy consumption recommended for existing schools, and 58 per cent. were below the highest band recommended for new schools.

It is hoped that schools whose energy consumption is above the maximum recommended bands will be encouraged by SEAM to adopt no-cost good housekeeping measures or low-cost energy saving measures to reduce their energy consumption.

Teachers

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was *(a)* the average age of teachers entering the state and maintained sector, *(b)* the average age of teachers in that sector and *(c)* the youngest and oldest teachers who took voluntary redundancy or early retirement (i) in the latest year for which figures are available and (ii) in 1989–90. [20215]

Mrs. Gillan: The average age of new entrants and the average age of all teachers in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special sector is as follows. The youngest age at which a teacher may be granted premature retirement is 50, and the oldest 64, and those are the ages of the youngest and oldest teachers granted premature retirement in the two years in question. The Department does not collect information on voluntary redundancies.

	1989–90	*1994–95*
Average age of new entrants	28	28
Average age of all teachers	41	42

Departmental Expenditure Plans

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what changes have been made to her Department's expenditure plans in consequence of the initial claim for additional grant in aid submitted by the Further Education Funding Council in respect of demand-led element enrolments. [20164]

Mr. Paice: The initial claim from the Further Education Funding Council, of £82 million in this financial year has been met in full by the Department. This has been managed by drawing on existing underspends across a range of DfEE budgets. The underspends which have been used to meet the initial claim would otherwise have been returned to the Exchequer at the end of this financial year.

Internet

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance her Department is providing to schools regarding the supervision of access to the Internet by pupils. [20196]

Mr. Robin Squire: At the Department's request the National Council for Educational Technology has published guidance for teachers and parents on the use of the Internet. Through its network of curriculum IT support projects, the Department has also funded the development of materials to support teachers in the use of technologies such as the Internet in the delivery of national curriculum subjects.

The Government are also supporting the evaluation of the educational potential of new technologies and models of implementation through their piloting programme, the Education Department's superhighways initiative. Several of these projects are piloting the use of the Internet, including Internet services designed specifically for schools. The outcomes of these evaluations will be made available later this year, accompanied by guidance for schools on purchasing and good practice in the use of new technologies.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *706*, if she will provide figures for her Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*. [20384]

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 6 March, *Official Report*, column *706*. The estimate in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98" is based on the aggregate potential for PFI in the Department's and Employment Service's own estates and infrastructure; it is not yet directly attributable to specific projects, other than the two

which have already been concluded. These projects are not yet fully operational and their details therefore remain commercially sensitive.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list in rank order the pupil-teacher ratio for *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools of each local education authority and their ranking in respect of number of GCSE grades A to C. [20533]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Pupil:teacher ratios (PTRs) and GCSE results' by local education authority area in England

LEA area	*Percentage of pupils aged 15 achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-C 1995–96*		*Pupil: teacher ratios*			
			January 1996			
			Primary		*Secondary*	
	Percentage	*Rank*	*PTR*	*Rank*	*PTR*	*Rank*
Isles of Scilly	73.1	1	15.0	2	8.1	1
Kingston upon Thames	59.9	2	23.8	82	16.2	35
Sutton	56.4	3	23.3	59	16.6	62
Harrow	53.5	4	20.8	12	15.6	13
Barnet	53.4	5	20.9	13	14.8	6
North Yorkshire	53.0	6	23.4	66	16.3	43
North Somerset	52.5	7	23.7	77	16.3	43
Richmond upon Thames	52.2	8	21.3	17	16.5	53
Redbridge	50.8	9	22.7	38	16.2	35
West Sussex	50.6	10	22.5	33	16.6	62
Buckinghamshire	50.5	11	23.6	73	17.1	94
Surrey	50.5	11	22.0	23	16.6	62
Bromley	50.3	13	24.6	109	15.7	18
Gloucestershire	50.2	14	23.4	66	17.6	107
Somerset	50.0	15	23.2	51	18.0	117
Solihull	49.6	16	24.1	99	16.6	62
Cheshire	49.3	17	24.0	93	17.0	87
Dorset	49.3	17	23.9	87	17.5	102
Hertfordshire	49.3	17	22.3	25	15.7	18
Stockport	49.0	20	23.8	82	16.6	62
Berkshire	48.8	21	23.3	59	16.3	43
Bury	48.6	22	24.0	93	17.2	99
Trafford	48.6	22	24.7	111	16.6	62
Wiltshire	48.3	24	23.4	66	16.8	75
Shropshire	48.0	25	24.3	102	16.5	53
York	47.7	26	24.2	101	16.2	35
Bath and North-east Somerset	47.4	27	22.8	43	16.4	48
Suffolk	47.0	28	22.3	25	16.5	53
Bexley	46.8	29	24.8	113	16.6	62
Cambridge	46.7	30	23.9	87	17.2	99
Cornwall	46.7	30	23.7	77	17.5	102
Kensington and Chelsea	46.7	30	17.8	3	13.3	2
Hampshire	46.5	33	22.8	43	16.6	62
Northumberland	46.1	34	24.6	109	18.5	119
Oxfordshire	45.8	35	23.3	59	17.9	114
Dudley	44.9	36	22.4	31	16.5	53
South Gloucestershire	44.7	37	24.3	102	16.9	81
Hereford and Worcester	44.6	38	23.2	51	17.7	110
Isle of Wight	44.5	39	23.2	51	18.1	118
Lincolnshire	44.5	39	23.6	73	15.9	23
Wirral	44.4	41	23.2	51	16.2	35
Cumbria	44.2	42	23.2	51	16.9	81
Devon	44.2	43	24.0	93	17.0	87
Havering	44.1	44	23.7	77	16.2	35
Sefton	44.0	45	23.2	51	16.4	48
Wigan	43.9	46	22.9	46	16.0	28
Kent	43.7	47	23.9	87	16.4	48
Warwickshire	43.7	47	23.6	73	16.8	75
East Riding of Yorkshire	43.6	49	24.8	113	16.6	62
Northamptonshire	43.5	50	23.4	66	17.0	87
East Sussex	43.3	51	22.7	38	16.0	28
Essex	43.1	52	22.6	35	16.7	73
Camden	43.0	53	20.3	9	14.9	7
Bedfordshire	42.7	54	23.0	49	17.8	112
Lancashire	42.6	55	24.1	99	17.0	87
Hounslow	42.3	56	21.6	20	15.8	21
Derbyshire	42.0	57	25.3	120	17.0	87
Bolton	41.9	58	22.8	43	16.5	53

Pupil:teacher ratios (PTRs) and GCSE results[1] by local education authority area in England

LEA area	Percentage of pupils aged 15 achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-C 1995–96		Pupil: teacher ratios January 1996			
			Primary		Secondary	
	Percentage	Rank	PTR	Rank	PTR	Rank
Norfolk	41.9	58	22.3	25	15.6	13
North Tyneside	41.1	60	23.9	87	17.1	94
Enfield	41.0	61	22.6	35	16.3	43
Hillingdon	40.9	62	22.3	25	16.4	48
St. Helens	40.9	62	22.9	46	15.6	13
Staffordshire	40.9	62	24.9	117	17.6	107
Calderdale	39.7	65	24.0	93	16.9	81
Leicestershire	39.7	65	23.3	59	17.1	94
Croydon	38.8	67	22.2	24	16.3	43
Kirklees	38.4	68	23.3	59	16.8	75
Merton	38.3	69	21.5	19	17.2	99
Coventry	38.0	70	23.3	59	16.1	30
North Lincolnshire	37.6	71	24.5	107	17.1	94
Redcar and Cleveland	37.6	71	24.5	107	17.1	94
Sheffield	37.2	73	22.9	46	17.5	102
Stockton on Tees	37.2	73	23.8	82	16.9	81
Gateshead	36.6	75	22.3	25	15.9	23
Leeds	36.6	75	23.9	87	16.6	62
Nottinghamshire	36.4	77	24.3	102	16.7	73
Durham	36.2	78	24.0	93	17.5	102
Rotherham	36.2	78	23.2	51	17.0	87
Rochdale	35.4	80	24.4	106	16.9	81
Tameside	35.4	80	25.1	119	17.8	112
Hammersmith and Fulham	35.3	82	20.3	9	16.8	75
Wakefield	35.3	82	24.0	93	16.4	48
South Tyneside	35.2	84	23.3	59	16.8	75
Brent	35.1	85	21.7	21	15.4	11
Ealing	34.6	86	22.7	38	16.5	53
Doncaster	33.5	87	24.3	102	16.8	75
Waltham Forest	33.4	88	21.4	18	15.8	21
Oldham	33.3	89	23.7	77	15.9	23
Westminster	33.0	90	18.4	4	15.2	8
Birmingham	32.9	91	22.7	38	15.9	23
Wandsworth	32.8	92	20.5	11	15.9	23
Newcastle upon Tyne	32.7	93	23.8	82	16.9	81
North East Lincolnshire	32.4	94	24.8	113	17.9	114
Walsall	32.2	95	23.4	66	16.2	35
Hartlepool	31.9	96	24.8	113	17.0	87
Sunderland	31.7	97	22.6	35	16.1	30
City of Bristol	30.9	98	22.7	38	15.6	13
Wolverhampton	30.2	99	22.5	33	16.1	30
Salford	30.1	100	23.8	82	16.5	53
Lewisham	30.0	101	20.1	8	15.2	8
Greenwich	29.1	102	20.9	13	15.6	13
Bradford	28.9	103	22.3	25	17.7	110
Haringey	28.5	104	21.0	16	14.6	4
Barnsley	28.2	105	25.0	118	17.9	114
Newham	27.9	106	23.9	87	16.5	53
Liverpool	27.6	107	23.5	71	16.2	35
Barking and Dagenham	27.1	108	22.4	31	16.1	30
Manchester	27.0	109	23.0	49	15.5	12
Middlesbrough	26.9	110	23.6	73	16.1	30
Sandwell	26.5	111	23.7	77	16.5	53
Hackney	25.7	112	19.7	7	14.7	5
Lambeth	25.1	113	18.6	5	14.4	3
Southwark	24.6	114	21.7	21	16.2	35
Tower Hamlets	23.9	115	19.5	6	15.2	8
Knowsley	23.6	116	23.5	71	16.6	62
City of Kingston upon Hull	22.8	117	24.7	111	17.6	107
Islington	22.4	118	20.9	13	15.7	18
Corporation of London	n/a	n/a	13.9	1	n/a	n/a
England	44.5		23.2		16.6	

[1] Includes grant-maintained, special schools and City Technology Colleges; excludes independent schools.
n/a = not applicable.

Mr. Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the pupil-teacher ratio for *(a)* primary, *(b)* special and *(c)* secondary schools in (i) 1979, (ii) 1990 and (iii) the latest available date for each English local education authority. [20532]

Mr. Squire: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Pupil:teacher ratios in maintained primary, secondary and special schools by local education authority area in England
Position at January 1979, 1990 and 1996

	1979			1990			1996		
	Primary	Secondary[1]	Special	Primary	Secondary[1]	Special	Primary	Secondary	Special
Corporation of London	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	17.4	[3]—	[3]—	13.9	[3]—	[3]—
Camden	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	19.2	14.9	3.8	20.3	14.9	3.7
Greenwich	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	19.7	15.8	6.0	20.9	15.6	6.5
Hackney	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	18.3	14.2	6.1	19.7	14.7	5.7
Hammersmith and Fulham	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	18.3	14.3	4.9	20.3	16.8	5.6
Islington	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	18.5	16.4	5.8	20.9	15.7	5.0
Kensington and Chelsea	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	18.5	13.7	5.8	17.8	13.3	3.3
Lambeth	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	19.2	14.2	5.6	18.6	14.4	5.2
Lewisham	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	19.6	14.7	5.9	20.1	15.2	6.3
Southwark	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	20.0	15.6	5.0	21.7	16.2	5.0
Tower Hamlets	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	18.1	14.1	6.0	19.5	15.2	5.8
Wandsworth	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	17.9	14.5	4.9	20.5	15.9	6.3
Westminster	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	17.2	14.2	6.1	18.4	15.2	5.4
Inner London Education Authority	18.7	14.9	6.9	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Barking and Dagenham	22.3	15.5	7.6	22.3	14.7	5.7	22.4	16.1	5.6
Barnet	21.5	15.5	7.2	20.1	14.9	4.8	20.9	14.8	5.7
Bexley	25.1	17.2	9.6	22.9	16.0	6.5	24.8	16.6	7.0
Brent	18.7	13.9	6.5	20.8	13.7	4.7	21.7	15.4	5.2
Bromley	24.5	16.7	9.1	23.1	15.7	5.8	24.6	15.7	6.4
Croydon	23.1	16.3	7.5	21.3	16.3	5.2	22.2	16.3	5.8
Ealing	20.4	15.6	6.8	20.2	14.0	5.0	22.7	16.5	5.6
Enfield	24.0	16.8	8.7	21.2	15.3	5.3	22.6	16.3	5.9
Haringey	20.9	16.0	5.7	21.8	12.9	4.5	21.0	14.6	4.7
Harrow	22.1	16.1	6.5	22.0	15.4	5.7	20.8	15.6	5.0
Havering	23.6	17.0	8.3	22.6	15.4	6.4	23.7	16.2	6.0
Hillingdon	23.0	16.5	7.4	22.1	15.3	6.7	22.3	16.4	7.3
Hounslow	21.9	15.9	6.3	20.2	15.2	5.7	21.6	15.8	6.3
Kingston upon Thames	22.1	16.1	9.2	21.8	14.1	6.5	23.8	16.2	6.9
Merton	22.2	17.6	7.5	20.8	15.4	5.0	21.5	17.2	6.0
Newham	21.4	16.1	7.4	23.1	14.1	5.3	23.9	16.5	2.4
Redbridge	24.1	17.1	7.2	23.4	15.9	6.4	22.7	16.2	4.3
Richmond upon Thames	22.2	17.0	5.9	20.9	15.9	5.5	21.3	16.5	5.5
Sutton	24.0	17.3	9.2	22.0	15.8	6.4	23.3	16.6	6.8
Waltham Forest	22.4	14.7	5.7	22.2	13.6	3.5	21.4	15.8	4.2
Birmingham	24.0	16.5	7.4	23.6	16.3	6.3	22.7	15.9	6.4
Coventry	22.7	16.0	8.0	22.4	13.9	5.7	23.3	16.1	6.3
Dudley	25.5	18.0	9.9	21.5	13.9	8.6	22.4	16.5	8.1
Sandwell	24.4	16.4	9.6	22.2	14.1	6.7	23.7	16.5	7.5
Solihull	23.5	16.4	8.2	22.6	15.4	5.6	24.1	16.6	7.1
Walsall	22.6	15.8	7.5	20.8	13.9	5.5	23.4	16.2	6.1
Wolverhampton	21.1	15.8	6.5	19.8	13.5	5.9	22.5	16.1	7.2
Knowsley	23.4	16.3	7.4	21.4	14.5	6.8	23.5	16.6	5.2
Liverpool	21.1	16.1	7.6	21.7	14.2	6.5	23.5	16.2	6.0
St. Helens	23.8	16.2	9.3	22.4	13.6	7.7	22.9	15.6	6.8
Sefton	23.6	17.3	9.0	23.2	16.1	6.9	23.2	16.4	6.6
Wirral	24.2	17.1	8.0	20.6	14.9	6.3	23.2	16.2	6.7
Bolton	25.2	16.5	7.9	21.7	14.8	6.1	22.8	16.5	6.6
Bury	23.5	16.5	8.0	22.3	15.2	5.6	24.0	17.2	5.0
Manchester	21.9	15.1	6.7	21.8	13.7	5.4	23.0	15.5	4.8
Oldham	25.2	17.6	7.7	22.4	14.5	5.3	23.7	15.9	5.6
Rochdale	22.9	15.4	7.8	21.9	13.8	6.6	24.4	16.9	7.3
Salford	23.5	16.2	8.9	22.0	13.5	6.5	23.8	16.5	5.2
Stockport	26.3	17.3	9.8	23.4	15.2	6.5	23.8	16.6	6.3
Tameside	24.1	16.5	6.9	22.7	15.5	5.3	25.1	17.8	7.3
Trafford	22.2	16.5	8.2	22.4	14.2	6.6	24.7	16.6	6.8
Wigan	22.6	16.1	8.2	21.4	13.7	5.9	22.9	16.0	6.5
Barnsley	23.6	16.8	7.8	22.7	15.5	6.1	25.0	17.9	6.6
Doncaster	22.2	16.6	8.5	21.6	15.1	8.1	24.3	16.8	9.1
Rotherham	24.0	17.4	7.8	21.3	14.5	6.7	23.2	17.0	7.6
Sheffield	21.8	16.4	6.1	21.0	14.2	4.4	22.9	17.5	5.2
Bradford	20.9	17.6	7.5	19.7	14.9	3.8	22.3	17.7	5.6
Calderdale	23.8	17.6	7.1	22.3	14.9	4.8	24.0	16.9	5.2
Kirklees	23.6	18.3	7.3	21.0	14.7	6.9	23.3	16.8	6.5
Leeds	24.6	17.8	7.7	19.4	14.9	5.9	23.9	16.6	6.3
Wakefield	23.3	18.0	8.4	22.0	15.3	6.3	24.0	16.4	6.1
Gateshead	21.2	16.5	9.3	20.9	13.9	5.6	22.3	15.9	5.9
Newcastle upon Tyne	18.7	14.7	7.4	21.0	14.2	5.9	23.8	16.9	6.8
North Tyneside	21.1	16.2	8.3	20.9	14.3	6.0	23.9	17.1	6.4
South Tyneside	20.3	16.0	7.9	20.9	14.3	6.6	23.3	16.8	8.2
Sunderland	23.5	16.7	8.9	22.0	14.7	5.9	22.6	16.1	7.4
Isles of Scilly	15.3	11.3	[3]—	14.2	8.2	[3]—	15.0	8.1	[3]—

Pupil:teacher ratios in maintained primary, secondary and special schools by local education authority area in England
Position at January 1979, 1990 and 1996

	1979			1990			1996		
	Primary	Secondary[1]	Special	Primary	Secondary[1]	Special	Primary	Secondary	Special
Avon	24.2	17.0	7.6	22.4	16.2	6.0	23.3	16.3	5.9
Bedfordshire	21.6	17.3	6.5	21.5	17.2	6.1	23.0	17.8	7.1
Berkshire	23.9	16.8	8.9	23.5	15.5	6.6	23.3	16.3	7.1
Buckinghamshire	24.2	16.8	8.2	22.9	15.8	6.6	23.6	17.1	7.2
Cambridgeshire	23.3	16.7	8.8	22.6	16.0	5.7	23.9	17.2	6.9
Cheshire	23.5	17.0	7.9	24.3	16.3	6.7	24.0	17.0	7.2
Cleveland	23.4	18.4	8.5	22.5	15.2	5.0	24.1	16.8	7.1
Cornwall	24.2	16.9	8.0	23.2	16.1	7.3	23.7	17.5	7.3
Cumbria	23.1	16.5	8.5	21.8	14.7	5.6	23.2	16.9	7.0
Derbyshire	23.8	17.5	8.3	21.6	14.0	4.8	25.3	17.0	7.2
Devon	24.3	17.9	8.9	22.3	16.1	7.5	24.0	17.0	7.9
Dorset	23.7	17.5	9.1	23.1	16.1	7.6	23.9	17.5	7.5
Durham	21.5	16.9	7.9	22.2	16.0	6.4	24.0	17.5	7.5
East Sussex	23.4	17.5	8.0	22.3	15.9	6.8	22.7	16.0	6.5
Essex	24.8	17.8	9.1	22.4	16.4	6.2	22.6	16.7	6.9
Gloucestershire	23.4	17.4	8.3	22.1	15.7	6.7	23.4	17.6	6.9
Hampshire	24.6	17.4	9.1	22.1	16.2	7.6	22.8	16.6	7.6
Hereford and Worcester	24.2	17.7	8.1	23.2	16.7	7.1	23.2	17.7	7.6
Hertfordshire	22.5	15.9	8.0	21.6	15.1	5.0	22.3	15.7	5.7
Humberside	22.1	16.8	8.9	22.1	15.6	6.4	24.7	17.2	7.4
Isle of Wight	23.9	18.6	10.4	22.9	16.8	7.8	23.2	18.1	7.7
Kent	24.3	17.7	9.2	23.5	16.1	7.9	23.9	16.4	7.5
Lancashire	24.7	16.6	8.0	23.3	15.7	5.6	24.1	17.0	4.8
Leicestershire	23.3	16.4	8.1	22.7	14.9	5.4	23.3	17.1	6.2
Lincolnshire	23.7	17.0	9.4	23.3	16.3	7.4	23.6	15.9	6.8
Norfolk	22.8	17.6	8.6	22.0	15.3	6.8	22.3	15.6	7.3
North Yorkshire	22.5	17.1	8.6	22.1	15.3	6.5	23.6	16.3	6.5
Northamptonshire	24.4	17.0	8.3	22.5	15.9	6.2	23.4	17.0	6.5
Northumberland	23.4	17.5	7.5	22.9	16.3	6.1	24.6	18.5	8.0
Nottinghamshire	24.7	17.0	9.0	21.3	14.5	6.1	24.3	16.7	4.7
Oxfordshire	24.2	18.0	7.5	22.7	16.2	5.4	23.3	17.9	5.6
Shropshire	23.8	17.0	9.0	21.2	15.2	7.0	24.3	16.5	7.4
Somerset	24.6	18.6	10.2	22.2	15.6	6.3	23.2	18.0	8.1
Staffordshire	23.2	16.8	8.1	23.3	15.8	6.6	24.9	17.6	8.0
Suffolk	23.4	18.1	8.8	22.0	16.6	6.1	22.3	16.5	6.8
Surrey	21.9	16.8	8.4	20.8	15.6	6.3	22.0	16.6	6.8
Warwickshire	23.1	17.0	9.0	21.8	15.6	6.6	23.6	16.8	7.1
West Sussex	24.3	18.5	8.3	21.8	16.4	7.5	22.5	16.6	7.4
Wiltshire	23.9	17.7	8.3	22.5	15.5	5.9	23.4	16.8	6.4
England	23.1	16.8	8.0	22.0	15.4	6.1	23.2	16.6	6.4

[1] Figures exclude sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from April 1993.
[2] Not available.
[3] Not applicable.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list in rank order the amount and percentage of the nursery voucher withheld by each local education authority from nursery schools in its control and indicate in each case whether the schemes have received her Department's approval. [20531]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the amounts of nursery grant, if any, which local education authorities plan to hold back from their schools is not supplied to the Department. Proposals for variations to schemes for local management of schools are still being processed; decisions on all of these will be made by 31 March 1997.

Key Stage 2

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what reasons she has calculated average results for each local education authority's primary schools in key stage 2 on the basis of unweighted averages of individual schools' performance; and if she will publish weighted averages for authorities based on the numbers of pupils in each school. [20685]

Mrs. Gillan: The primary school performance tables published on 11 March show how many pupils reached level 4 or above in the 1996 key stage 2 tests and teacher assessments, as percentages of the number of eligible pupils at each school.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Intestacy

29. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Attorney-General how many people died intestate with no known kin in the last year for which figures are available; how much in money and belongings was left by them; and if he will make a statement. [18858]

The Solicitor-General: For England and Wales, excluding the Duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall, some 2,400 cases were referred to the Treasury Solicitor in 1996 which appeared to concern the estates of persons dying intestate with no known kin. The total of balances on estates, after setting liabilities, accounted for in 1996 following completion of their administration by the Treasury Solicitor was £8,603,204.

Lenient Sentences

30. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Attorney-General how many cases referred to the Appeal Court on grounds of undue leniency have resulted in higher sentencing tariffs, in the last year for which figures are available. [18860]

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Attorney-General how many unduly lenient sentences he has referred to the Court of Appeal in the last year; and what was the rate of success. [18859]

The Attorney-General: During 1996, 70 sentences were referred to the Court of Appeal on grounds of undue leniency; 62 have been heard, and an increased sentence resulted in 46, or 74 per cent. of them.

Right-wing Groups

Mr. Janner: To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions are pending arising out of alleged threats against individuals by neo-Nazi, fascist or other extreme right-wing bodies or persons. [18854]

The Attorney-General: Proceedings are pending against three defendants for alleged offences of publishing and possessing racially inflammatory written material with a view to distribution, contrary to part III of the Public Order Act 1986. The written material contains extreme right-wing ideology and contains threats against, and advocates the harassment of, named individuals.

Disclosure Procedures

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to review the guidelines on disclosure of unused material and on the handling of identification in criminal cases when statutory provisions relating to prosecution disclosure and modified committals are implemented. [20812]

The Attorney-General: On 27 May 1976, *Official Report*, columns *287-88*, the then Attorney-General outlined guidance, in the light of the Devlin report on identification, on the handling of criminal cases where it appeared likely that identification would be an issue. That guidance has largely been overtaken by developments in the common law and statutory provisions, including the amendment to the general nature of committal proceedings provided for by section 47 of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 which takes effect on 1 April 1997.

On 18 December 1981, *Official Report* columns *251–52*, the then Attorney-General announced guidelines on disclosure of unused material by prosecutors. Those guidelines have also now been largely superseded and the law relating to prosecution disclosure will be placed on a statutory footing when part 1 of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 is implemented, also with effect from 1 April 1997. I have therefore revoked both sets of the guidelines with effect from that date.

WALES

Unemployment Rates

10. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the unemployment rates for *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [18837]

Mr. Hague: The labour force survey provides data on unemployment which are comparable across the European Union. In autumn 1996, the International Labour Organisation unemployment rate for Wales from this source was 8.2 per cent. This compares with ILO unemployment rate of 11.9 per cent. for the Republic of Ireland in October 1996. These figures are not seasonally adjusted.

13. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the unemployment rates for Wales relative to those of Catalonia. [18840]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest available figures for Wales and Catalonia, on a comparable basis published by Eurostat, are for April 1995 when the ILO unemployment rate for Wales was 8.7 per cent. and that for Catalonia was 19.9 per cent. These figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Teachers (Supply)

11. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the supply of teachers to schools. [18838]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I am confident that schools in Wales have a sufficient number of qualified teachers to meet their needs.

Bathing Beaches (Standards)

12. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many bathing beaches in Wales comply with European standards; and how many did so at the time of water privatisation. [18839]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Last year, 52 Welsh bathing waters met mandatory European standards compared with 40 in 1989.

Inward Investment (North Wales)

14. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has recently been made in attracting more inward investment to north Wales. [18841]

Mr. Hague: Significant progress has been made as demonstrated by the almost 1,000 jobs and £130 million of capital investment promised by the announcements by Toyo Seal; Baumeister and Ostler; JCB Transmissions; Toyota; British Aerospace; Hoya Lens; Shotton Paper; and Eastern Group.

Patient Statistics

15. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients were treated in NHS hospitals in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what were the figures in 1979. [18842]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of in-patients and day cases treated in Welsh hospitals has more than doubled between 1979 and 1995–96 from 381,000 to 774,000. The number of out-patients rose by over 40 per cent. in the same period from 1,803,000 to 2,569,000.

Manufacturing Output

16. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of manufacturing output in Wales. [18843]

Mr. Hague: Over the past three years, manufacturing output in Wales has grown by 13.9 per cent., compared to 7.2 per cent. in the UK as a whole.

Nursery Vouchers

17. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme in Wales; and what plans he has for extending the scheme to primary education. [18844]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In addition to ministerial correspondence, the Welsh Office has received some 6,000 letters and some 60 petitions about the nursery voucher scheme. There are no plans currently to extend the scheme beyond four-year-olds.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the social services departments which have agreed to apply for nursery vouchers for children in foster care; and what assessment he has made of the reasons why some departments have not applied. [20287]

Mr. Evans: The social services departments that have said that they will apply for nursery vouchers for foster children are Blaenau Gwent, Flintshire, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouth, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Swansea, Torfaen and Wrexham. The majority of the remainder have not said whether they will be applying.

Class Sizes

18. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many classes in Wales for five, six and seven-year-olds have over 30 pupils. [18845]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on class sizes is published in "Statistics of Education and Training in Wales; Schools 1996". It is not collected by age range.

A494

19. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the budget for the road improvement scheme of Drws-Y-Nant on the A494 Dolgellau to Bala road; when will work begin on the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [18846]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In the light of other, higher priorities, it is not expected that funds will be available for a start of works in 1997.

Hospital Closures (Dyfed Powys)

20. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met representatives of Dyfed Powys health authority to discuss hospital closures. [18847]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The chairmen of Dyfed Powys health authority met my right hon. Friend on 10 March to tell him about the authority's consultation document on the future provision of health services in Dyfed Powys.

School Standards

21. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has recently been taken to improve school standards in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [18848]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The latest phase of the bright future programme is set out in "Beating The Previous Best" published in February.

Fishing Restrictions (Milford Haven)

22. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in lifting fishing restrictions in Milford Haven. [18849]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The majority of restrictions on commercial fisheries, put in place following the Sea Empress oil spill, have been lifted. The only commercial fishery still affected is the oyster fishery in the Milford Haven estuary.

Restrictions are also being maintained as a protective measure for casual pickers of shellfish (excluding crustaceans), and on edible seaweed and samphire in the intertidal area between St. David's head and Port Eynon point. Monitoring and sampling work is continuing so that these remaining restrictions can be lifted as soon as possible.

The Economy

23. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the economy in Wales. [18850]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh economy is doing very well. Unemployment is falling fast. Manufacturing output is rising faster than in the UK generally. Manufacturing productivity is well above the UK average. Industrial disputes are low. Wales is a favoured location for inward investment. Business confidence is rising faster in Wales than in almost every other UK region, and independent forecasters say that the Welsh economy will grow faster than that of the UK in the future.

GP Services

24. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the development of GP services *(a)* in Rhymney and *(b)* in Wales. [18862]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Health authorities have responsibility for developing GP services in their area and the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill, which is currently before Parliament, will give authorities more flexibility for developing GP health care provision.

Special Needs Schools

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by local education authority area the total expenditure per pupil at maintained special schools for each of the last five years. [15706]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The latest available information is for 1994–95 and 1993–94 and is given in the following table. Expenditure for special schools is not separately identifiable for earlier years as it is combined with expenditure on special education in hospitals, social services establishments and at home.

Total expenditure per pupil at LEA maintained special schools[1]

£

	1993–94	*1994–95*
Clwyd	10,534	9,158
Dyfed	12,727	13,476
Gwent	17,406	19,252
Gwynedd	10,533	11,329
Mid Glamorgan	9,786	9,502
Powys	13,920	14,770
South Glamorgan	9,597	9,564
West Glamorgan	14,972	14,694
Wales	11,401	11,201

[1] Figures shown are for net current expenditure and gross capital expenditure divided by the full-time equivalent pupil numbers in maintained special schools at January in each year. Total expenditure figures exclude special education in special education units attached to primary and secondary schools, hospitals, social services establishments and at home.

School Administration Costs

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each local education authority in Wales the expenditure per pupil of the school's budget on administration in 1995–96 and estimated to be so spent in 1996–97. [15938]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The information requested is given in the following table.

The details for 1995–96 are:

	£
Clwyd	47.73
Dyfed	46.90
Gwent	30.87
Gwynedd	40.89
Mid Glamorgan	19.92
Powys[1]	2.86
South Glamorgan	44.88
West Glamorgan	27.04

The figures for Clwyd, Dyfed and West Glamorgan LEAs are based on section 42 budget statements as the outturn statements for 1995–96 have yet to be submitted to the Secretary of State.

[1] Costs relating to the management and administration of general schools budget expenditure have been included with the budgets of those services that the authority has chosen to retain centrally. Details of these costs are not available.

The provisional details for 1996–97 are:

	£
Isle of Anglesey	35.49
Blaenau Gwent	37.69
Bridgend	32.95
Caerphilly	35.52
City and County of Cardiff	18.70
Carmarthenshire	48.82
Ceredigion	62.09
Conwy	60.77
Denbighshire	62.65
Flintshire	43.28
Merthyr Tydfil	35.24
Monmouthshire	38.88
Neath Port Talbot	21.48
Newport	49.61
Pembrokeshire	60.03
Powys[1]	0.00
Rhondda-Cynon-Taff	18.33
City and County of Swansea	20.79
Torfaen	49.18
Vale of Glamorgan	43.24
Wrexham	49.39

[1] Costs relating to the management and administration of general schools budget expenditure have been included with the budgets of those services that the authority has chosen to retain centrally. Details of these costs are not available.

Rented Housing Starts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new rented housing starts he estimates will be made by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* housing associations in 1997–98. [19214]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Housing associations are the main providers of new subsidised housing. Housing for Wales expects to start 1,850 dwellings in its 1997–98 programme, of which up to 1,300 will be for rent. The remainder will be for low-cost home ownership. The number of starts will be increased by transfers to housing associations by those local authorities which will have bids approved under the £5.5 million home ownership, efficiency and rural housing challenge fund. No estimate is available for new rented housing starts by local authorities in 1997–98.

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when his Department established its Internet site; what representations he has received and what data he has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps he is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19151]

Mr. Hague: My Department established Internet pages on the CCTA server in May 1995. This site now contains hospital performance information. A pilot site for the Welsh Office Industry and Training Department was set up in September 1995 and this contains mainly industry related information. Information on the number of accesses is collected weekly for both sites. A study is currently being carried out to establish how my Department can make best use of the Internet to disseminate information in the future.

National Health Service Resources

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional resources have been given to the national health service in Wales since 1992. [18829]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Since 1992–93, an additional £455 million has been provided for the national health service in Wales, including provision for 1997–98. This represents a cash increase over the period of 23.8 per cent. and 10.3 per cent. in real terms.

Planning Guidance (Agricultural Land)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he gives to local authorities on giving planning permission for building housing estates on grade 2 agricultural land. [20289]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Advice on the development of grade 2 agricultural land is contained in planning guidance (Wales): planning policy (May 1996), technical advice note (Wales) 6: development of agricultural land (November) 1996 and annex A to planning policy guidance note 7, "The Countryside and the Rural Economy" (January 1992). In development control decisions, considerable weight should be given to protecting grades 1, 2 and 3a land from development because of its special importance. Within these grades, where there is a choice between sites of different grades, development should be directed to land of lower quality.

Trunk Road Programme (Property Purchases)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that private companies carrying out negotiations relating to compensation for property purchased by compulsory purchase order for trunk road improvements in Wales will have a detailed knowledge of the north Wales property market. [20322]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Yes.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that private companies carrying out negotiations relating to compensation for property purchased by compulsory purchase order for trunk road improvements in Wales will be able to provide a full Welsh language service where it is required. [20321]

Mr. Jones: Yes. In line with the requirements of the Welsh Office Welsh language scheme, which came into effect on 13 January, contractors are bound by the terms of their contract to communicate appropriately in the medium of Welsh where it is relevant to the services they are providing for the Department.

Annual Departmental Report

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish the annual departmental report. [20218]

Mr. Hague: I expect to publish the Welsh Office departmental report for 1997 on Thursday 20 March.

NHS Trusts (Mergers)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date his Department was first told of the proposed merger between Derwen and Pembrokeshire trusts; if his Department participated in meetings of the trusts to develop the merger proposals; and if he will list the dates of such meetings and the levels of participation. [20222]

Mr. Hague: My Department was first informed of the proposed merger on 1 July 1996. From that date, Welsh Office officials maintained links with senior trust staff by telephone, correspondence and meetings to advise them on the processes necessary to complete the merger.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what merger proposals for trusts other than Derwen and Pembrokeshire trust have been notified to his Department; what merger-related meetings have taken place *(a)* on his Department's premises and *(b)* at other locations with departmental participation; and if he will list the dates and attendance at such meetings. [20223]

Mr. Hague: My Department has not received any other proposals for NHS trusts to merge. Trust configuration is on occasion raised in discussions between my Department and the NHS about service improvements and financial performance. A review is being undertaken by the Welsh ambulance policy and advisory group which might, in due course, produce a formal expression of interest to reconfigure the ambulance NHS trusts in Wales.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received *(a)* in support of and *(b)* against the merger of Derwen NHS trust with Pembrokeshire NHS trust; and if he will list the (i) organisations and (ii) individuals from whom he has received representations. [20290]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A list of those organisations and individuals that responded to the public consultation on the application to merge the Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS trusts, detailing their preferences, has been placed in the Library of the House.

Highway Works

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he gives to local authorities undertaking highway works as to the desirability of not closing to traffic highways affected. [20288]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Advice on procedures to be used when undertaking highway works is contained in the traffic signs manual, chapter 8 "Traffic Safety Measures and Signs for Road Works and Temporary Situations".

School Classes

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by local education authority *(a)* the number of classes with mixed aged groups and *(b)* the number of children taught in them in each of the last five years, and in 1979, 1983 and 1987. [20625]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is not available centrally.

Primary Schools (League Tables)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reasons he has not published the league tables for Welsh primary schools. [20545]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Teacher union action disrupted the assessments in Wales during 1995; data collection and validation arrangements were then subject to comprehensive test in 1996. Extensive information on key stage 2 results, by local authority area, was published on 24 February. Now that the assessment arrangements are firmly established, performance tables giving key stage 2 results by named schools will be published after this year's round.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March *Official Report*, column *725*, if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*. [20391]

Mr. Hague: No.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing and Land

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the link between housing land shortages and the house price increase of the late 1980s; and if he will make a statement. [19023]

Sir Paul Beresford: In 1990, my Department commissioned Gerald Eve, chartered surveyors in association with the department of land economy, University of Cambridge to undertake research on the relationship between house prices and land supply.

The study concluded that it would require significant additional land release, on a national scale and over a considerable period of time, to have a measurable effect on reducing average house prices.

Further research will be commissioned in the coming financial year to examine whether the links between planning and land and property prices can be further clarified.

Ponds and Lakes

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the Landscape Foundation to discuss the improvement of ponds and lakes in *(a)* parks and *(b)* nature reserves. [19654]

Mr. Clappison: As far as I am aware the Secretary of State has not met the Landscape Foundation.

Hereditaments (Local Taxation)

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the average *(a)* domestic rates *(b)* community charge *(c)* council tax per household and *(d)* non-domestic rates payment per hereditament for each year since 1989–90 [20013]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not available on a completed consistent basis across all years. The available information for England is as follows. All figures are net of benefit, transitional relief and non-domestic rate relief.

	Local domestic taxes per hereditament £	*Non-domestic rates per hereditament* £
1989–90	[1]454	[4]2,647
1990–91	[2]524	[5]5,603
1991–92	[2]331	[5,6]6,408
1992–93	[2]368	[5,7]6,029
1993–94	[3]376	[8]6,082
1994–95	[3]393	[8]6,173
1995–96	[3]416	[8]6,382
1996–97	[3]445	[8]6,918

[1] Calculated as net domestic rate yield (i.e. net of non-collection), divided by the number of domestic hereditaments. No information is available about the domestic rate debit (i.e. gross of non-collection) raised in the year.

[2] Calculated as estimated net community charge yield (net of non-payment), divided by the estimated number of chargeable dwellings. The 1991–92 figures is net of £140 per adult community charge reduction grant. No information is available on the amount of community charge debit (i.e gross of non-collection) raised in each year.

[3] Calculated as the estimated council tax debit (i.e. gross of non-payment), divided by the number of chargeable dwellings on valuation lists.

[4] Calculated as non-domestic rate yield (i.e. net of non-collection), including crown contributions in lieu, divided by the number of non-domestic hereditatments. The definition of a non-domestic hereditament was changed on 1 April following the introduction of the national non-domestic rate. There were a number of changes to the definition of a non-domestic hereditament at this time, for example lock up garages were taken out of rating. No information is available about the non-domestic rate debit (i.e. gross of non-collection) raised in the year.

[5] Calculated as the rateable value on local rating lists for the year, multiplied by the non-domestic rates multiplier, less estimated rate reliefs, divided by the number of hereditaments on local rating lists. This figure is gross of non-collection, and taken no account of the effect of subsequent appeals on the rates payable for the year.

[6] The average rates payable in 1991–92 increased partly as a result of NHS properties transferring to local rating lists on 1 April 1991.

[7] The average rate payable decreased in 1992–93 because successful appeals resulted in a lower average rateable value for the year.

[8] Calculated as non-domestic rate debit for the local rating list for the year, divided by the number of hereditaments on local rating lists.

Drains and Sewers (Maintenance Responsibility)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which bodies have a duty to ensure that the structure and operation of all drains and sewers, hitherto in public ownership, are maintained to a standard that minimises the risks to public and environmental health; who issues standards for those operations; how they are monitored; and which bodies are charged with monitoring the contents of sewage effluent with particular reference to changes in the volumes of bacteria or viruses prejudicial to human and animal health. [20021]

Mr. Clappison: All sewerage undertakers have a statutory responsibility, enforceable by the Secretary of State or the Director General of Water Services, to maintain all public sewers to ensure their area is effectually drained. No trade effluent may be discharged to a public sewer without the consent of the sewerage undertaker who may impose strict conditions on the discharge. It is an offence if such a discharge is made to the sewer without consent or any other matter

is discharged which may be dangerous, a nuisance or likely to cause injury to health. Responsibility for any public health matters arising from sewers initially rests with the environmental health department of the local authority.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the bidding guidance for round 4 of the single regeneration budget challenge fund will be published. [20310]

Mr. Curry: The guidance will be published in due course.

Tree Preservation Orders

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tree preservation orders have been served throughout the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [20187]

Mr. Clappison: The information requested is not held centrally. Responsibility for making tree preservation orders rests with local planning authorities.

Cryptosporidium

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many incidents relating to cryptosporidium in drinking water are awaiting assessment and report by the drinking water inspectorate; [20088]

(2) if he will list the incidents by water company and date relating to cryptosporidium in drinking water reported to the drinking water inspectorate since 1 January 1993. [20089]

Mr. Clappison: Water companies in England and Wales are required to report all incidents in which drinking water quality might be affected. All incidents are investigated by the drinking water inspectorate. Most incidents are relatively minor happenings.

The most significant risk to drinking water quality is the presence of cryptosporidium oocysts. On cryptosporidium, the notification to the inspectorate can relate either to the detection of cryptosporidium oocysts in treated water, or to an increase of the illness cryptosporidiosis in the community, or both. The transmission of the illness occurs in a number of ways and often through contact with animals. One recent outbreak of cryptosporidiosis was found to be associated with the failure of a milk pasteurisation plant. The source of any outbreak has to be established through epidemiology.

A case of South West Water Services Ltd. allegedly supplying water unfit for human consumption during 1995 because of cryptosporidium is currently before the courts.

Notifications of events involving cryptosporidium since 1 January 1993 are listed under three headings together with the status of the investigation. It should be noted that not all notifications become confirmed as incidents.

Cryptosporidium oocysts detected in treated water but no reported increase of cryptosporidiosis in the community

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*	*Status*
Yorkshire Water	5 January 1995	Huby WTW	concluded
Yorkshire Water	16 March 1995	Fixby WTW	concluded
Essex and Suffolk	30 March 1995	Ormsby WTW	concluded
Yorkshire Water	31 August 1995	Cottingham adit	concluded
Yorkshire Water	13 September 1995	Kepwick Springs WTW (in raw water)	concluded
South West Water	13 September 1995	Parracombe WTW	concluded
Yorkshire Water	5 January 1996	Elvington WTW	concluded
Yorkshire Water	10 January 1996	Elvington WTW	concluded
Yorkshire Water	15 January 1996	Kepwick Springs WTW	concluded
South West Water	29 May 1996	Littlehempston	concluded
Cambridge Water	30 May 1996	Duxford/Linton	concluded
South West Water	27 June 1996	Crown Hill WTW	concluded
Mid Kent Water / Southern Water	3 July 1996	Burham WTW	concluded
Yorkshire Water	17 October 1996	Elvington WTW (raw water only)	under investigation
Northumbrian Water	22 October 1996	Lumley WTW	under investigation
Yorkshire Water	21 February 1997	Pateley Bridge	under investigation
Cambridge	12 March 1997	St. Ives	under investigation
Cambridge	12 March 1997	Horse Heath	under investigation

An increase in cryptosporidiosis in the community by oocysts not detected in treated water

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*	*Status*
Wessex Water	April 1993	Poole	under investigation
Yorkshire Water	11 June 1993	Gilstead (Shipley/Bingley)	under investigation
Northumbria	15 June 1993	Sherburn	Concluded
North West	April 1994	Chorley	Concluded
North East	25 January 1996	Sunderland	under investigation
Yorkshire Water	21 March 1996	Tophill Low	under investigation
Anglian Water	12 February 1997	Bedford area	under investigation
Three Valleys Water	26 February 1997	Luton/Dunstable	under investigation

Both oocysts detected in treated water and an increase of cryptosporidiosis in the community

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*	*Status*
South West Water	12 August 1995	Torbay/ Littlehempston	being prosecuted
North West Water	29 April 1996	The Wirral	under investigation
Portsmouth Water	18 November 1996	Itchen WTW	under investigation
Three Valleys Water	2 March 1997	Clay Lane WTW	under investigation
Three Valleys Water	2 March 1997	Welwyn	under investigation

No incidents relating to cryptosporidium other than those listed are awaiting assessment or report.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the drinking water inspectorate will report on the Shipley/Bingley incident of cryptosporidium in drinking water on 11 June 1993. [20090]

Mr. Clappison: The investigation by the drinking water inspectorate of this incident is continuing. As is standard practice, as part of its investigations, the inspectorate is considering whether there is a case for prosecuting Yorkshire Water plc, under section 70 of the Water Industry Act 1991, for the alleged offence of supplying water unfit for human consumption.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Office of Water Supply regarding compensation to be paid to the customers affected by the cryptosporidium incident in the area of the Three Valleys Water Company. [20094]

Mr. Clappison: None. The drinking water inspectorate has commenced a full investigation to establish whether the recent outbreak of cryptosporidiosis is linked to the water supply. After this investigation is completed, the Director General of Water Services will consider whether there is any case for compensation.

Water Meters

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the cost of the free installation of water meters was paid for by *(a)* increased domestic customer charges and *(b)* shareholders in 1996. [20091]

Mr. Clappison: This is a matter for the Director General of Water Services who informs me that in setting price limits at the 1994 periodic review he allowed for the costs of metering to be met by metered customers, other than the costs of excavation for meter boxes. This did not have a significant effect on price limits. Price limits have not been increased to allow for the subsequent introduction by some companies of a free meter space and these costs are therefore met by the shareholders, at least until new price limits are set.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation the Office of Water Supply has held with non-metered householders about the costs to them of free meter installation. [20093]

Mr. Clappison: Since price limits were set by the Director General of Water Services in 1994, he informs me that there have been no costs to unmeasured household customers associated with companies' subsequent introduction of free meter installation. The director has not therefore specifically consulted about this. Ofwat liaises on a day to day basis with its 10 customer service committees about matters affecting customers.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was spent by water companies in 1996 on *(a)* the installation of and *(b)* the administrative costs of household metering. [20092]

Mr. Clappison: This is a matter for the Director General of Water Services, who informs me that this information is not available in the form requested.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being taken by his Department to promote the decontamination of contaminated land and its development in preference to green field sites; and if he will make a statement. [20319]

Mr. Clappison: My Department's contaminated land policies, funding of research, technical guidance on topics such as techniques for site investigation, risk assessment of sites, take-up of new technologies and potential environmental liabilities and support under the single regeneration budget and through English Partnerships are all designed to enable the use of brown field sites in preference to green field sites.

Property Disposals (Residuary Body)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties the residuary body, established under section 22 of the Local Government Act 1992, has dealt with or disposed of to date; and if he will list those properties. [20291]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State has no role in deciding which particular properties vest in the residuary body. This is a matter for the body and the local authorities concerned. I understand from the residuary body that it is dealing with the archives owned by the former Humberside county council and has disposed of an interest in Carlisle House, Goole, an office building formerly owned by Boothferry district council. The residuary body has put forward recommendations to the Secretary of State for the disposal of the Humberside archives.

English House Condition Survey

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide for the combined regions of the north (northern, Yorkshire and Humberside and north-west), Greater London (inner London and outer London) and the rest of England (east midlands, west midlands, south-west, east anglia and rest of south-east) from the 1991 English house condition survey the figures for *(a)* construction date by tenure, *(b)* unfitness by tenure, *(c)* worst or best condition by tenure, *(d)* unfit vacants by tenure, *(e)* unfitness by dwelling type and tenure, *(f)* reason for vacancy by tenure and *(g)* variation of general comprehensive and urgent repair costs by tenure. [20217]

Mr. Clappison: Tables *(a)*, *(b)*, *(c)* and *(g)* are presented as requested. The information requested in *(d)* is part of table *(b)*. The sample of dwellings surveyed in the 1991 English house condition survey is too small to provide *(e)* and *(f)*.

Table A: Construction date by tenure by three broad regions

Thousand (per cent.) dwellings

Construction date by broad region	Owner-occupied	Private rented	Local authority	Housing association	Vacant	Total
Northern						
Pre 1919	1,106 (71.5) 29.6	276 (17.8) 66.2	33 (2.1) 2.5	57 (3.7) 26.1	75 (4.8) 38.9	1,547 (100) 26.2
1919–44	816 (64.2) 21.8	62 (4.9) 14.9	344 (27.1) 25.6	21 (1.7) 9.6	28 (2.2) 14.5	1,271 (100) 21.5
1945–64	673 (52.1) 18.0	40 (3.1) 9.6	529 (40.9) 39.4	14 (1.1) 6.4	36 (2.8) 18.7	1,292 (100) 21.9
Post 1964	1,140 (63.4) 30.5	39 (2.2) 9.4	438 (24.4) 32.6	126 (7.0) 57.8	54 (3.0) 28.0	1,797 (100) 30.4
Regional total	3,735 (63.2) 100	417 (7.1) 100	1,344 (22.8) 100	218 (3.7) 100	193 (3.3) 100	5,904 (100) 100
Greater London						
Pre 1919	661 (59.2) 38.8	197 (17.6) 63.1	83 (7.4) 12.4	83 (7.4) 54.2	93 (8.3) 62.0	1,117 (100) 37.4
1919–44	610 (70.8) 35.8	64 (7.4) 20.5	134 (15.6) 19.9	18 (2.1) 11.8	35 (4.1) 23.3	861 (100) 28.8
1945–64	183 (43.7) 10.7	22 (5.3) 7.1	204 (48.7) 30.4	2 (0.5) 1.3	8 (1.9) 5.3	419 (100) 14.0
Post 1964	249 (42.0) 14.6	29 (4.9) 9.3	251 (42.3) 37.4	50 (8.4) 32.7	14 (2.4) 9.3	593 (100) 19.8
Regional total	1,703 (57.0) 100	312 (10.4) 100	672 (22.5) 100	153 (5.1) 100	150 (5.0) 100	2,990 (100) 100
Rest of England						
Pre 1919	1,831 (71.7) 24.2	492 (19.3) 54.9	51 (2.0) 2.8	38 (1.5) 16.1	141 (15.5) 47.3	2,553 (100) 23.6
1919–44	1,250 (70.0) 16.5	127 (7.1) 14.2	354 (19.8) 19.2	22 (1.2) 9.3	32 (1.8) 10.7	1,785 (100) 16.5
1945–64	1,550 (61.1) 20.5	104 (4.1) 11.6	797 (31.4) 43.2	35 (1.4) 14.8	52 (2.0) 17.4	2,538 (100) 23.4
Post 1964	2,925 (74.0) 38.7	173 (4.4) 19.3	643 (16.3) 34.9	141 (3.6) 59.7	73 (1.8) 24.5	3,955 (100) 36.5
Regional total	7,556 (69.8) 100	896 (8.3) 100	1,845 (17.0) 100	236 (2.2) 100	298 (2.8) 100	10,831 (100) 100

Table B: Unfitness by tenure by 3 broad regions

Thousand (per cent.) dwellings

Unfitness by broad region	Owner-occupied	Private rented	Local authority	Housing association	Vacant	Total
Northern						
Fit	3,487 (654.7) 93.4	310 (5.8) 74.3	1,249 (23.2) 93.0	207 (3.8) 95.8	135 (2.5) 70.7	5,388 (100) 91.3
Unfit	248 (48.2) 6.6	107 (20.8) 25.7	94 (18.3) 7.0	[1]—	56 (10.9) 29.3	514 (100) 8.7
Regional total	3,735 (63.33) 100	417 (7.1) 100	1,342 (22.8) 100	216 (3.7) 100	191 (3.2) 100	5,904 (100) 100
Greater London						
Fit	1,576 (58.6) 92.5	257 (9.6) 82.1	601 (22.4) 89.7	130 (4.8) 84.4	125 (4.6) 83.3	2,689 (100) 89.9
Unfit	127 (42.2) 7.5	56 (18.6) 17.9	69 (22.9) 10.3	[1]—	25 (8.3) 16.7	301 (100) 10.1
Regional total	1,703 (57.0) 100	313 (10.5) 100	670 (22.4) 100	154 (5.2) 100	150 (5.0) 100	2,990 (100) 100
Rest of England						
Fit	7,217 (71.1) 95.5	726 (7.2) 81.0	1,744 (17.2) 94.5	229 (2.3) 96.6	235 (2.3) 78.9	10,151 (100) 93.7
Unfit	339 (49.7) 4.5	170 (24.9) 19.0	102 (15.0) 5.5	[1]—	63 (9.2) 21.1	682 (100) 6.3
Regional total	7,556 (69.7) 100	896 (89.3) 100	1,846 (17.0) 100	237 (2.2) 100	298 (2.8) 100	10,833 (100) 100

[1] Sample sizes too small to provide statistically significant data.

Table C: Worst/best condition by tenure by 3 broad regions

Thousand (per cent.) dwellings

Worst/best condition by broad region	Owner-occupied	Private rented	Local authority	Housing association	Vacant	Total
Northern						
Best 30 per cent.	1,271 (71.6) 34.0	44 (2.5) 10.6	320 (18.0) 23.8	114 (6.4) 52.8	25 (1.4) 13.1	1,774 (100) 30.1
Rest (60 per cent.)	2,117 (61.4) 56.7	234 (6.8) 56.1	905 (26.2) 67.4	90 (2.6) 41.7	103 (3.0) 53.9	3,449 (100) 58.4
Worst 10 per cent.	348 (51.2) 9.3	139 (20.4) 33.3	118 (17.4) 8.8	12 (1.8) 5.6	63 (9.3) 33.0	680 (100) 11.5
Regional total	3,736 (63.3) 100	417 (7.1) 100	1,343 (22.8) 100	216 (3.7) 100	191 (3.2) 100	5,904 (100) 100
Greater London						
Best 30 per cent.	392 (62.0) 23.0	49 (7.8) 15.7	110 (17.4) 16.4	41 (6.5) 26.6	40 (6.3) 26.7	632 (100) 21.1
Rest (60 per cent.)	1,162 (58.3) 68.3	174 (8.7) 55.6	475 (23.8) 70.8	97 (4.9) 63.0	85 (4.3) 56.7	1,993 (100) 66.7
Worst 10 per cent.	148 (40.5) 8.7	90 (24.7) 28.8	86 (23.6) 12.8	16 (4.4) 10.4	25 (6.8) 16.7	365 (100) 12.2
Regional total	1,702 (56.9) 100	313 (10.5) 100	671 (22.4) 100	154 (5.2) 100	150 (5.0) 100	2,990 (100) 100
Rest of England						
Best 30 per cent.	2,758 (78.6) 36.5	104 (3.0) 11.6	479 (13.7) 25.9	116 (3.3) 49.2	51 (1.5) 17.1	3,508 (100) 32.4
Rest (60 per cent.)	4,325 (67.6) 57.2	556 (8.7) 62.1	1,242 (19.4) 67.3	103 (1.6) 43.6	171 (2.7) 57.4	6,397 (100) 59.1
Worst 10 per cent.	473 (51.1) 6.3	235 (25.4) 26.3	125 (13.5) 6.8	17 (1.8) 7.2	76 (8.2) 25.5	926 (100) 8.5
Regional total	7,556 (69.8) 100	895 (8.3) 100	1,846 (17.0) 100	236 (2.2) 100	298 (2.8) 100	10,831 (100) 100

Table G: Variation of urgent, general and comprehensive repair costs by tenure by 3 broad regions

Estimated cost of remedial work (£)

Tenure by region	Urgent repairs Mean	Urgent repairs Median	General repairs Mean	General repairs Median	Comprehensive repairs Mean	Comprehensive repairs Median
Northern						
Owner-occupied	685	137	1,160	415	2,053	776
Private rented	1,855	884	2,617	1,798	4,549	2,872
Local authority	762	252	1,091	474	2,002	969
Housing association	377	26	561	65	1,035	122
All tenures	797	190	1,252	473	2,227	903
Greater London						
Owner-occupied	697	261	1,341	649	2,597	1,437
Private rented	1,465	464	2,002	854	3,488	1,708
Local authority	723	300	1,042	452	2,000	947
Housing association	736	193	981	373	1,674	681
All tenures	817	292	1,349	602	2,539	1,282
Rest of England						
Owner-occupied	538	97	1,027	342	1,966	593
Private rented	1,705	525	2,535	1,181	4,233	2,111
Local authority	497	182	863	374	1,726	730
Housing association	350	40	699	80	1,356	128
All tenures	653	134	1,154	370	2,155	701

[1] Vacant dwellings have been included in the relevant tenure group. Assumptions have been made regarding the distribution of private sector vacants between the owner-occupied and private rented sectors.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *730–31*, if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*. [20383]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My answer of 6 March to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) provides the maximum possible information on capital investment in individual projects, without releasing commercially sensitive details, particularly for those projects still in procurement.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide figures for local authority PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*; and if he will list his latest estimates of annual totals for local authority PFI projects, on the same basis as those given in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [20397]

Mr. Jones: The Red Book gives estimates for total capital spend by contractors on PFI projects. Information in this form for individual projects is not held centrally. We have announced support for up to £250 million of PFI investment to the end of 1997–98. The public private partnerships programme has recently announced a series of PFI patherfinder projects which are expected to be signed in the forthcoming months.

Salisbury Bypass (Report)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library *(a)* the draft report and *(b)* the final report by English Nature to the Highways Agency on the crossing of the River Avon south of Salisbury by the proposed Salisbury bypass. [20294]

Mr. Clappison: I have today placed in the Library of the House *(a)* a copy of English Nature's final working draft advice on the proposed Salisbury bypass and *(b)* a copy of its formal advice to the Highways Agency, as endorsed by English Nature's council.

Isles of Scilly (Homelessness Legislation)

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make special provision for the Isles of Scilly under the homelessness legislation; and if he will make a statement. [20515]

Mr. Curry: In view of the unique situation of the Isles of Scilly—its small scale and limited resources—the Secretary of State has made an order under section 225 of the Housing Act 1996 which relieves the Council of the Isles of Scilly of an obligation to rehouse persons applying for assistance under part VII of the Housing Act 1996 who have not resided in that authority's area for at least two-and-a-half years of the last three years.

Accidents (Dangerous Substances)

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the major accidents notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1984 since January 1993, indicating in respect of each such accident *(a)* the dangerous substances involved, *(b)* the number of casualties, *(c)* the emergency measures taken to protect lives and property, *(d)* the extent of consequential restrictions placed on the consumption of food or drinking water and *(e)* details of any damage to the environment. [20456]

Sir Paul Beresford: The list of major accidents that have occurred at sites subject to the Control of Industrial Regulations Major Accident Hazards 1984 since January

1983 and notified to HSE is as follows. The table lists where the off-site emergency plan was activated. HSE has no information on any restrictions placed on the consumption of food or drinking water as a result of these incidents.

The taking of emergency measures to protect lives and property is the responsibility of the local authority emergency services and therefore HSE has only limited information on the emergency measures taken to protect lives and property.

Date		*Company*	*Dangerous substance*	*Casualties*	*Emergency measures*	*Environment damage*
1997 (1)	7 February 1997	Van Ommeren West Thurrock, Essex	Ethanol	None	No need to activate the off-site emergency plan.	None
(2)	24 January 1997	British Gas Romford	Liquified natural gas	None	No need to activate the off-site emergency plan.	None
1996 (3)	3 October 1996	Albright and Wilson Ltd. Birmingham	Epichlorohydrin, Sodium chlorate and mixed chemicals.	Injuries to 6 firemen and other employees, some members of the public reported eye/respiratory irritation.	Off-site emergency plan activated (no information of food/drinking water restriction).	None
(4)	17 July 1996	Synthetic Chemicals (Northern) Ltd. Knottingley, West Yorkshire	Sulphur Trioxide	Injury to plant manager.	Off-site plan activated (no information of food/drinking water restriction).	None
(5)	4 February 1996	British Gas Bromley	Natural gas	None	Off-site plan not activated.	None
1995 (6)	22 October 1993	British Gas Runcorn	Natural gas	None	Off-site plan activated (no information re: food/water restriction).	None
(7)	20 July 1995	Continental Can Co. Ltd. Rugby	Liquified petroleum gas	1 (minor) casualty.	Off-site plan not activated.	None
(8)	17 January 1995	GATX Terminals Ltd. Bristol	Petroleum spirit	None	Off-site plan not activated.	None
1994 (9)	3 September 1994	Coalite Chemicals Ltd. Bolsover	Chlorine	On-site casualties (5).	Off-site plan not activated.	None
(10)	4 August 1994	GATX Terminals Ltd. Bristol	Petroleum spirit	1 Fatality	Off-site plan not activated.	None
(11)	24 July 1994	Pembroke Cracking Co. Ltd. Pembroke	Flammable gases-liquids	On-site casualties.	Off-site plan not activated.None	
(12)	6 July 1994	ICI C&P Ltd.Runcorn	Vinyl chloride	None	Off-site plan not activated	None
(13)	22 May 1994	Esso Petroleum Ltd. Southampton	Refinery treated gas (hydrogen and hydrocarbons)	None	Off-site plan not activated	None
(14)	11 April 1994	Powell Duffryn Terminals Ltd.	Ethanol	None	Off-site plan not activated	None
(15)	9 February 1994	Phillips Petroleum Ltd.Bacton	Natural gas	None	Off-site plan not activated	None
(16)	1 February 1994	Associated Octel Ltd.Ellesmere Port	Ethyl chloride	None	Off-site plan activated (no information re: food/water restrictions)	None
1993 (17)	1 November 1993	British Gas Beckton	Natural gas	None	Off-site plan not activated	None
(18)	5 October 1993	British Gas Partington	Liqueified Natural Gas	None	Off-site plan not activated	None
(19)	5 July 1993	Simon Storage Immingham	LPG	None	Off-site plan not activated	None

Albino Frogs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect on other life forms and the environment of the reported increase in the number of albino frogs. [20546]

Mr. Clappison: English Nature, the Government's scientific advisers on nature conservation issues, advises that albinism is highly unlikely to have any impact whatsoever on other life forms or the environment. The only effect that it may have is that for a short while predators on frogs may have an easier time in locating their prey. I am satisfied that, at this time, this issue is not of any conservation significance.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what indications have been given to the in-house bid team seeking to acquire the Building Research Establishment about the level of Government support for the Building Research Establishment in the immediate future and the type of work which would be covered by Government contracts. [20636]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Information memorandum sent to all pre-qualified bidders contained information about the work the Department intended to commission from BRE post privatisation, comprising both on-going contracts and new work to be let on a single tender basis to BRE. Detailed information about this work was placed in the data room for the benefit of shortlisted bidders, and updated as appropriate. In addition, both shortlisted bidders were given the opportunity to talk to DOE customers about future opportunities.

It will be for other Government Departments to decide for themselves what work they might wish to commission from BRE in the future.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the Government plan to accept any liability for redundancy costs arising from the proposed privatisation of the Building Research Establishment; [20637]

(2) what discussions have been held between his Department and the two bidders for the Building Research Department about provision for redundancy among existing Building Research Establishment employees and the liability for redundancy payments. [20639]

Mr. Jones: It was made clear to all bidders that decisions on, and funding of, any redundancies post privatisation was a matter for the future owners of BRE. However, the calculation of expected restructuring costs—including redundancies—has been an important aspect of valuing BRE and, for prospective purchasers, for deciding how much to bid. Therefore in order to maintain a level playing field, all pre-qualified bidders were provided with assumptions regarding redundancy costs for different categories of staff, which they were requested to use in preparing their indicative bids.

The two shortlisted bidders were given access to the data room which contained:

a note by the Government Actuary's Department on redundancy entitlement in the Civil Service;

the civil service compensation scheme report and explanatory booklet "PCSPS Early Retirement and Redundancy";

information from the Government Actuary's Department relating to estimated redundancy costs by category of staff.

At both stages, subsequent discussions were held with those bidders who requested them—including both short-listed bidders at stage 2—in order to clarify where necessary the figures and the basis on which bids were to be submitted.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff are currently employed at the Building Research Establishment; and how many redundancies are forecast in the in-house bid team's proposals. [20638]

Mr. Jones: At close of play on 14 March 1997 there were 660 people employed at BRE, 633.2 full-time equivalent staff.

Information given to the staff and trade unions by the management bid team indicates that they expect there to be in the order of 115 job losses following transfer to the private sector.

Mr. Garel-Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will be in a position to make a statement about the Building Research Establishment. [20826]

Mr. Jones: On 15 March my Deaprtment entered into a contract to sell the Building Research Establishment to the preferred purchaser, the management bid team. The consideration is £1.7 million, plus an adjustment based on the balance sheet at completion. The sale agreements include provision for the Department to benefit from any windfall gain the purchaser may receive in respect of property, intellectual property, or reduced business rates. We hope to complete this transaction shortly.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on what date he received the formal request from the Environment Directorate of the European Commission for his observations on the complaint in respect of the Cardiff bay barrage; when he expects to make his response; and if he will place a copy of his response in the Library; [20521]

(2) what information he proposes to supply to the Environment Directorate of the European Commission in response to the request for United Kingdom Government observations on the complaint regarding the Cardiff bay barrage; if he will include details of the Treasury's cost-benefit analysis of the barrage in his response; and if he will make a statement; [20522]

(3) what information the Environment Directorate of the European Commission has requested concerning progress on the Gwent levels bird reserve project as part of the United Kingdom Government's observations on the complaint regarding the Cardiff bay barrage. [20520]

Mr. Clappison: The European Commission decided not to proceed with the complaint in respect of the Cardiff bay barrage in February 1996. It confirmed that they were satisfied with the compensatory measures put forward by the Government. Since then we have kept the Commission closely informed of progress on these measures, both in correspondence and in a series of discussions between the relevant officials. The Government have received no formal request for information from the Commission pursuant to any further complaint.

Environment Agency (Charging Schemes)

Sir Jim Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the Environment Agency charging schemes for Integrated Pollution Control and Radioactive Substances Act Regulation for 1997–98. [20823]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Act 1995 requires the Environment Agency to make charging schemes to recover the cost of carrying out its regulatory functions.

With the consent of Treasury, and of the charging schemes for Radioactive Substances Act Regulation, the consent of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; and following consultation with those likely to be affected by the schemes, the Environment Agency has now made charging schemes for Integrated Pollution Control and Radioactive Substances Act Regulation for 1997–98. The schemes will take effect from 1 April 1997. I have placed copies of them in the Library.

The subsistence charge for integrated pollution control has been set at £1,755 to effect full cost recovery. This is a reduction of £50 on the charge in 1996–97. There are some minor changes to the charging schemes. Copies of the schemes will be sent to relevant operators and to other interested bodies shortly.

Planning Inspectorate

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what performance targets he has set for the Planning Inspectorate agency for the financial year 1997–98. [20804]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have today set key targets for the Planning Inspectorate in England in furtherance of the dual objectives of securing improved efficiency, and safeguarding the impartiality and quality of the agency's work. These targets form part of the phased programme of performance which I initiated last year. The targets for 1997–98 are:

Timeliness

(a) 80 per cent. of all planning appeals decided by written representations to be determined in 20 weeks, reducing to 18 weeks by 1998–99;

(b) 80 per cent. of all planning appeals decided by hearings to be determined in 33 weeks, reducing to 24 weeks by 1998–99;

(c) 80 per cent. of all planning appeals decided by inquiries to be determined in 44 weeks, reducing to 36 weeks by 1998–99;

(d) to provide an inspector for 80 per cent. of local plan inquiries on request within 26 weeks of the end of the objection period, and to deliver 90 per cent. of inspectors' reports to local authorities by the dates agreed in service agreements;

Financial

(a) unit costs of planning appeals decided by written representations not to exceed £690;

(b) recover 90 per cent. of receipts within eight weeks of invoice date;

Efficiency

generate a 3 per cent. efficiency improvement in the use of running costs compared with 1996–97;

Quality

to satisfy the Advisory Panel on Standards, and thus the Secretary of State, annually and following rigorous monitoring, that the quality of the inspectorate's work is being maintained at a high standard with 99 per cent. of its casework free from justified complaint;

Information and guidance

to carry out a customer satisfaction survey of the quality of Inspectors' reasoning in decision letters.

Council Leaseholders (Service Charges)

Sir Jim Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further plans he has to assist council leaseholders facing difficulties with service charges. [20822]

Mr. Clappison: We issued the Social Landlords Discretionary Reduction of Service Charges (England) Directions 1997 and the Social Landlords Mandatory Reduction of Service Charges (England) Directions 1997 on 4 February. We issued a further direction on 13 March giving Wandsworth borough council discretion to waive or reduce service charges for works in respect of defects on the Ackroydon and Queensmere estates. We have no plans at present to issue further directions, but we shall consider carefully any requests that are put to us.

Greening Government Initiative

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the greening government initiative. [20821]

Mr. Gummer: Green Ministers have taken stock of the Government's approach to the environmental appraisal of its policies and to green housekeeping.

The Government's commitment to assess the potential environmental impact of new policy proposals has been restated in successive White Paper annual reports on sustainable development, and "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" requires all Departments to ensure that papers for Cabinet and ministerial committees should, where appropriate, cover any significant costs or benefits to the environment. Green Ministers have specifically reaffirmed that their Departments will carry out environmental appraisal of policies where appropriate and agreed to ensure that departmental procedures are in place to check that this happens and to keep them under review. They have also agreed to consider publishing those appraisals where there is a significant environmental impact. In 1991 my Department published "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" giving extensive guidance on how to integrate environmental considerations into Government policy. Consultants (KPMG) have been appointed to evaluate the practical application of environmental appraisal and are due to finalise their report shortly.

The Government are also fully committed to running their own operations and buildings in accordance with best environmental practice as an integral part of their contribution to the UK's sustainable development strategy. All Government Departments have had green housekeeping strategies in place since 1992 and have achieved a great deal. Energy efficiency on the Government estate has improved by almost 15 per cent. in the five years to March 1996 and a new target of an overall 20 per cent. improvement by March 2000 has been endorsed by the Prime Minister.

New Government buildings and major refurbishment will be assessed under the Building Research Establishment's environmental assessment method, or an equivalent scheme. The Department of the Environment's office services division has achieved accreditation for its environmental management system under BS 7750 and ISO 140001; this makes the United Kingdom one of the small number of countries that are investigating the application of such techniques in central Government. Work is under way by Government Departments to review the scope for reducing the impact of their travel and transport patterns on the environment and the scope for introducing green commuter plans to encourage staff to switch from the car to public transport, walking or cycling.

Green Ministers have now agreed a further programme of action to take forward the green government initiative. The KPMG report and its case studies will be published as soon as it has been finalised. Green Ministers agree with the thrust of KPMG's emerging findings on the environmental appraisal of policies. Specifically they have agreed to:

(a) prepare a short aide memoire, widely available and targeted more towards policy advisers than appraisal specialists, and showing the range of techniques available;

(b) provide more detailed material on good practice for those needing further specialist advice; the Department of the Environment will be ready to advise other Departments without such expertise, and more generally (including considering the dissemination of case studies using both written material and seminars);

(c) review in their Departments the systems and processes they have in place to deal with environmental issues in policy appraisal where there are significant; although requirements differ across Departments, they will provide a clear point of contact for officials seeking advice;

(d) take responsibility for ensuring that the necessary systems and processes are being properly used and, where the environmental impacts are significant, demonstrate publicly how they have taken account of environmental considerations in policy development. Collectively Green Ministers will review the situation periodically to satisfy themselves that arrangements are working well.

The Government's corporate strategy on green housekeeping signals the Government's determination to build on the action already taken and to follow sound environmental principles across its operations. In particular, the Government will work to the target of a 20 per cent. improvement in energy efficiency over 1990 levels by 2000, and explore new ways of measuring performance by standard performance indicators. We shall ensure that new buildings and major refurbishments are designed to achieve high standards of environmental performance.

The Government will also monitor targets set by Departments for reducing their waste in accordance with the UK strategy for sustainable waste management and promote the concepts of reduction, re-use, recovery and recycling with disposal as the least favourable option. New guidelines will be issued to Government Departments on taking environmental factors into account in purchasing goods and services consistent with the need to achieve value for money.

Departments will reduce the use of hazardous substances, materials and goods and, where they are essential, dispose of them safely and in an environmentally preferable manner. Furthermore, Departments will minimise the environmental impact of the transport needs of Government operations, promote environmentally sensible choices in the way staff travel to work and provide them with the information and training they need to carry out their duties with the minimum impact on the environment.

Green Ministers recognise that the achievement of improved environmental performance requires the commitment of all staff from senior management downwards and depends on Departments developing proper management systems. Where they have not already done so, Departments will consider whether it would be practicable, and whether it would bring extra value, to seek accreditation under BS 7750 and ISO 14001 or to have their systems assessed by auditors trained in environmental management.

SCOTLAND

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown by project of PFI schemes for which his Department is responsible as identified in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [18934]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* Table 1 gives a breakdown of the forecasts for Scotland in table 5.5 of the Red Book. It is possible to give a meaningfull breakdown of the forecasts by project only for the Scottish Office's own projects and those of its agencies and nationalised industries. Forecasts for other sectors are based on information supplied by the public bodies concerned and the views of the Scottish Office and the Forestry Commission of the likely progress of the PFI in these sectors.

Table 2 lists the latest forecasts on the same basis.

Table 1: Red Book forecasts

	Estimated capital investment (£ million)			
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*Total*
Scottish Office, Agencies and nationalised industries:				
M6 completion	22	70	30	122
M8 completion	25	50	40	115
M80 completion	—	—	25	25
Bowhouse prison	40	40	—	80
Inverness Airport terminal (Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.)	1	2	1	4
Water and sewerage	60	230	307	597
Further and higher education	5	3	3	11
Health	100	150	270	520
Forestry Commission: timber harvesting	10	11	14	35
"Scotland" total in Red Book	263	556	690	1,509
Scottish local authority projects	22	104	105	231

Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million.

Table 2: Latest estimates

	Estimated capital investment (£ million)			
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*Total*
Scottish Office, Agencies and nationalised industries:				
M6 completion	37	59	33	130
M8 completion	25	50	40	115
M80 completion	—	—	15	15
Bowhouse prison	20	60	—	80
Inverness Airport terminal (Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.)	9	—	—	9
Water and sewerage	60	230	307	597
Further and higher education	10	8	3	21
Health	100	150	270	520
Forestry Commission: timber harvesting	10	11	14	35
"Scotland" total in Red Book format	270	568	682	1,520
Scottish local authority projects	22	103	100	225

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*; and if he will list his latest estimates of annual totals for PFI projects, on the same basis as those given in Table 5.5 of the Red Book. [20395]

Mr. Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) today.

NHS Staff

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list (i) by health board and (ii) overall the number of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* health visitors, *(e)* administration and clerical staff and *(f)* managers in the NHS in Scotland in each year from 1990 to 1996. [18894]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* As the information requested is lengthy, I have arranged for copies to be placed in the House Library.

Market Testing Unit (Costs)

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the costs of his Department's market testing unit in each year since 1992, indicating for each year the *(a)* staff costs, *(b)* running costs and *(c)* costs of work commissioned by the unit. [19155]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information available on the costs of market testing is given in the table. This shows staff costs for the period up to June 1994 and the full costs to date of consultancy support. Information on staff costs since June 1994 and non-staff running costs is not available centrally and could be gathered only at a disproportionate cost.

£ million

Year	*Staff costs*	*Consultancy costs*
1992–93	0.965	0.917
1993–94	1.239	0.469
1994–95	0.095	0.064
1995–96	Not separately identified	Nil
1996–97	Not separately identified	Nil

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been in each year the *(a)* consultancy, *(b)* advertising and *(c)* other fees associated with the establishment of nursery vouchers in Scotland. [19157]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information as at 4 March 1997, excluding VAT, is as follows:

	1995–96 £	*1996–97* £
Consultancy fees	0	4,188
Advertising fees	520	113,400
Other fees	9,350	203,518

"Other fees" include translation and production fees subcontracted by advertising agents, and fees to Capita Managed Services for the issue and redemption of vouchers, helpline staffing and associated services. Charges made by local authorities and others for the secondment of staff as development officers and for work on the curriculum framework, by Stirling university for research on the pilot schemes, and by press and television firms for the carriage of advertising (these latter amounting to nil in 1995–96, £212,901 in 1996–97), have been excluded.

Scallop Conservation

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to implement the results of the consultation on scallop conservation measures in Argyll and Bute; and if he will make a statement. [19493]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The results of the 1996 UK consultation exercise on scallop conservation were largely inconclusive. No specific measures are proposed for Argyll and Bute. Discussions are continuing in the context of the European Commission's proposed revision of the technical conservation regulation.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of food poisoning in Scotland were notified to his Department in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [20193]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table. Notifications of cases of food poisoning are made to the Common Services Agency for the Scottish health service. Notifications of food poisoning cases are made by doctors but, since February 1995, cases ascertained by laboratories and environmental health officers have also been included in the totals.

Notifications of Food Poisoning[1,2] in Scotland, year ending 31 December 1979–1996

Year	*Total*
1979	2,657
1980	2,689
1981	4,379
1982	4,525
1983	4,265
1984	4,301
1985	4,230
1986	4,662
1987	5,050
1988	5,734
1989	6,156
1990	6,757
1991	6,318
1992	7,877
1993	7,170
1994	8,291
1995	9,297
1996	10,126

[1] For 1979–1995 notifications are confirmed cases, adjusted where a revised diagnosis is subsequently received. For 1996 notifications are provisional and subject to amendment where a revised diagnosis is subsequently received.
[2] Includes campylobacters from 1980. Excludes campylobacters in Ayrshire and Arran Health Board area from 1979–1986.
Source:
Common Services Agency.

Mr. W. J. Duff

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions, and from what date, the Common Services Agency dental practice division undertook ad hoc checks on dental payment claim forms submitted by Mr. W. J. Duff; what were the conclusions; and what action was taken following each occasion. [19264]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* The Common Services Agency's dental practice division undertakes ad hoc checks where dental payment claim forms are rejected during processing for any reason such as when there is incomplete information

on the form. In such cases, payments are not made and the forms are returned to the dentist for correct completion. Because these checks are ad hoc, no records are kept.

Drug Services (Funding)

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy in regard to the ring fencing of funding provision to health boards for drug services. [20198]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: In order to ensure that sufficient priority is given to tackling the problem of drug misuse in Scotland, the Government's policy is that the ring fencing of funding provision to health boards for drug services is essential and should continue.

Radioactive Materials

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the civil police provide escorts for type B containers of civil radioactive materials transported by road at the request of the material's owners; and if he will make a statement. [19932]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

The civil police do not escort type B containers of radioactive materials transported by road. The UK Atomic Energy Authority constabulary escorts these containers when necessary.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the owners of radioactive materials in transit are responsible for the cost of civil police escorts; and if he will make a statement. [19933]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

The civil police are not involved in the escort of radioactive materials and therefore no costs are incurred.

HEALTH

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with disabilities, living in NHS hospitals or residential accommodation, currently receive the mobility component of the disability living allowance. [20130]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

People with entitlement to disability living allowance mobility component at 21 January 1997 who were in hospital for over 28 days (84 days for children)

	Number
Rate of mobility entitlement	
Higher	10,480
Lower	13,951
Total	24,431

Source:
Analytical Services Division 100 per cent. data.

Community Care

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the responses to his Department's draft guidance for local authorities on the implementation of the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19205]

Mr. Burns: Copies of all responses have been placed in the Library, except where respondents have indicated that they wish their reply to be excluded from this arrangement. In those cases, confidentiality has been respected.

We have received 206 replies to the consultation throughout the United Kingdom. These comprise 86 replies from local authorities, 70 from voluntary organisations, and 50 from independent providers, health bodies, statutory bodies and individuals.

Pepper Gas

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *287*, for what reasons his Department compiled the report on pepper spray; and if his Department has prepared other reports on this subject since 1991. [19088]

Mr. Horam: The report to which the hon. Member refers was prepared by officials at the Department of Health at the request of the Home Office. No further scientific reports on this subject have been produced by officials.

Extra-Corporeal Membrane Oxygenation

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals which have facilities to provide extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation for children aged *(a)* up to six months and *(b)* six months and over; and how many paediatric intensive care beds there are in each of the units with extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation facilities. [19497]

Mr. Horam: On the basis of recently published evidence of the effectiveness of extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation in neonates, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 8 January that, from 1 April this year, an ECMO service for neonates and premature babies up to six months suffering from respiratory syncytial virus will be purchased centrally from Great Ormond Street hospital for sick children, London; Glenfield hospital, Leicester; and the Freeman hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne. All three have the necessary neonatal and paediatric facilities to support ECMO treatment for this group of babies.

The information requested on the number of paediatric intensive care beds with ECMO facilities is not held centrally.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the hospitals in the west midlands that have had recorded incidents of MRSA since 1992; [19721]

(2) how many *(a)* cases of and *(b)* deaths from MRSA have been recorded in (i) the west midlands and (ii) west midlands hospitals in each year since 1992; [19719]

(3) how many cases of MRSA have been recorded in Walsgrave hospital, Coventry in each of the last five years, broken down by age bands of 10 years; [19720]

(4) what has been the percentage change in the annual incidence of MRSA in west midlands hospitals from 1990–91 to 1995–96. [19722]

Mr. Horam: Information on the total number of cases of infection or colonisation with methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus is not collected centrally. Some health authorities monitor the occurrence of MRSA, but these are likely to be subject to local variations in the type of data collected and the methods of collection used.

Data on the occurrence of MRSA compiled by the public health laboratory service are derived from isolates submitted voluntarily by hospitals in England and Wales for typing.

The data held by PHLS of the number of hospitals in the West Midlands health region reporting incidents of MRSA from 1992 to 1996, the number of patients affected and the year-on-year percentage change of number of patients affected are shown in the table. The names of individual hospitals are not available. An incident is defined as three or more patients with the same strain of MRSA in a month from the same hospital. It is not known in how many of these cases MRSA contributed to or caused death.

Incidents of MRSA: West midlands health region 1992 to 1996

Year	*Number of hospitals reporting incidents*	*Number of patients affected*	*Year-on-year percentage change of patients affected*
1992	11	200	—
1993	17	677	+239
1994	21	2,180	+222
1995	22	1,448	−34
1996	17	1,293	−11

Source:
PHLS.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts *(a)* have had their establishment orders altered, and when, and *(b)* are currently being considered for alterations to their establishment orders. [19824]

Mr. Horam: Copies of establishment orders for national health service trusts are available in the Library.

Establishment orders for the following trusts are being considered for alteration:

Black Country Mental Health trust

Bromley Hospitals NHS trust

Chichester Priority Services NHS trust

Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS trust

Leicester Ambulance and Paramedic Services NHS trust

Lifecare NHS trust

Riverside Mental Health NHS trust

South Lincolnshire Community and Mental Health Services NHS trust.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to alter the establishment orders of NHS trusts involved in negotiating private finance initiative projects. [19823]

Mr. Horam: A decision will be taken following consultation with the local community health council in respect of trusts which require changes to their establishment order as a result of a private finance initiative project.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* negotiations he is undertaking with and *(b)* representations he has received from, (i) NHS trusts, (ii) community health councils, (iii) health authorities, and (iv) private sector private finance initiative partners concerning alterations to NHS trust establishment orders. [19825]

Mr. Horam: Alterations to trust establishment orders are generally requested by the trusts concerned. A decision is made on amendment following consultation where that is applicable. The consultation process where an alteration to an establishment order is due to a change in service provision is carried out by the Department involving the trust and the local community health council. Health authorities and the private sector are not directly involved.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *569*, concerning NHS trusts' funding, if the establishment order for each NHS trust named permits it to sign a contract for the private finance initiative project it is currently negotiating; and if he will make a statement. [20070]

Mr. Horam: The position is set out in the table.

Trust	*Establishment order compliant with PFI*
Bishop Auckland NHS trust	Yes
Bromley Hospitals NHS trust	Consultation in progress
Calderdale Healthcare NHS trust	Amending order made 13 March 1997
Carlisle Hospitals NHS trust	Amending order made 13 March 1997
Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust	Yes
Greenwich Healthcare NHS trust	Consultation required
Hereford Hospitals NHS trust	Yes
North Durham Acute Hospitals NHS trust	Yes
Oxleas NHS trust	Yes
St. James and Seacroft University Hospitals NHS trust	Yes
Swindon and Marlborough NHS trust	Yes
Walsgrave Hospitals NHS trust	Consultation required
Wellhouse NHS trust	Amending order made 13 March 1997
Worcester Royal Infirmary NHS trust	Yes

Art Therapy

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received recently regarding art therapy services in London; and if he will make a statement on the matters raised by the hon. Member for Woolwich in his letter of 5 March regarding Lewisham and Guys NHS mental health trust; [19514]

(2) with whom the final decision to delete art therapy services in the Lewisham and Guy's NHS mental health trust rests; and if he will make a statement; [20332]

(3) what was the basis upon which the decision to cease to provide art therapy services in the Lewisham and Guy's NHS mental health trust was taken; and if he will make a statement. [20333]

Mr. Burns *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has received a number of representations concerning art therapy in London. The decision to discontinue some of the art therapy services provided by Lewisham and Guy's mental health trust was made by Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority, in consultation with the trust. The decision followed a review of patient needs and priorities in the south-east London area.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance is given by his Department regarding the notice given by service providers for terminating work with long-term clients, with special reference to art therapy; and if he will make a statement; [20334]

(2) what assessment he has made of the implications of his decision in respect of the recognition of art, music and drama therapy for NHS funding, priority setting and the provision of such services. [20331]

Mr. Burns: We have not issued central guidance on arrangements for terminating art therapy services. The funding, priority setting and provision of art therapy services are matters for the national health services to determine in the light of local circumstances. In recognition of the part art therapists play, we have agreed that they should be registered in accordance with the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the additional funds which he has provided for mental health services in London can be spent on art therapy services. [20335]

Mr. Burns: There is no reason in principle for excluding art therapy from the range of services to be funded from the mental health challenge fund or from target funds, provided that their provision relates to the needs of people with severe mental illness, and that bids have been soundly based within the criteria which govern the allocation process.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for the City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) of 29 January, *Official Report,* columns *271–72,* concerning NHS PFI projects, what information he has received regarding *(a)* the date that contracts, including financial agreements, will be signed and *(b)* the likely start date and time scale for construction work at each of the sites named. [20071]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 13 March, *Official Report,* column *341.* Financial agreement on a private finance initiative contract is expected three or four months after the commercial contract has been signed. Shortly after financial agreement, work can begin on site.

Negative Equity Buy-out

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many, and which, health authorities and trusts operated negative equity buy-out or similar relocation schemes prior to October 1994; and how much was paid by each health service body under such schemes in each year. [20117]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 13 March 1996, *Official Report,* column *621.*

Residential Care for the Elderly (London)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each London borough the number of residential places for the elderly in *(a)* 1987 and *(b)* 1997 in (i) local authority and (ii) other homes by category. [20014]

Mr. Burns: Information for 1987 and 1996, the latest available year, is given in the table.

Places in residential care homes for elderly people—London, as at 31 March 1987 and 1996

Borough	*Local authority*		*Voluntary sector*		*Private sector*		*All sectors*	
	1987	*1996*	*1987*	*1996*	*1987*	*1996*	*1987*	*1996*
All London boroughs	15,677	7,251	6,284	6,284	5,529	7,443	27,490	20,978
Inner London	6,639	3,152	2,097	2,210	874	1,264	9,610	6,626
Camden	553	206	198	225	71	170	822	601
Greenwich	560	333	0	0	109	178	669	511
Hackney	495	239	137	148	0	75	632	462
Hammersmith	461	274	106	113	16	16	583	403
Islington	626	319	58	126	32	0	716	445
Kensington	300	167	249	158	51	82	600	407
Lambeth	698	472	286	233	172	279	1,156	984
Lewisham	760	248	18	66	237	372	1,015	686
Southwark	682	255	248	93	0	0	930	348
Tower Hamlets	407	236	125	178	0	0	532	414
Wandsworth	568	152	636	789	186	92	1,390	1,033
Westminster	529	251	36	81	0	0	565	332
Outer London	9,038	4,099	4,187	4,074	4,655	6,179	17,880	14,352
Barking	359	433	0	32	38	55	397	520
Barnet	544	364	1,003	941	534	560	2,081	1,865
Bexley	437	129	5	251	45	46	487	426
Brent	437	132	129	140	72	197	638	469

Places in residential care homes for elderly people—London, as at 31 March 1987 and 1996

Borough	Local authority		Voluntary sector		Private sector		All sectors	
	1987	1996	1987	1996	1987	1996	1987	1996
Bromley	475	41	646	532	330	575	1,451	1,148
Croydon	579	183	239	290	698	475	1,516	948
Ealing	595	338	383	266	302	253	1,280	857
Enfield	550	125	28	15	354	594	932	734
Haringey	457	109	343	293	140	146	940	548
Harrow	412	108	134	110	396	518	942	736
Havering	490	283	0	151	303	531	793	965
Hillingdon	505	348	88	75	57	188	650	611
Hounslow	432	168	136	140	5	82	573	390
Kingston upon Thames	253	115	6	0	370	327	629	442
Merton	262	168	165	175	165	178	592	521
Newham	616	253	109	125	24	16	749	394
Redbridge	481	215	151	137	231	372	863	724
Richmond upon Thames	353	239	434	288	85	202	872	729
Sutton	338	147	176	113	299	428	813	688
Waltham Forest	463	201	12	0	207	436	682	637

Source:
DH annual return RAC5.

Hepatitis B Vaccinations

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many vaccinations against hepatitis B were administered in each of the last three years; [20023]

(2) what was the cost, in each of the last three years for which figures are available, of programmes to vaccinate groups at risk from hepatitis B. [20025]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Liver Cancer

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the number of deaths from liver cancer and *(b)* the cost to the NHS of treating liver cancer, in each year since 1994. [20027]

Mr. Horam: Information on the number of deaths from liver cancer in 1994—latest available figures—is contained in "Mortality statistics: cause, England and Wales, 1993 (revised) and 1994" (Series DH2 no. 21), published by the Office for National Statistics, copies of which are available in the Library.

Information on the costs to the NHS of treating liver cancer is not collected centrally.

Health Spending (East Sussex)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS spending in East Sussex is on people over retirement age. [20017]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact John Lewis, chairman of East Sussex Brighton and Hove health authority for details.

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the current structure and membership of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. [20026]

Mr. Horam: Current membership of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation is as follows;

Professor Sir David Hull (Chairman)—formerly Professor of Child Health, Nottingham.

Dr. R. Aston—Consultant in Communicable Disease Control, Bolton.

Dr. B. Bannister—Consultant in Communicable Disease Control, Coppett's Wood Hospital (Royal Free Hospital).

Dr. H. Bowyer—Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Borders Health Board.

Dr. K. Cartwright—Director, Gloucester Public Health Laboratory.

Dr. S. Conway—Consultant in Paediatric Infectious Diseases, Leeds.

Professor D. Goldblatt—Senior Lecturer/Honorary Consultant, Institute of Child Health.

Professor D. Hall—Professor of Community Paediatrics, University of Sheffield.

Dr. D. Joynson—Director, Swansea Public Health Laboratory.

Dr. C. R. Kennedy—Consultant Paediatric Neurologist, Southampton University Hospital.

Dr. J. Lunn—formerly Consultant in Occupational Medicine, Northwick Park Hospital.

Dr. K. Nicholson—Senior Lecturer and Honorary Consultant in Infectious Diseases, Leicester University and Leicester Royal Infirmary.

Dr. M. Ogilvie—Senior Lecturer and Honorary Consultant Medical Virology, Edinburgh University Medical School.

Professor L. Ritchie—General practitioner and Professor of General Practice, Aberdeen.

Dr. R. Smithson—Consultant in Communicable Disease Control, Western Health and Social Services Board.

Two new members to advise on nursing matters and paediatric epidemiology are currently being appointed and will replace outgoing members Mrs. D. Roden and Professor C. Peckham.

Drug-related Incidents (Weekends)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what data his Department collates on the number of people currently treated on average on *(a)* Friday and *(b)* Saturday nights at accident and emergency units for (i) ecstasy, (ii) cocaine and (iii) heroin-related incidents; [20354]

(2) how many people are currently being treated in hospital for ecstasy-related health problems; [20415]

(3) what research he has *(a)* evaluated and *(b)* commissioned into the long-term effects of taking ecstasy; [20401]

(4) what is his estimate of the number of people who currently use ecstasy on a weekend in the United Kingdom; and on what data these figures are based; [20376]

(5) what research he has *(a)* evaluated and *(b)* commissioned on the side effects of taking ecstasy; [20400]

(6) how many people have died in 1996 as a consequence of taking ecstasy or attending ecstasy-related events. [20414]

Mr. Burns: The Department of Health does not collect information by day of the week on drug-related incidents in accident and emergency units, but anecdotal evidence from a number of hospitals suggests that incidents related to the drug known as ecstasy are common at weekends. It is not possible, because of its clandestine nature, to determine accurately the level of ecstary misuse, but surveys suggest that about 1 per cent. of 16 to 29-year–olds take the drug on a regular basis.

Information on the number of patients treated for ecstasy-related health problems is not collected.

The Department of Health has commissioned a literature review to evaluate existing research on both the short-term side effects and long-term health risks of taking ecstasy and has received advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on these issues, which was the subject of a question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 28 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *441–42*. The Department of Health is considering, in the light of this work, what further research may be necessary on the health risks of this drug.

Figures for the number of deaths from ecstasy in 1996 are not yet available, but there were 10 deaths in 1994 attributed solely to the misuse of ecstasy.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will require the Medicines Commission to review the operation of the Committee on Safety of Medicines in October 1995; [20481]

(2) if he will list the dates between 1 June 1995 and 19 October 1995 when he met the chairman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines; [20622]

(3) if he will publish the documents of 16 October 1995 relating to the instructions his Department gave to the Medical Direct Mail Organisation; [20561]

(4) when data from the World Health Organisation study into oral contraception were first made available to the Medicines Control Agency; and if he will make a statement; [20559]

(5) when his Department's formal written request of 11 October 1995 relating to desogestrel and gestodene was acknowledged by *(a)* the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products and *(b)* the European Medicines Evaluation Agency; [20482]

(6) on what date the licensing authority received the abstract relating to the transnational study, subsequently presented at the British Pharmacological Society; and when the abstract was seen by the Committee on Safety of Medicines; [20623]

(7) if Ministers asked the Medicines Control Agency to arrange the meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines held on 13 October 1995; [20562]

(8) on what dates after 13 October the Committee on Safety of Medicines considered matters relating to the safety of oral contraceptives containing desogestrel and gestodene; [20483]

(9) on whose instructions the letter over the signature of the chairman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines of 18 October 1995 was issued. [20560]

Mr. Malone: The hon. Member, and the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) have already pursued these matters in great detail. I refer the hon. Member to the statement to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 23 October 1995 at columns 701–10 and to the replies I gave on 12 June 1996 at columns *250–71*, 7 November 1995 at columns *679–80*, 11 December 1995 at columns *522–23*, 19 December 1995 at columns *1148–50* and *1152–54*, 8 February 1996 at columns *343–48*, 7 March 1996 at column *321*, 14 March 1996 at column *752*, 21 March 1996 at columns *317–18*, 25 March 1996 at column *428*, 28 March 1996 at column *748*, 1 April 1996 at column *53*, 2 April 1996 at columns *184–86*, 24 April 1996 at columns *172–74*, 25 April 1996 at column *281*, 30 April 1996 at columns *497–99*, 9 May 1996 at columns *243–44*, 10 May 1996 at columns *280–82*, 5 June 1996 at columns *447–49*, 13 June 1996 at columns *245–247*, 17 June 1996 at column *358*, 20 June 1996 at columns *570–71*, 21 June 1996 at columns *667–68*.

Blister Packs

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what ways British standards covering the strength of blister packs for pharmaceutical products differ from those applying in other European Union countries. [20541]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Medical Personnel (Voluntary Work Overseas)

Mr. Orme: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made since the NHS executive letter of 28 June 1995 in facilitating the release of medical personnel for voluntary work overseas, with special reference to Medical Emergency Relief International; what new proposals he has to facilitate their release; and if he will make a statement. [19610]

Mr. Malone: Executive letter (95)69 makes plain that decisions on whether to release staff to work overseas are matters for local national health service employers. I understand that a number of trusts have made

agreements with Voluntary Services Overseas about releasing health professionals to work in developing countries.

Treatment Costs

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the average cost per patient treated in each NHS trust in England. [19718]

Mr. Horam: The information available, in the form of average cost per finished consultant episode, has been placed in the Library.

Health Service Chairmen (West Yorkshire)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the chairman of each NHS trust and health authority in west Yorkshire; when each was appointed; and when their current period of office comes to an end. [20108]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is listed in the table.

Health authority	*Chairman*	*Appointed from*	*Appointed to*
Bradford	Zahida Manzoor	1 April 1996	31 March 1998
Calderdale and Kirklees	Allan Templeton	1 April 1996	31 March 2000
Leeds	Clive Leach	1 April 1996	31 March 2000
Wakefield	Anne Bolter	1 April 1996	31 March 2000

NHS trust	*Chairman*	*Appointed from*	*Appointed to*
Airedale	Peter Bell	1 December 1993	30 November 1997
Bradford Community Health	John Watson	2 December 1996	30 November 2000
Bradford Hospitals	Linda Pollard	15 July 1996	31 October 1999
Calderdale Healthcare	Ian Hughes	15 July 1996	31 October 1999
Dewsbury Healthcare	John Hemingway	1 November 1995	31 October 1999
Huddersfield Healthcare	Garrick Graham	1 November 1994	31 October 1998
Leeds Community and Mental Health Services	Bill Kilgallon	1 November 1994	31 October 1998
Pinderfields Hospitals[1]	Vacancy		
Pontefract Hospitals[1]	Christine Searby	1 November 1996	31 October 1997
St. James's and Seacroft University Hospital	Tony Hughes	1 April 1995	30 November 1998
United Leeds Teaching Hospitals	David Hall	1 April 1995	30 November 1998
Wakefield and Pontefract Community Health	Roy Widdowson	1 November 1996	31 October 2000
West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance	Alan Titterington	1 November 1996	31 October 1998

[1] Applications are currently being considered for the chairmanship of the merged Pinderfields and Pontefract Hospitals trust.

Ambulance Trusts

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* emergency vehicles and *(b)* vehicles for non-emergency services were in service with each NHS ambulance trust in each of the last three years. [20128]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally. The second report of the Health Committee in Session 1994–95, copies of which are available in the Library, provides some information about the number of emergency ambulances in service at that time.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vehicles and of what type are (i) owned and (ii) leased by each NHS ambulance trust; and, for each type, how many are *(a)* less than one year old, *(b)* between one and three years old, *(c)* between four and seven years old and *(d)* eight or more years old. [20129]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current average waiting time between a child being referred for speech therapy, an assessment taking place and referral for treatment. [20132]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not available centrally. Under the childrens charter, parents can expect to be told the local charter standard for the maximum waiting time before their child is seen.

Trust Boards (Disabled People)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with disabilities are members of NHS trust boards; and what percentage this is of the total membership. [20131]

Mr. Malone: Information on all trust board members is not available. Of 845 non-executives appointed since monitoring began in July 1996, nine—1.06 per cent.—considered themselves to have a disability. Information about executive trust board members with disabilities is not collected centrally.

Residential Care Charges

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that the partial equity release insurance scheme will form part of the long-term care partnership proposals set out in the draft Community Care (Residential Charges) Bill. [20127]

Mr. Burns: The Government remain willing to explore options for making equity release a safe and affordable way of financing the purchase of long-term care insurance, as made clear in paragraph 29 of the policy statement "A New Partnership for Care in Old Age" (Cm 3563), copies of which are available in the Library.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of food poisoning were notified to his Department in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [20194]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary gave the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) on 27 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *307-308*. Data for the preceding years are available from the same source.

Medicinal Drugs (Third World)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to persuade other nations to reduce the distribution of surplus medicinal drugs in third world and other countries following the recent medicinal drug deaths in Nigeria, Haiti and Lithuania. [20292]

Mr. Malone: The United Kingdom will continue to work with other countries and appropriate international organisations, particularly the World Health Organisation, in pursuit of agreed standards and guidelines regarding drug donations and their safety.

Funding (Market Forces Factor)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of overall funding reflects the pay element of the market forces factor in the allocations of resources in each health authority. [20461]

Mr. Horam: The market forces factor is one component of the weighted capitation formula used to calculate health authority targets which in turn inform allocations.

There are six elements within the MFF adjustment and their corresponding weightings are shown in the table:

Element	*Weighting Percentage*
Staff	57.31
Medical and dental London weighting	8.68
Non pay	22.57
Land	1.17
Buildings	7.94
Equipment	2.33
Total	100

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the market force factor in his health authority funding formula in areas which his Department has identified as having low rates of pay largely based on Whitley Council agreements. [20459]

Mr. Horam: The staff market forces factor enables all health authorities to meet trust prices which reflect national pay agreements.

Anti-anthrax Vaccination

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the recommended interval between each injection in a course of anti-anthrax vaccination. [20449]

Mr. Horam: This information is contained in the book "Immunisation Against Infectious Diseases" issued by the Health Departments, which was issued to all practising clinicians and copies of which are available in the Library. The information is also routinely included in the insert included in every pack of vaccine.

Four injections of 0.5 ml is recommended. There should be an interval of three weeks between the first three injections, and six months between the third and fourth. Subsequent reinforcing doses of 0.5 ml are recommended at annual intervals.

Oakleaf Rehabilitation Centre, Guildford

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will pay an official visit to the Oakleaf rehabilitation centre in Guildford. [20473]

Mr. Burns: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has no plans to visit the Oakleaf rehabilitation centre.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 March, *Official Report*, column *114*, how much money was spent by fundholding general practitioners practices in *(a)* North Yorkshire, *(b)* Yorkshire region and *(c)* Northern region on purchasing hospital and community health services from private sector providers as defined by sub-code 160 in form FAA23 in the accounts filed by health authorities in each year since general practitioner fundholding started. [20690]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is given in the table.

Expenditure by GP fundholders on the purchase of healthcare from non-NHS providers

£ thousand

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
North Yorkshire family health services authority	101	512	348	618	989
Northern region	238	960	1,978	n/a	n/a
Yorkshire region	315	1,086	2,182	n/a	n/a
Northern and Yorkshire region	n/a	n/a	n/a	7,390	8,870

Source:

The annual accounts of family health services authorities.

Notes:

1. The 1995–96 figures are provisional.

2. Northern and Yorkshire Regions merged in 1994–95, though South Cumbria transferred to the North West region.

3. Expenditure in North Yorkshire family health service authority is included under the Yorkshire region for 1991–92 to 1993–94 and the Northern and Yorkshire region total for 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Anti-depressants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment his Department has made of the *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term effects of (i) tricyclic anti-depressants and (ii) selective serotinin re-uptake inhibitors; and if he will make a statement. [20537]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 6 February 1997, *Official Report*, at column *723*, which referred to benzodiazepines and tricyclic anti-depressants. The answer to that question also applies to selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors.

Funding (Private Health Care Investment)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account is taken of the level of investment in private health care in the formula used to distribute resource allocations to health authorities. [20460]

Mr. Horam: The national weighted capitation formula determines health authorities' shares of available resources and its aim is for health authorities to be able to purchase similar levels of health services for resident populations in similar need. The formula does not take explicit account of levels of private medical insurance and therefore allocations are not directly affected.

The national health service is available to all, regardless of ability to pay, and people with private medical insurance always have the option to use the NHS.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the number and proportion of pensioners in each region of the United Kingdom who received *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit. [17484]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables. The information for May 1994 corrects that given in my reply of 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *171–72*.

Income support pensioner recipients by region: May 1995

GSS region	Number of claimants	Proportion of the pensioner population (percentage)
South East	444,000	12.7
South East (except London)	236,000	10.4
London (inner/outer)	209,000	17.0
North	101,000	15.4
Yorkshire and Humberside	157,000	15.1
East Midlands	107,000	12.6
East Anglia	55,000	11.8
South West	116,000	10.2
West Midlands	173,000	16.0
North West	218,000	16.7
England	1,372,000	13.7
Scotland	165,000	15.9
Wales	95,000	14.6
Total (Great Britain)	1,632,000	13.9
Northern Ireland	59,000	21.0
Total (United Kingdom)	1,690,000	14.1

Housing benefit pensioner recipients by region: May 1995

GSS region	Number of claimants	Proportion of the pensioner population (percentage)
South East	539,000	15.4
South East (except London)	286,000	12.6
London (inner/outer)	253,000	20.6
North	135,000	20.6
Yorkshire and Humberside	196,000	18.8
East Midlands	123,000	14.5
East Anglia	68,000	14.5
South West	128,000	11.2
West Midlands	188,000	17.4
North West	231,000	17.7
England	1,609,000	16.0
Scotland	234,000	22.6
Wales	88,000	13.5
Total (Great Britain)	1,932,000	16.5
Northern Ireland	42,000	15.0
Total (United Kingdom)	1,974,000	16.4

Council tax benefit pensioner recipients by region: May 1995

GSS region	Number of claimants	Proportion of the pensioner population (percentage)
South East	732,000	20.9
South East (except London)	424,000	18.7
London (inner/outer)	308,000	25.0
North	184,000	27.9
Yorkshire and Humberside	283,000	27.2
East Midlands	193,000	22.6
East Anglia	101,000	21.5
South West	203,000	17.8
West Midlands	293,000	27.1
North West	360,000	27.6
England	2,347,000	23.4
Scotland	304,000	29.4
Wales	132,000	20.3
Great Britain	2,784,000	23.7
Northern Ireland	n/a	n/a
United Kingdom	n/a	n/a

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Percentages are given to one decimal place.
2. A case is defined as being a pensioner if in receipt of the pensioner premium, higher pensioner premium or enhanced pensioner premium. It excludes those aged 60 or over without a premium, i.e. preserved right residential care cases.
3. There will be an overlap between recipients of the named benefits.
4. Regions used are Government standard statistical regions.
5. Income support sample size 5 per cent.
6. Council tax benefit does not apply to Northern Ireland.
7. Figures are for benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.

Sources:

1. Income support statistics quarterly inquiry May 1995.
2. Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample inquiries taken at the end of May 1995.
3. Office of Population and Censuses and Surveys mid-term estimates 1995.
4. Income Support (Northern Ireland) 100 per cent. sample May 1995.
5. Northern Ireland Housing Executive inquiry taken at 15 December 1995.

Housing benefit pensioner recipients by region: May 1994

GSS region	Number of claimants	Proportion of the pensioner population (percentage)
South East (except London)	*283,000*	15.4
London (inner/outer)	*256,000*	[1]—
North	136,000	20.6
Yorkshire and Humberside	205,000	19.7
East Midlands	120,000	14.2
East Anglia	66,000	14.2
South West	127,000	11.2
West Midlands	189,000	17.5
North West	227,000	17.3
England	1,609,000	16.0
Scotland	245,000	23.7
Wales	90,000	13.8
Total (Great Britain)	1,944,000	16.6
Northern Ireland	42,000	15.1
Total (United Kingdom)	1,986,000	16.5

Note:
[1] London and South-east regions have been added together for the population estimate.

Council tax benefit pensioner recipients by region: May 1994

GSS region	Number of claimants	Proportion of the pensioner population (percentage)
South East (except London)	*433,000*	20.9
London (inner/outer)	*299,000*	[1]—
North	187,000	28.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	297,000	28.5
East Midlands	192,000	22.7
East Anglia	102,000	22.0
South west	213,000	18.8
West Midlands	305,000	28.3
North west	362,000	27.5
England	2,390,000	23.8
Scotland	304,000	29.4
Wales	135,000	20.7
Great Britain	2,829,000	24.1
Northern Ireland	n/a	n/a
United Kingdom	n/a	n/a

Notes:
[1] London and South-east regions have been added together for the population estimate.
1. In each table the figures in italics were transposed in error in the original reply.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Percentages are given to one decimal place.
3. Regions used are Government standard statistical regions.
4. Figures for housing benefit council tax benefit are for benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
5. Pensioners are defined as either a claimant or partner aged 60 or over except for the figures for Northern Ireland where claimant or partner are aged 65 or over.
6. Council tax benefit does not apply in Northern Ireland.
Sources:
1. Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample inquiry taken at the end of May 1994.
2. Office of Population and Censuses and Surveys mid-term estimates 1993.
3. Northern Ireland Housing Executive inquiry, taken at 15 December 1995.

Gulf War Victims (Compensation)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost to the social services of the delay in the payment of compensation to United Kingdom victims of the Gulf war through the United Nations Compensation Commission. [18726]

Mr. Heald: None. The United Nations compensation arrangements relate to United Nations peace-keeping operations. Operation Granby in the Gulf conflict was a multinational force operation mounted under a UN resolution and is not therefore covered by those compensation arrangements.

Private Finance Initiatives

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report,* column *720,* if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report,* columns *692–93.* [20390]

Mr. Burt: Information on the Department of Social Security's private finance initiative projects is not available in the format requested. Disaggregating the figures quoted in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" into individual, identifiable projects at this stage would involve publishing commercially confidential material, harm the competitive position of a third party and prejudice the Department's position in on-going and future project negotiations.

Basic Pension Plus

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cumulative cost of the basic pension plus proposals between 2020 and 2040. [20488]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 11 March, *Official Report,* column *194.*

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of *(a)* average pensioner incomes, *(b)* the distribution of future pensioner incomes and *(c)* the number of pensioners living on incomes under half the national average for the years before pension benefits will be paid under the basic pension plus scheme. [20469]

Mr. Heald: The available information is contained in Government economic service working paper No. 129, titled "PENSIM: A dynamic simulation Model of Pensioners' Incomes", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many pensioners he estimates would be reliant on means-tested benefits in retirement if people made contributions only at the minimum 5 per cent. level under the basic pension plus proposals; and what assumptions about the level of means-tested benefits underlie this estimate; [20500]

(2) what would be the impact on the retirement income of *(a)* people on (i) a quarter, (ii) a half, (iii) three quarters and (iv) average earnings and *(b)* public spending on

means-tested benefits under the basic pension plus scheme if people made contributions only at the minimum 5 per cent. level. [20499]

Mr. Heald: The rebates will be around £9 a week plus for employees—around 5 per cent. of earnings on which national insurance is payable. The basic pension guarantee will ensure that everyone gets at least as high a basic pension as they would from the current state scheme; and the investment of their funds gives a good prospect of higher pensions. The number of pensioners reliant on income-related benefits could be lower than under the present scheme, even if there were no increase in the number making voluntary additional provision.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his basic pension plus proposal will involve any alteration to the rates of national insurance contributions set out in table 3 of the Government Actuary's report on the 1994 Pensions Bill. [20440]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 11 March, *Official Report*, columns *197–98*.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumptions underlay his estimate of £10 billion for the continuing cost of the basic pension guarantee after 2040. [20442]

Mr. Heald: The broadly estimated cost of the basic pension guarantee is £10 billion per annum, on the assumptions that broadly the same proportion of the work force as now will accrue credits, and that because of low charges and simple but effective regulation there will not be many funds which fail to produce the required minimum return of 4.25 per cent. per annum.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumptions he has made about the number of employees opting out of their occupational pension scheme in his basic pension plus proposals. [20490]

Mr. Heald: It has not been assumed that anyone would opt out of an occupational pension scheme as a result of basic pension plus. Members of occupational pension schemes will be able to opt to have their basic pension plus funds managed as an additional voluntary contribution by the occupational scheme.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumptions he has made in his basic pension plus proposal about the level of additional contributions beyond the 5 per cent. minimum contribution level. [20498]

Mr. Heald: In costing the basic pension proposal, no assumptions have been made about additional contributions beyond the minimum rebates of £9 a week plus 5 per cent. of earnings to fund the state pension. Everyone will have their own pension fund and will have the opportunity to make additional contributions.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate he has made of the value of the pension earned under the basic pension plus for *(a)* a male and *(b)* a female on (i) a quarter and (ii) three quarters of male and female average earnings, relative to average male and female earnings in 2040; [20463]

(2) what estimate he has made of the value of the pension earned on entering the basic pension plus in the years *(a)* 2010, *(b)* 2020, *(c)* 2030 and *(d)* 2040, for those on (i) a quarter, (ii) a half, (iii) three quarters and (iv) average earnings relative to average earnings when they can expect to retire; [20467]

(3) what estimate he has made of the value of the pension earned under the basic pension plus for a woman on average earnings, relative to overall average earnings in 2040. [20464]

Mr. Heald: Generally, at least as good as the pension available from the present state scheme or better.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will assess the impact of altering the capital limits on benefits on the incentive to save under the Government's basic pension plus proposal. [20475]

Mr. Heald: The incentive to save under the basic pension plus proposal will come from the existence of a basic pension plus fund for each individual, to which they can add. The effect on the propensity to save of a change in the capital limits on eligibility for income-related benefits is independent of the basic pension plus proposal.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if public employees who opted out of their pension scheme, or moved to a job in the private sector, would be able to move their pension into a funded private sector pension scheme under the basic pension plus proposals. [20492]

Mr. Heald: Yes. Under current legislation, public service employees who terminate their pensionable service more than one year before the scheme's normal pension age have a statutory right to transfer the cash equivalent of their accrued rights. The transfer payment may be made to another occupational pension scheme, personal pension scheme or suitable insurance policy able and willing to accept it.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what level of charges was assumed for years when people are not contributing to the scheme under the basic pension plus proposals; and what is the estimated effect of this level of fees and charges for years when people are not contributing to the scheme on expected pension benefits. [20502]

Mr. Heald: As the technical note, paragraph 19, explained, the Personal Pensions Investment Authority will publish a list of personal pension providers whose charging structures do not penalise people who take career breaks, intentionally or unexpectedly.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his assumptions for the costs of his basic pension plus proposals allow for behavioural effects resulting from the proposed change in tax relief. [20497]

Mr. Heald: No. There is no reason to believe that there will be significant behavioural effects resulting from the proposed change in tax relief. We will consult the pensions industry and other interested bodies to ensure that any changes are made in a way which preserves, undiminished, the immense contribution that existing pension schemes make to people's pension provision. Pension savings will remain an attractive form of investment for individuals.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumptions were made about the proportion of occupational pensions schemes

(a) providing salary-related benefits and *(b)* operating money purchase arrangements under the basic pension plus proposals. [20491]

Mr. Heald: None.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what level of fees and charges was assumed in calculations of the pension benefits under the basic pension plus proposals; what are the administrative costs of occupational pension schemes; and if he will make a statement on the impact of fees and charges on pensions under the basic pension plus proposals relative to the impact of administrative charges in occupational pension schemes. [20501]

Mr. Heald: The assumptions are consistent with those made by the Government Actuary in his report "Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes: review of certain contracting-out terms" Cm 3221. There is currently a range of different cost structures for occupational pension schemes.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated public expenditure cost under the basic pension plus proposals of top-ups for employees with national insurance contributions of less than £9 per week. [20441]

Mr. Heald: Whether such top-ups should be classified as public expenditure is under consideration.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners who will retire on incomes under half the national average under the basic pension plus scheme. [20468]

Mr. Heald: The number is expected to be smaller than under the current state pension scheme.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the additional contributions necessary for people on *(a)* a quarter, *(b)* half, *(c)* three quarters and *(d)* average earnings to receive a pension equivalent to the value of the single and married person's tax allowances for those over the age of 65 years if these allowances are uprated in line with (i) prices and (ii) earnings under the Government's basic pension plus proposals. [20476]

Mr. Heald: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security at what point the Government would use their powers to impose a ceiling on charges under the basic pension plus proposals; and for what reasons the Government have not used their existing powers to limit the charges imposed by existing providers of personal pensions. [20503]

Mr. Heald: During the period prior to legislation we will consult extensively about means of ensuring competitive pressures bear down on costs and charges, but we will not hesitate to use legal powers to impose a ceiling on charges should they not reflect those reduced costs.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the amount of money recovered by the compensation recovery unit in respect of benefits paid to persons who subsequently received compensation for accident, injury or disease in the first six months of the fiscal year 1996; what projection he has made as to the level of such payments in the period April to September 1997; and if he will make a statement. [20647]

Mr. Roger Evans: From April to September 1996, just over £69 million was recovered by the compensation recovery unit. It is estimated that approximately £75 million will be recovered during the same period in 1997. These figures are provisional and subject to change.

Benefit Reliance (Evaluation)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on reliance on means-tested benefit and the impact on the incentive to save. [20474]

Mr. Roger Evans: Two recent studies commissioned by the Department provide information relating to the relationship between receipt of income-related benefits and savings. DSS research report No. 38, "Managing Money in Later Life", explored older people's knowledge of the capital limits for income support and their attitudes towards asset holding in relation to these limits. Research report No. 53, "Moving Off Income Support: Barriers and Bridges" provided information on the extent to which income support claimants have savings.

Private Pension Schemes

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to adjust the level of rebates to reflect changes in the Government Actuary's assumptions about the rate of return which private pension schemes can expect to earn. [20443]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) on 11 March, *Official Report* column *198*.

Pensioner Numbers

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the increase in the number of pensioners *(a)* between 2020 and 2040 and *(b)* after 2040. [20487]

Mr. Heald: Estimates of the number of pensioners are published in "National Insurance Fund Long Term Financial estimates: Report by the Government actuary on the Third Quinquennial Review" under section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975 (HC160).

All Work Test (Appeals)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals against incapacity benefit all work test decisions are currently outstanding in Greenock and Port Glasgow; what is the average waiting time for such appeals to be heard; what was the number of all work test decisions made in Greenock and Port Glasgow in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [20646]

Mr. Burt: There are currently 317 appeals against incapacity all work test decisions outstanding in Greenock and Port Glasgow. The average waiting time for such appeals to be heard is 25 weeks and a total of 200 all work test decisions were made in Greenock and Port Glasgow in 1996.

Social Fund Funeral Payments

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to change the provision of social fund funeral payments. [20953]

Mr. Roger Evans: Amending regulations and a copy of the Social Security Advisory Committee's report, along with my response, have been laid before the House today. After having carefully considered the committee's report, we have decided to proceed with the main changes as originally proposed.

The changes will target help more precisely on those most in need. In cases where there is no surviving partner, where a parent, son or daughter of the deceased exists, and neither they nor their partner are in receipt of an income-related benefit, it will be considered unreasonable for someone who is receiving such a benefit to take responsibility for the funeral expenses.

The level of help available will increase and be much easier to understand. The person responsible for arranging the funeral will be free to decide which elements they wish to be included, taking into account the level of help available from the social fund. This includes the choice of either burial or cremation, for which the necessary cost will be met separately. In the case of a burial, this cost alone can exceed £1,500 in some parts of the country.

Where the deceased lived in a remote area of the country, or died away from home, extra help will be available. In addition, up to £600 will be available for other funeral expenses.

The revised scheme aims to balance the needs of someone who has good reason for taking responsibility for arranging a funeral and the taxpayer who has to fund the cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 18 March 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the last 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19774]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office has sponsored a total of 60 Bills in the last 15 years. Of these, 54 have been passed by Parliament, with one other being partially enacted. The Bills, arranged according to the relevant parliamentary Session, were as follows:

1981–82

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

Criminal Justice Bill

Fire Service College Board (Abolition) Bill.

1982–83

Nuclear Material (Offences) Bill

Marriage Bill

Data Protection Bill (fell at Dissolution)

Police and Criminal Evidence Bill (fell at Dissolution).

1983–84

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Bill

Data Protection Bill

Cable and Broadcasting Bill

Repatriation of Prisoners Bill

Police and Criminal Evidence Bill.

1984–85

Prosecution of Offences Bill

Representation of the People Bill

Interception of Communications Bill

Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Bill.

1985–86

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Bill

Drug Trafficking Offences Bill

Public Order Bill

Shops Bill (defeated at Second Reading).

1986–87

Broadcasting Bill

Criminal Justice Bill[1]

Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Bill

Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Bill.

[1] By agreement with the Opposition Parties in both Houses, Part 1 of the Bill dealing with the setting up of the Serious Fraud Office was enacted before Dissolution: the rest of the Bill fell.

1987–88

Criminal Justice Bill

Firearms (Amendment) Bill

Immigration Bill

Licensing Bill.

1988–89

Official Secrets Bill

Police Officers (Central Service) Bill

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Bill

Representation of the People Bill

Security Service Bill.

1989–90

British Nationality Hong Kong Bill

Broadcasting Bill

Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill

War Crimes Bill (defeated at Second Reading).

1990–91

Criminal Justice Bill

Dangerous Dogs Bill

Maintenance Enforcement Bill

War Crimes Bill.

1991–92

Aggravated Vehicle Taking Bill

Prison Security Bill

Charities Bill

Asylum Bill (fell at Dissolution).

1992–93

Parliamentary Boundary Commission Bill

Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill

Criminal Justice Bill

European Parliamentary Elections Bill

National Lottery Bill.

1993–94

Sunday Trading Bill

Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill

Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill.

1994–95

Licensing (Sunday Hours) Bill

Criminal Appeal Bill

Criminal Injuries Compensation Bill.

1995–96

Prevention of Terrorism (Additional Powers) Bill

Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill

Security Service Bill

Asylum and Immigration Bill.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were recorded by each police force in England and Wales within each category of crime in 1996; how many incidents of theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle and of theft from a motor vehicle were recorded by each force; how many of the burglaries recorded by each police force in England and Wales in 1996 were in a dwelling; and how many were in another building. [20191]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police

England and Wales 1996

Police area	*Total crime*	*Violence against the person*	*Sexual offences*	*Robbery*	*Burglary*	*Theft and handling stolen goods*	*Fraud and forgery*	*Criminal damage*	*Other*	*Theft of vehicle*	*Theft from vehicle*	*Burglary dwelling*	*Burglary other*
Avon and Somerset	156,357	8,809	1,037	2,022	35,151	81,096	4,293	22,970	1,179	16,224	31,246	19,320	15,831
Bedfordshire	52,005	3,396	412	658	10,237	25,983	2,033	8,727	559	5,760	9,157	5,287	4,950
Cambridgeshire	69,532	3,246	427	427	14,544	38,521	1,500	10,339	528	6,616	14,127	6,376	8,168
Cheshire	66,214	3,616	575	390	15,521	30,499	2,339	11,635	1,619	6,402	9,070	7,496	8,025
Cleveland	78,608	2,957	314	678	22,234	37,230	1,475	12,977	743	8,615	12,700	12,050	10,184
Cumbria	39,739	2,562	208	103	8,419	18,184	995	8,796	472	2,108	6,571	3,880	4,539
Derbyshire	78,896	4,158	486	384	18,856	38,328	1,355	14,558	771	8,314	14,362	7,967	10,889
Devon and Cornwall	103,121	6,184	772	493	24,841	51,549	2,374	15,545	1,363	5,964	19,716	11,365	13,476
Dorset	49,731	2,019	324	189	9,924	26,653	1,303	8,679	640	3,789	9,904	4,732	5,192
Durham	51,849	1,895	351	221	13,084	22,630	1,279	11,575	814	5,995	6,594	5,885	7,199
Essex	100,758	4,859	635	461	19,007	51,937	2,485	20,381	993	9,410	17,204	8,146	10,861
Gloucestershire	53,675	1,697	272	423	12,928	29,335	1,652	6,962	406	4,399	12,361	6,626	6,302
Greater Manchester	327,976	11,069	1,406	6,271	83,780	144,890	5,532	72,272	2,756	46,740	47,006	49,132	34,648
Hampshire	135,915	6,745	1,073	576	23,008	70,517	3,907	28,178	1,911	8,574	25,961	9,804	13,204
Hertfordshire	54,441	2,108	300	326	10,353	28,892	1,237	10,738	487	5,572	12,886	4,343	6,010
Humberside	126,932	6,104	665	747	37,834	57,406	2,610	20,754	812	11,133	17,938	15,923	21,911
Kent	147,980	8,891	908	747	32,516	71,116	3,155	28,999	1,648	15,078	22,676	14,667	17,849
Lancashire	122,487	3,637	713	827	30,500	54,644	3,446	27,090	1,630	8,592	20,245	17,103	13,397
Leicestershire	94,125	5,228	478	1,439	24,997	43,968	3,365	13,897	753	9,448	15,794	13,417	11,580
Lincolnshire	47,077	2,701	293	138	12,819	21,085	1,148	8,297	596	3,388	6,568	5,722	7,097
City of London	4,831	130	17	34	515	3,303	439	276	117	125	383	37	478
Merseyside	145,956	8,236	891	2,985	29,437	71,393	4,288	26,907	1,819	18,867	17,883	17,920	11,517
Metropolitan Police	841,784	49,639	7,355	32,867	164,926	385,160	38,983	151,829	11,025	60,466	115,750	100,216	64,710
Norfolk	55,314	2,492	428	219	11,751	28,276	1,251	10,222	675	3,404	8,892	4,186	7,565
Northamptonshire	57,378	2,766	345	473	12,542	27,207	1,246	12,241	558	6,891	8,894	6,377	6,165
Northumbria	169,656	5,148	601	1,403	42,822	68,692	2,109	47,725	1,156	17,877	20,626	21,409	21,413
North Yorkshire	56,919	2,333	311	177	13,972	28,573	1,052	10,036	465	4,804	9,024	6,065	7,907
Nottinghamshire	141,307	8,529	820	1,166	33,188	61,603	3,027	31,903	1,071	14,350	18,896	16,671	16,517
South Yorkshire	151,577	4,427	570	1,209	43,276	70,448	2,651	27,800	1,196	22,053	23,523	22,392	20,884
Staffordshire	92,155	7,329	532	503	24,511	39,561	2,004	16,904	811	8,487	13,415	12,395	12,116
Suffolk	37,094	2,136	351	156	6,384	18,134	1,333	7,965	635	2,008	5,523	2,539	3,845
Surrey	42,014	1,942	363	212	8,476	21,611	1,389	7,457	564	2,777	7,762	3,777	4,699
Sussex	118,086	6,407	759	682	21,534	59,412	2,815	25,015	1,462	7,424	20,217	10,758	10,776
Thames Valley	172,194	6,606	779	1,429	36,549	93,239	4,551	27,257	1,784	17,584	37,741	18,678	17,871
Warwickshire	38,926	1,278	207	196	9,181	19,915	975	6,805	369	4,269	7,227	3,954	5,227
West Mercia	82,254	3,085	526	331	16,435	43,110	1,894	15,866	1,007	7,168	14,908	7,432	9,003
West Midlands	317,892	8,404	1,124	8,150	88,860	146,882	6,365	55,856	2,251	45,383	50,632	46,237	42,623
West Yorkshire	268,716	8,376	1,588	3,229	80,010	120,801	5,071	45,842	3,799	27,802	41,655	47,582	32,428
Wiltshire	35,911	2,126	352	153	7,611	17,854	920	6,473	422	1,880	6,297	3,615	3,996
Dyfed-Powys	19,072	2,098	257	47	3,041	7,704	604	4,571	750	1,010	1,848	1,159	1,882
Gwent	44,572	4,540	431	121	8,717	19,581	1,305	8,925	952	3,216	6,515	3,663	5,054
North Wales	41,024	2,467	420	111	8,952	19,586	1,022	7,921	545	2,147	7,165	3,217	5,735
South Wales	141,578	6,734	571	584	31,121	66,448	3,105	31,533	1,482	21,189	22,583	12,472	18,649
England and Wales	5,033,828	239,109	31,247	73,957	1,164,364	2,382,956	135,902	950,698	55,595	493,302	799,445	601,992	562,372

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were recorded in each borough by the Metropolitan police within each category of crime in 1996; how many incidents of theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle and of theft from a motor vehicle were recorded in each borough; how many of the burglaries recorded in each borough were in a dwelling; and how many were in another building. [20192]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes have been reported in each of the London boroughs in 1997 to date, broken down by type of crime and clear-up rate. [20176]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not yet available centrally.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the compliance of his Department's policy in respect of the detention of asylum seekers convicted of using false documents with the terms of article 31 of the UN convention relating to the status of refugees; and if he will make a statement. [20277]

Mr. Kirkhope: It is for the prosecuting authorities to decide whether to prosecute a person for using false documents. The prosecution of people who have not sought asylum in the United Kingdom, but have attempted to enter or leave the country using false documents, is not a breach of article 31 of the United Nations convention. Any subsequent application for asylum in the United Kingdom would be determined on its individual merits. Detention solely under Immigration Act powers would be authorised only if there were good grounds for believing that the person would not comply with the terms of temporary admission.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to open a new detention centre for asylum seekers at Dover; and if he will make a statement. [20278]

Mr. Kirkhope: We are examining the case for seeking to locate an immigration detention centre in the Dover area, but no firm proposals have yet been developed.

Police Authorities (Staff)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each police authority in England and Wales the number of *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian staff employed (i) in 1979, (ii) in 1990 and (iii) at the latest available date. [20649]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Police and civilian strength in England and Wales

Force	May 1979		September 1990		September 1996	
	Police	Civilians[1]	Police	Civilians[1]	Police	Civilians[1]
Avon and Somerset	2,829	683	3,069	863	3,004	1,209
Bedfordshire	900	280	1,051	370	1,118	498
Cambridgeshire	1,071	306	1,193	460	1,253	558
Cheshire	1,787	391	1,868	497	2,016	755
City of London	832	274	790	278	868	335
Cleveland	1,347	318	1,496	452	1,444	599
Cumbria	1,064	252	1,176	408	1,124	435
Derbyshire	1,587	634	1,773	562	1,795	684
Devon and Cornwall	2,667	752	2,870	964	2,876	1,164
Dorset	1,140	277	1,286	532	1,262	614
Durham	1,312	500	1,371	534	1,426	542
Dyfed-Powys	913	190	943	242	998	334
Essex	2,490	686	2,845	990	2,927	1,266
Gloucestershire	1,081	229	1,159	344	1,139	425
Greater Manchester	6,440	1,409	7,019	2,232	6,961	2,719
Gwent	971	203	1,000	264	1,231	463
Hampshire	2,955	708	3,160	967	3,362	1,350
Hertfordshire	1,455	374	1,652	544	1,721	790
Humberside	1,861	504	1,986	655	2,042	715
Kent	2,730	888	3,000	973	3,227	1,274
Lancashire	3,093	885	3,183	1,137	3,203	1,204
Leicestershire	1,701	362	1,778	641	1,933	708
Lincolnshire	1,175	314	1,200	445	1,157	489
Merseyside	4,441	910	4,686	1,472	4,271	1,686
Metropolitan	22,225	11,837	28,287	13,447	27,049	13,890
Norfolk	1,229	246	1,389	426	1,399	573
Northamptonshire	909	252	1,134	399	1,186	560
Northumbria	3,285	773	3,519	1,185	3,693	1,215
North Wales	1,269	317	1,335	437	1,381	536
North Yorkshire	1,337	338	1,386	441	1,334	596
Nottinghamshire	2,120	554	2,336	661	2,339	989
South Wales	2,945	870	3,112	1,134	2,913	1,151
South Yorkshire	2,560	599	2,961	877	3,128	1,316
Staffordshire	1,980	573	2,197	667	2,220	758
Suffolk	1,077	323	1,206	436	1,159	500
Surrey	1,442	360	1,659	523	1,632	760
Sussex	2,759	723	2,990	913	3,097	1,167
Thames Valley	2,653	970	3,699	1,323	3,682	1,853
Warwickshire	843	204	1,022	339	948	393
West Mercia	1,752	501	2,013	844	2,011	958
West Midlands	6,031	1,426	6,866	2,254	7,203	2,389
West Yorkshire	4,739	1,191	5,278	1,842	5,154	2,091
Wiltshire	1,001	252	1,140	438	1,166	493

[1] Excludes traffic wardens.

Police Cautions

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each police authority the number and percentage of people arrested who were released after receiving a police caution in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* the latest available date. [20529]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* Detailed data on the number of people arrested are not collected centrally.

Information available on the number of people cautioned by police force area is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables, Volume 3". Table S3.7(A) in the 1990 and 1994 editions and table S3.6(A) in the 1995 volume contain that information.

Copies are available in the Library.

Acquittals

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each *(a)* magistrates court and *(b)* Crown court the percentage of defendants acquitted in (i) 1990, (ii) 1994 and (iii) the latest available date. [20530]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* Readily available information is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables".

Magistrates court data for individual petty sessional divisions can be found in the 1990 volume 5, table S5.1 and in volume 4, table S4.1, of the 1994 and 1995 editions.

Data for individual Crown court centres are published in the 1990 volume 3, table S3.6(A) and in volume 2, table S2.3, of the 1994 and 1995 editions.

Copies are available in the Library.

Child Support Agency

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the annual additional costs of police time arising out of CSA decisions; and if he will make a statement. [20172]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally. The cost of specific activities and operations carried out by the police is a matter for chief officers. The Government would not collect data of this kind unless there was a specific and justifiable need to do so.

Possession of Cannabis (Court Proceedings)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each police authority in England and Wales the number, and percentage, of people arrested for possession of cannabis who were *(a)* cautioned, *(b)* tried in a magistrates court and *(c)* tried in a higher court in (i) 1990, (ii) 1994 and (iii) the latest available date. [20528]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* Detailed data on the number of people arrested are not collected centrally.

Information available on the number of people cautioned, proceeded against at magistrates courts and tried at the Crown court for 1994 and 1995 by police force area is given in the tables. Comparable 1990 data for offences of possession of a controlled drug do not distinguish the type of drug.

Number of persons cautioned, proceeded against[1] at magistrates' courts and tried at the Crown Court for the offence of Possession of Cannabis by Police Force Area, 1994 and 1995

Police Force Area	Cautioned		Proceeded against at Magistrates' court[1]		Total tried at the Crown Court	
	1994	1995	1994	1995	1994	1995
Avon and Somerset	594	282	228	259	33	25
Bedfordshire	77	94	118	182	18	19
Cambridgeshire	498	377	141	63	7	6
Cheshire	784	590	290	360	8	17
Cleveland	306	406	47	67	4	10
Cumbria	326	315	255	228	7	9
Derbyshire	259	468	147	175	9	22
Devon and Cornwall	1,084	1,073	258	311	31	23
Dorset	144	196	112	127	5	8
Durham	153	217	103	147	2	5
Essex	851	848	285	284	9	18
Gloucestershire	459	593	108	157	3	4
Greater Manchester	2,230	2,032	722	767	48	58
Hampshire	1,380	1,131	328	456	26	29
Hertfordshire	482	453	187	229	5	8
Humberside	398	280	93	137	3	7
Kent	684	619	342	289	11	22
Lancashire	1,180	1,341	256	407	26	27
Leicesterhire	380	337	130	174	6	6
Lincolnshire	198	235	203	191	13	16
London, City of	347	535	33	64	2	2
Merseyside	597	820	790	829	26	41
Metropolitan Police	13,268	14,007	4,291	3,443	232	237
Norfolk	236	490	190	272	6	7
Northamptonshire	448	535	60	76	9	1
Northumbria	832	1,192	192	166	18	17
North Yorkshire	307	309	193	201	16	13
Nottinghamshire	361	378	188	218	19	20
South Yorkshire	728	731	237	336	13	18
Staffordshire	424	478	166	213	15	14
Suffolk	537	494	82	119	10	7
Surrey	—	235	142	183	7	16
Sussex	821	937	361	366	11	16

Number of persons cautioned, proceeded against[1] at magistrates' courts and tried at the Crown Court for the offence of Possession of Cannabis by Police Force Area, 1994 and 1995

Police Force Area	Cautioned		Proceeded against at Magistrates' court[1]		Total tried at the Crown Court	
	1994	1995	1994	1995	1994	1995
Thames Valley	795	692	548	594	16	16
Warwickshire	349	459	69	71	—	3
West Mercia	773	824	187	247	10	9
West Midlands	1,632	1,526	469	420	32	36
West Yorkshire	566	686	723	803	43	52
Wiltshire	400	275	54	57	—	—
Dyfed-Powys	470	469	153	206	5	7
Gwent	494	497	106	130	8	8
North Wales	820	837	297	292	7	8
South Wales	500	578	409	402	21	20
England and Wales	38,172	39,871	14,293	14,718	800	907

[1] Includes those who were committed for trial at the Crown Court.

Police Stations

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the parliamentary constituencies in the United Kingdom which do not contain a police station. [20214]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has responsibility for the police service in England and Wales. The information requested is not kept centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the respective Secretaries of State.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

"Competing for Quality"

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the Government's response to the "Competing for Quality" policy review. [21077]

Mr. Freeman: The "Competing for Quality" policy review endorsed the Government's policy of improving efficiency and quality through competition and the involvement of the private sector and made a large number of recommendations for enhancing "Competing for Quality" programmes.

Since the review was published, the Government have been considering their recommendations and have consulted the CBI and the Council of Civil Service Unions.

I am happy to announce now that the Government accept the large majority of the review's recommendations. I expect Departments to follow the advice of the review in their "Competing for Quality" programmes.

In particular, I want to stress:

Departments should continue to develop co-operation with the private sector, in order to maximise the opportunities for improvement in value for money.

the leadership of senior management in Departments continues to be important for success and they should encourage the scope of innovation and improvement through competition to be continuously widened.

staff are our key asset and they should be properly trained for and supported in managing competition programmes. The concerns of those affected by competitions should be addressed.

improving quality and improving value for money should go hand in hand.

transparency is important for success and will be achieved through the Government's initiatives on open government and by the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting.

The Government are not able to accept fully the review's recommendations on:

imposing minimum cost thresholds for competition

The review points out that high process costs have eroded, or in some cases exceeded, savings made by submitting to competition small or low cost areas of work. It suggests a minimum threshold below which competition should be avoided. The Government consider that this is too inflexible and could inhibit Departments from making worthwhile gains even in relatively small areas. In any competition, Departments should package small activities together as well as looking for other ways to minimise process costs. Then they should satisfy themselves that the benefits would be worth the process costs involved. But the Government do not plan to impose rigid cost thresholds, as proposed by the review.

restructuring activities in preference to competition

The review recommends that internal restructuring options should be pursued before putting activities out to competition. It also recommends that, in general, strategic contracting out (that is, competition between private sector organisations to supply services to Government, without any in-house teams competing as in a market test) is to be preferred to market testing, because the net savings are likely to be higher and because it may offer a better way of handling staff interests. The Government's policy, as was set out in the "Continuity and Change" White Paper (Cm 2627), continues to be to improve efficiency and quality through competition and by involving the private sector. But within this policy, Departments are free to make informed judgements of the relative benefits of internal restructuring, market testing and contracting out.

indemnities for contractors' against redundancies after staff transfer under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, 1981, as amended ("TUPE")

The review recommends contractors should be indemnified by the Government against the cost of future redundancies in case work is abolished at the end of a contract. Indemnities would create contingent liabilities and, in general, the Government believe the interests of the taxpayer are best served by a clean break. But indemnities can be negotiated exceptionally, with the agreement of the Treasury, on the basis of criteria issued in 1994.

The review also recommended that indemnities should be given against the effects of any future amendments to the European acquired rights directive, on which TUPE is based. The Government do not give indemnities against changes in legislation, but would be prepared to consider whether any transitional arrangements were needed in the event of significant changes to the directive which resulted in the need to amend TUPE.

In due course, the forthcoming Government's "Guide to Competing for Quality" will give fuller guidance to Departments.

Civil Service Salaries

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the average increase in civil service salaries since February 1993. [20653]

Mr. Freeman: This information is not available in the precise form requested but I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) on 24 February, *Official Report*, column *125*.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in how many cases, in the last 12 months, he was advised that the cost of answering a parliamentary question would exceed £450; and in how many of those cases he declined to provide an answer on grounds of disproportionate cost. [20652]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 5 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *618*.

HMSO

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals there are to change the 1996–97 cash limit for Her Majesty's Stationery Office. [21044]

Mr. Freeman: The cash limit for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, class XVII, vote 4, will be reduced by £50,000 from £1,191,000 to £1,141,000. This reflects the partial offset of increased expenditure in the Office of Public Service, class XVII, vote 1, as announced in a previous answer on 31 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *386*.

Government Business

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what guidance is issued to Government Departments on the conduct of Government business once an election is announced. [21045]

Mr. Freeman: The guidance covering the conduct of Govnerment business once an election is announced was issued to Departments yesterday and copies of it have been placed in the Library of the House.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the last 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19779]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested is as follows:

1981–82: 3
1982–83: 1
1983–84: 4
1984–85: 4
1985–86: 4
1986–87: 4
1987–88: 3
1988–89: 2
1989–90: 3
1990–91: 2
1991–92: 0
1992–93: 2
1993–94: 1
1994–95: 4
1995–96: 4.

With two exceptions—one in 1984–85 and the other in 1994–95—all of the Bills were passed by Parliament. The figures include measures of law reform, but not consolidation Bills.

Justices Chief Executive (Hartlepool)

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what decision he has reached concerning the application of the justices chief executive in Teeside to acquire the responsibilities of the justices clerk in Hartlepool; and if he will make a statement. [20839]

Mr. Streeter: My Department has not yet received such an application.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the last 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19766]

The Attorney-General: Save for consolidation Bills, which are not treated as departmental business, none.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

International Treaties

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many international treaties the United Kingdom has signed in each of the last 15 years; how many were judged to

require Acts of Parliament prior to notification; and how many times in that period a Bill to give effect to a treaty was not passed by Parliament. [19781]

Dr. Liam Fox: A total of 1,381 treaties have been signed by the United Kingdom since 1 January 1982:

1982: 67
1983: 78
1984: 69
1985: 65
1986: 99
1987: 105
1988: 81
1989: 110
1990: 113
1991: 92
1992: 89
1993: 122
1994: 117
1995: 84
1996: 90.

The treaties cover a wide range of subjects and in a majority of cases Government Departments other than the FCO would have been responsible for determining what legislation, if any, was involved. This information is not recorded in treaty records and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the last 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19764]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the ODA, sponsored the following number of Bills in each of the last 15 years:

1982: 1
1983: 0
1984: 0
1985: 4
1986: 2
1987: 3
1988: 3
1989: 3
1990: 1
1991: 3
1992: 1
1993: 2
1994: 2
1995: 3
1996: 2

All of the Bills have been passed by Parliament.

Montserrat

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the new jetty in the north of Montserrat will be completed; and what assessment he has made of the risk from a volcanic eruption to the people working in the harbour. [20840]

Dr. Liam Fox: The stub of the new jetty was completed in February 1997. It can now be used for limited movement of people and supplies. The full jetty is due for completion in late May 1997. There is continual appraisal of the risk by the scientific team on the island. Contingency plans are in place for the rapid departure of essential workers from the harbour if the circumstances change.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Trans-Pennine Trail

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action she is taking to expedite the completion of the trans-Pennine trail. [18481]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Web Site

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when her Department established its Internet site; what representations she has received and what data she has collated on the use and utility of the site; and what steps she is taking to increase the amount of information available via the site. [19141]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage web site, www.heritage.gov.uk, was established in March 1996. The Department's web site allows people to provide feedback on the pages. Representations have been received from bodies wishing to have a link to their web site added to the Department's.

A monthly report is produced which identifies the most commonly accessed information held on the site as well as the total number of people who have visited the site. There are a growing number of DNH publications on the web site with the most recent addition being "Reading the Future—A Review of Public Libraries in England". Future DNH publications will also be posted on the Department's web site and the range of information provided is under review in the light of the recent Green Paper on government.direct.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Treason Charges (Nigeria)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has received on the treason charges bought against Nigerian dissidents on 12 March; and if he will make a statement; [20766]

(2) what reports he has received on *(a)* the cases of the Nigerian political activists charged with treason by the Nigerian authorities on 12 March and *(b)* the conditions in which those detained are being held. [20767]

Dr. Liam Fox: Our high commission in Lagos has reported that, on 12 March, 15 people were arraigned before a magistrates court in Lagos, four in absentia, charged with two counts of treason against the Nigerian

Government. The case has been adjourned until 9 May. We have no information, at this stage, about the conditions in which the 11 Nigerian-based detainees are being held, but our high commission is following the case closely.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

McDermott *v.* Diana, Princess of Wales

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the industrial tribunal application in the case McDermott *v.* Diana, Princess of Wales, was withdrawn or an award was made consequent on negotiations between the applicant and the respondent. [19960]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The industrial tribunal application in the case of McDermott *v.* Diana, Princess of Wales was settled prior to the tribunal hearing on 5 March, as result of an agreement reached between the applicant and the respondent.

Internet

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps here Department is taking to prevent access by children to the adult material content of the Internet. [20195]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* My Department has worked extensively with the industry, the Home Office and the police to develop an appropriate approach to this important issue. We have encouraged the industry in a self-regulatory approach, backed-up by the application of existing law, and the existing penalties, in the Internet environment. As a result, on 23 September 1996, I was able to launch an industry led initiative—now known as "Internet Watch"—with the backing of the police and the Home Office.

An independent "Internet Watch Foundation"—IWF—was created by the industry to provide a hot-line service where illegal material can be reported and acted upon with the involvement of the service providers and the police as necessary. IWF is also developing, with the help of an advisory board which includes child protection organisations, ratings systems to advise users and suppliers of the normal content of news groups and web pages. This provides both the means to uphold the existing law "on-line", and to provide advisory ratings for other material, which while legal, might be considered unsuitable for children or other vulnerable groups.

Service providers have undertaken to support the availability of ratings material and the facilities in browsing software to screen out material which parents do not wish their children to encounter. This is a major step forward in promoting responsible use of the Internet and in giving parents the tools with which to exercise their own responsibilities for their children "on-line". Copies of the proposal describing the scheme, which has been operating successfully for several months, were placed in the Library of the House at the time the scheme was launched, under the name of "R3 Safety-Net".

British Bankers Association (Code of Practice)

Mr. Richards: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the British Bankers Association proposal to produce a binding code of practice in respect of holders of floating charges giving notice to companies of their intention to appoint an administrative receiver. [21261]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The British Bankers' Association—BBA—has today launched a statement of principles entitled, "Banks and Businesses: Working Together". I, along with my hon. Friends the Minister for Small Firms and the Economic Secretary, believe that this is a positive step in the direction of better communications between bankers and their business customers. As such, we believe it should be of major benefit to both small to medium enterprise—SME—companies and other businesses.

The primary aim of the statement of principles is to bring about increased and improved communications in bank-customer relationships, particularly where financial difficulties are encountered. The banks will aim to provide businesses with early warning of any concerns they may have together with a reminder of the benefits of taking appropriate advice. By addressing problems at an early stage the statement of principles will underpin the banks' stated commitment to support sustainable rescues. It will also give business access to banks' complaints procedures and, where applicable, the banking ombudsman. For these reasons the statement of principles has potential additional benefits which would not be delivered by the five days notice proposal. At present 90 per cent. of the SME market will be covered by it.

All the major clearing banks have agreed to be bound by the statement of principles but some of the smaller banks have yet to sign up. I strongly encourage them to do so without delay.

The Government welcome the statement of principles and the issue of whether legislation is still needed will be reviewed in the light of whether it is delivering the expected benefits to business.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 10 March, *Official Report*, column *35*, if he will make a statement on how the methodology set out in the note placed in the Library on 2 February 1990 was used to assess the employment consequences of a national minimum wage on the basis of the 1995 new earnings survey. [20763]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The methodology was used in the same way as set out, in detail, in the note placed in the Library of the House on 2 February 1990. The calculation incorporated the latest earnings data from the April 1995 NES and employment figures for the first quarter of 1995 from the "Workforce in Employment". This gave a figure of around 1 million jobs lost from the introduction of a national minimum wage set at £4 an hour, assuming half restoration of pay differentials.

TRANSPORT

Ringway Parliamentary Support Group

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on each meeting between Ministers in his Department acting in an official capacity and the ringway parliamentary support group. [20313]

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend met the group on 26 February 1997. The main subject of discussion was the liberalisation of bilateral air services agreements.

In addition, my right hon. Friend attended a reception organised by the group in Westminster Hall in July 1995 and opened a small exhibition about the airport in the Upper Waiting Hall in July 1996. My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping also attended a reception held in conjunction with the above exhibition in July 1996.

Bus Working Group (Consultation)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultation has taken place between the bus working group and its sub-groups and *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* members of the public. [20445]

Mr. Watts: Consultation takes place by means of the membership of the bus working group and its sub-groups, all of which include representatives of the local authority associations and the National Federation of Bus Users. The membership of the bus working group was set out in my answer of 18 December columns *658-59* to the hon. Member.

Bus Companies (Customer Complaints)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage bus companies to follow good practice in handling customer complaints. [20444]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 February, *Official Report* column *142–43.*

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the past 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19763]

Mr. Bowis: The information is set out in the table. All of the Bills were passed by Parliament, with the exception of one—the Civil Aviation Bill of 1985—which was withdrawn.

Year	*Number of Bills*
1982	3
1983	3
1984	3
1985	4
1986	1
1987	2
1988	2
1989	2
1990	2
1991	5
1992	1
1993	1
1994	0
1995	0
1996	3
Total	32

Salisbury Bypass

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the Highways Agency report on its reviews of the crossing of the River Avon south of Salisbury by the proposed Salisbury bypass. [21014]

Mr. Watts: Copies of the Highways Agency review report, which is in three volumes, were placed in the Library on 17 March. The report identified two possible alternative routes to the published route for the bypass which would avoid land having to be taken from the newly designated East Harnham meadows site of special scientific interest in the Avon valley. In accordance with undertakings given when my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment announced their views on the proposed bypass last October, we will shortly be affording interested parties an opportunity to comment on the agency's report.

Marine Aids to Navigation

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future provision of marine aids to navigation by the general lighthouse authorities. [21125]

Mr. Bowis: The general lighthouse authorities carried out a consultation exercise during 1996 to determine user views on the future provision of marine aids to navigation. The major proposals, which were supported by respondents, were that the UK should provide a differential global positioning system, adopt the Loran C system as provided by the north-west Europe Loran C system agreement and discontinue the Decca navigator system and the radiobeacon service as soon as was reasonable. The GLAs proposed to maintain traditional aids to navigation, subject to regular reviews.

We welcome the GLAs' proposals and accept the need to establish a civil marine navigation plan as a sound basis for planning the future provision of aids to navigation into the next century.

We support the broad thrust of the proposals which are in line with developments in the international maritime community and will assist the transition to a civil global navigation satellite system. The balance of opinion following the consultation exercise supports the provision by the GLAs of DGPS for marine users based on the global positioning system at a relatively small cost to the general lighthouse fund. The system offers improved navigational accuracy while maintaining the system integrity of GPS, as well as the prospective benefits of providing future interface with electronic charting, integrated bridge system vessel traffic services and transponder systems.

The UK is interested in adopting the NEL system to replace the Decca navigator system as the terrestrial back-up to GPS. We cannot commit the UK to NELS until

its future has been placed beyond doubt. In the meantime, users should be aware that the GLAs are unlikely to operate the Decca navigator system beyond the year 2000.

The GLAs' proposals can be implemented within the income provided by the reduced level of light dues that we announced on March 6. They will save an estimated £32 million over the next 20 years while offering the prospect of improved accuracy to the navigator. Further reductions in user costs after 2000 are expected from the GLAs' on-going reviews of traditional aids to navigation which will be carried out in consultation with users.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Government will revoke the line orders for the east London river crossing. [21126]

Mr. Bowis: I am pleased to announced that the ELRC revocation order has now been made and is being prepared for publication on 26 March.

The ELRC orders have remained in place while alternatives for crossing the Thames between Beckton and Thamesmead were being considered in order that businesses and residents directly affected by the scheme could continue to benefit from the statutory compensation which accompanied the orders.

DEFENCE

Future Large Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment the Royal Air Force has made of the European staff requirement for the European future large aircraft. [20709]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We assess that the European staff requirement for the future large aircraft, as it is currently drafted, satisfies the United Kingdom's minimum technical requirements for a tactical military airlifter. We are currently considering whether our conditions for re-entry to the FLA programme set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) on 16 December 1994—*Official Report*, column *823*—have been met.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it remains his policy to seek to purchase between 40 and 50 future large aircraft. [20694]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside on 11 February this year—*Official Report*, column 131–32.

Army Technical Support Agency

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the key targets for the chief executive of the Army Technical Support Agency for 1997–98. [21122]

Mr. Soames: The chief executive of the Army Technical Support Agency has been set the following key targets for 1997–98.

1. Influence equipment design by attaining a 15 per cent. increase to 80 per cent. in Procurement Executive integrated logistic support project involvement where ATSA's contribution is equal to or greater than one half-year-man effort.

2. Achieve a 10 per cent. gross cost saving in advanced order recommended spares purchasing without reducing sustainability or availability of land systems equipment.

3. Answer 92 per cent. of ad hoc inquiries within two working days.

4. Achieve an average response time of nine working days for demand for technical publications.

5. Complete 90 per cent. of operational projects and 75 per cent. of priority A projects before the agreed target date.

6. Ensure for at least 70 per cent. of projects that the maintenance specific spares, required to support an equipment throughout its service life, are identified and encoded on to the stores system record by the target date agreed with the equipment manager.

7. Satisfy 90 per cent. of customers when undertaking technical projects.

8. Improve efficiency by 3.6 per cent. over 1997–98 outturn.

9. Respond to 100 per cent. of equipment failure report (or its equivalent) submissions within 14 calendar days of receipt.

RAF (Reserve Personnel)

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the use of the RAF's Reserve personnel; and if he will make a statement. [21154]

Mr. Soames: I am delighted to announce that three new Royal Auxiliary Air Force squadrons are to be formed. An Air Transportable Surgical Squadron will form at Royal Air Force Leuchars on 1 April 1997, with an establishment of 71 reservist personnel. Two Training and Standardisation Squadrons are also to be formed—the first at Royal Air Force Halton also on 1 April 1997, with an establishment of 21 personnel, and the second at Royal Air Force Shawbury on 1 June 1997, with an establishment of nine. In addition, the establishment of No. 4624 (County of Oxford) Movements Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force based at Royal Air Force Brize Norton will increase by 69 posts from 1 April 1997. From the same date, the establishment of the Inspectorate Royal Auxiliary Air Force also at Royal Air Force Brize Norton will increase from two posts to four. The new Role Support Squadron concept, which I announced in the House last year with the formation of the Helicopter Support Squadron, is developing in an encouraging way.

Service Personnel

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of personnel have *(a)* committed suicide and *(b)* suffered a fatal accident in each of the armed services in each of the past seven years; and if he will make a statement. [20033]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Paul Atobell to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 18 March 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the percentages of personnel in the Services who have committed suicide or died as result of an accident since 1990. As Chief Executive of Defence Analytical Services Agency this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The information you request is detailed in the attached table. Please note that the figures and percentages shown in the table represent the position based on information we have received as at 3 March 1997 for compatibility with your earlier questions. The figures for suicides ware still provisional for the later years as some Coroners verdicts' are still awaited.

I hope you find these figures useful.

The percentage of armed forces personnel who committed suicide or who were killed in accidents from 1 January 1990 to 31 December 1996 (based on information reported to DASA as at 3 March 1997)

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Tri-service[1]							
Average strength (000s)[2]	311.1	305.4	296.9	276.3	254.1	234.9	224.1
Coroner verdicts of suicide (number)	42	34	30	[3]23	[3]29	[3]18	[3]5
Percentage	0.014	0.011	0.010	[3]0.008	[3]0.011	[3]0.008	[3]0.002
Accidents (number)	159	141	124	129	107	101	75
Percentage	0.051	0.046	0.042	0.047	0.042	0.043	0.033
Navy							
Average strength (000s)[2]	62.7	62.3	61.5	58.4	54.4	50.2	47.1
Coroner verdicts of suicide (number)	8	5	6	1	6	1	[3]2
Percentage	0.013	0.008	0.010	0.002	0.011	0.002	[3]0.004
Accidents (number)	22	26	21	34	11	16	13
Percentage	0.035	0.042	0.034	0.058	0.020	0.032	0.028

[1] Includes Gurkhas.
[2] Average strength calculated by taking the strength at 1 January, 1 April, 1 July, 1 October of the year in question and 1 January the following year, divided by five. Strength shown in thousands.
[3] The numbers and percentages of suicides are provisional, representing the current known position, based on medical events data supplied to DASA as at 3 March 1997. These figures are subject to change once coroners' verdicts have been made and information becomes available.

The percentage of armed forces personnel who committed suicide or who were killed in accidents from 1 January 1990 to 31 December 1996 (based on information reported to DASA as at 3 March 1997)

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Army[1]							
Average strength (000s)[2]	159.1	155.3	150.9	138.5	125.6	114.7	113.4
Coroner verdicts of suicide (number)	20	22	19	18	[3]18	[3]15	[3]3
Percentage	0.013	0.014	0.013	0.013	[3]0.014	[3]0.013	[3]0.003
Accidents (number)	92	91	75	65	71	55	46
Percentage	0.058	0.059	0.050	0.047	0.057	0.048	0.041
RAF							
Average strength (000s)[2]	89.3	87.8	84.5	79.4	74.1	70.0	63.6
Coroner verdicts of suicide (number)	14	7	5	[3]4	[3]5	[3]2	[3]0
Percentage	0.016	0.008	0.006	[3]0.005	[3]0.007	[3]0.003	[3]0.000
Accidents (number)	45	24	28	30	25	30	16
Percentage	0.050	0.027	0.033	0.038	0.034	0.043	0.025

[1] Includes Gurkhas.
[2] Average strength calculated by taking the strength at 1 January, 1 April, 1 July, 1 October of the year in question and 1 January the following year, divided by five. Strength shown in thousands.
[3] The numbers and percentages of suicides are provisional, representing the current known position, based on medical events data supplied to DASA as at 3 March 1997. These figures are subject to change once coroners' verdicts have been made and information becomes available.

Loan Service Personnel

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for 1991 those countries *(a)* where British service personnel categorised as loan service personnel were based and *(b)* in which training exercises took place involving British service personnel. [19914]

Mr. Soames: According to available records, in 1991 British loan service personnel were deployed in the following countries:

Antigua
Australia
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belize
Bermuda
Brunei
Colombia
Dominica
Fiji
Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Hong Kong
Jordan

Kenya
Lesotho
Malaysia
Mauritius
Namibia
New Zealand
Nigeria
Oman
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Swaziland
Turks and Caicos Islands
United Arab Emirates
Zimbabwe

The full records of exercises involving British service personnel in 1991 are not available. According to available records, British service personnel exercised in or with forces from the following countries and dependent territories in 1991:

Ascension Island
Australia
Bahamas
Bahrain
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Botswana
Brunei
Canada
Colombia
Cyprus
Denmark
Dominica
Falkland Islands
France
Germany
Gibraltar
Greece
Hawaii
Hong Kong
Italy
Jamaica
Jordan
Kenya
Kuwait
Luxembourg
Malaysia
Namibia
Netherlands
Netherlands Antilles
New Zealand
Norway
Oman
Portugal
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
Spain
Sweden
Thailand
Trinidad and Tobago
Turkey
UAE
United Kingdom
United States

In addition, UK forces exercised with the states of the regional security system and the West Indies Guardship, as part of her routine deployment, would have exercised with many of the Caribbean countries and dependent territories.

Foreign Military Personnel (Training)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many foreign military personnel were in the United Kingdom undergoing military training on 1 March; and if he will list the countries from which they came. [20175]

Mr. Soames: According to our records, on 1 March 1997, a total of 831 military personnel from the following countries were attending training courses in the United Kingdom;

Antigua
Australia
Austria
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Canada
Chile
China
Czech Republic
Denmark
Egypt
Estonia
Fiji
France
Germany
Georgia
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica

Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Kuwait
Latvia
Lebanon
Lesotho
Former Yugoslavia
Republic of Macedonia
Malawi
Malaysia
Malta
Mauritius
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Paraguay
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Slovakia
Slovenia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sweden
Tanzania
Thailand
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Turkey
Ukraine
Uruguay
United Arab Emirates
USA
Yemen
Zimbabwe

In addition, an exercise involving some 2,021 personnel from Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Spain and USA was taking place in UK waters on that date.

Gulf War

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each of the vaccinations administered to armed services personnel and medical support staff who served in Operation Granby, indicating the reasons in each case for the decision to administer the respective vaccination. [20454]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on 21 January 1997—*Official Report*, column *550*.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 21 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *552*, when the Treasury initially introduced the non-movers package; when responsibility for relocation expenses was transferred to Government Departments; and what additional changes to the terms originally on offer they are permitted to make. [20209]

Mr. Soames: The arrangement for civilian staff that is not known in the Ministry of Defence as the non-mover's package was first introduced by the Treasury in 1989.

The Treasury delegated to Departments the responsibility for determining relocation expenses for civil servants in May 1993.

Departments have a degree of flexibility to make changes within the rules laid down in the civil service management code.

Nuclear Test Programme (Participation)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account he has taken of *(a)* the case of Kenneth McGinley and EE *v.* United Kingdom and *(b)* the ensuing report of the Europe Commission of Human Rights in determining his policy towards compensating participants in the nuclear test programme. [19136]

Mr. Soames: The European Commission of Human Rights concluded in its report on the case of McGinley and EE *v.* UK that there was a violation of article 6(1) of the convention because, in its opinion, the applicants' lack of access to "relevant records", defined as yield and radiation level records contemporary with the nuclear tests, prevented effective access to the pensions appeal tribunal. It is normal for the Commission to make proposals for compensation to provide "just satisfaction" for a breach of the convention. The Commission's proposals on compensation, however, expressly did not relate to a finding of increased mortality, cancers or other illnesses with participation in atmospheric nuclear tests. As the Committee of Ministers has referred the case to the European Court of Human Rights, the question of compensation no longer falls to be considered at this stage. Compensation would be a matter for the court to decide should it determine a violation of the convention. The Government intend to contest the case.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the last 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19765]

Mr. Soames: The number of Bills sponsored by my Department in each of the past 15 years is as follows:

1982: 1
1983: nil
1984: 1
1985: nil
1986: 2
1987: 1
1988: nil
1989: nil
1990: 1
1991: 2
1992: 1
1993: 1
1994: nil
1995: nil
1996: 2

All the Bills were passed by Parliament.

Retirement Pensions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of each former two-star appointment and above in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Air Force and *(c)* the Royal Navy who is currently in receipt of a retirement pension and the date of their retirement. [20056]

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *710–11*, if the organophosphate pesticide investigation team report has been sent to the organisations which represent service men and women who served in the Gulf war; and if he will list the main conclusions of the report. [20342]

Mr. Soames: The OPPIT substantive report—Parts One to Three—which contains details of what is now known about the use of organophosphate pesticides by British service personnel during the Gulf War, was published on 10 December 1996 and a copy was placed in the Library of the House. Copies were requested by and sent to a number of Gulf veterans, but not specifically to any veterans organisations. Further copies are available from the Ministry of Defence. The report contained 14 findings and eight observations.

Otterburn Training Area

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how many years the *(a)* multi-launch rocket system and *(b)* AS90 self-propelled gun are planned to be in service in the Otterburn training area. [20553]

Mr. Soames: The multiple-launch rocket system is due to remain in service until 2025. The AS90 is expected to remain in service until at least 2020. The Army has made proposals for the development of the Otterburn training area to provide facilities for training regiments equipped with MLRS and AS90 throughout their in-service lives. The notice of proposed development of Otterburn is now subject to a non-statutory public inquiry which commences on 22 April.

Defence Estate Organisation

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the Defence Estate Organisation. [21121]

Mr. Soames: The Defence Estate Organisation will launch as a defence agency of the Ministry of Defence, on 18 March 1997. The agency will be responsible for assisting MOD in managing the optimum estate of land, buildings and installations to meet the operating needs of the Department. While the management of the estate will remain the responsibility of the occupying MOD budget holder, the DEO plays a vital role in: supporting budget holders estate staff; improving MOD's stewardship of the estate; ensuring MOD receives best value for money for estate services, property management and new works procurement; acting as MOD's centre of estate expertise; and maintaining a strategic overview of the defence estate.

The DEO agency has about 1,400 staff in offices throughout the UK and abroad. The DEO's new headquarters will be at Sutton Coldfield.

The DEO's chief executive, Mr. Brian Hirst, is a widely experienced chartered surveyor recruited from the private sector, who has considerable public sector experience. He has been set the following key targets to be achieved by March 1998, by the end of DEO's first full year of operation:

1. Strategic Overview:
   (a.) To develop the information systems infrastructure necessary to support a strategic overview of the Defence Estate by March 1998.
   (b.) To develop a series of output-based targets for strategic overview.
2. To complete 30–35 establishment development plans across the Defence estate in FY 97–98.
3. To achieve 90 per cent. of total disposals' receipts within year against the 1997–98 target.
4. To meet the following contracts targets:
   (a.) To complete 75 per cent. of construction contracts within one month of the contracted completion date.
   (b.) To complete 90 per cent. of construction contracts within three months of the contracted completion date.
   (c.) To have less than 10 per cent. average variation on financially complete construction contracts.
5. To meet the following efficiency targets:
   (a.) To achieve a reduction in operating costs of 25 per cent. compared with the 1996–97 outturn.
   (b.) To develop a volume measure for all of DEO's business, baseline it and propose targets for subsequent years.
6. To complete the rural defence estate maintenance CFQ scoping and feasibility studies by end of March 1997 and to complete a CFQ scoping study for the whole of the DEO by December 1997.
7. To develop a mechanism for measuring customer satisfaction, establish a baseline by September 1997 and propose targets for subsequent years.
8. To put in place an integrated compliance audit and effectiveness review system for projects by March 1998.

I have arranged for copies of the agency's framework document and corporate plan to be placed in the Library of both Houses.

Gulf War (Carcases)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the carcases of camels, sheep and other animals killed during the Gulf war were *(a)* flow to Boscombe Down airfield, *(b)* transported thence to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down and *(c)* tested for the causes of their deaths, indicating the results of the tests. [19518]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 10 march 1997]:* At present my Department has no verified information concerning reports of dead animals being found during the Gulf war. The Chemical and Biological Defence sector of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, situated at Porton Down, has no record of any dead animals being received or analysed in connection with the Gulf war. However, a search for information relevant to this subject is currently underway.

PRIME MINISTER

Official Visits

5. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to make an official visit to Romford. [19196]

The Prime Minister: During the next few weeks, I hope to visit all parts of the United Kingdom.

Employment Prospects (Lichfield)

8. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effects of Her Majesty's Government's policies on employment prospects in Lichfield. [19200]

The Prime Minister: The Government's sound economic policies and labour market reforms have encouraged employment creation throughout the country. Unemployment has fallen by more than a million in the United Kingdom, by more than 20,000 in the county of Staffordshire, and by more than 2,000 in Lichfield.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 March. [19537]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 March. [19538]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

ENVIRONMENT

Homelessness (Disabled People)

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many disabled people were accepted as homeless and in priority need by local authorities in England during 1996. [20352]

Mr. Curry: Information is given on the numbers of households for whom local authorities accepted responsibility to secure accommodation, under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985, in the quarterly information bulletin entitled, "Households found accommodation under the homelessness legislation: England", the latest issue covers 1996. Table 3 provides a breakdown of acceptances by category of priority need, including one for households with a member who is vulnerable due to physical disability. Copies of the bulletin are in the Library.

Hedgerows

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice his Department offers to local planning authorities on how to ensure that a hedgerow's importance is accurately evaluated within the statutory 28 days if those days fall outside the wildlife breeding season; and if he will make a statement. [20272]

Mr. Clappison: The draft Hedgerows Regulations, which were laid in both Houses on 3 March, allow a local planning authority a period of 42 days to respond to a hedgerow removal notice, and so to evaluate the importance of the hedge. The draft regulations also provide that whether the hedgerow contains rare or endangered wildlife species shall be determined either by a site survey or by reference to previous records, as set out in schedule 1. Guidance on the implementation of the regulations, including how local planning authorities should apply the evaluation criteria, will be issued before they come into effect.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made over the last two months of the representations he has received regarding hedgerow protection; and if he will make a statement on how future *(a)* proposals and *(b)* legislation will ensure that targets set out in the biodiversity action plan are achieved. [20273]

Mr. Clappison: A total of 465 responses to the Government's consultation on draft Hedgerows Regulations were included in the analysis reported on by the consultants ERM. A copy of their report is in the House Library. These reponses were carefully considered and taken into account in the revised draft regulations laid in Parliament on 3 March 1997.

Once passed by Parliament, implementation and enforcement of these regulations to protect important hedgerows will contribute towards the targets set out in the biodiversity action plan on ancient and/or species rich hedgerows. The group which will review progress and take forward this action plan, chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, will meet on 24 April.

Straw Bale House Construction

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the scope for straw bale house construction in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [20270]

Mr. Clappison: The Department of the Environment has made no assessment of the use of straw bales for house construction in the UK. However, at the end of last year, staff of the Building Research Establishment

inspected a single storey demonstration project in Belfast and it has since agreed to undertake some monitoring studies.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the *(a)* environmental and *(b)* financial benefits of straw bale built housing; what Government training opportunities are available in this construction method; and if he will make a statement. [20271]

Mr. Clappison: The Department of the Environment has made no assessment of the environmental and economic benefits of straw bale built housing. There are no Government training opportunities available at present.

Water Pollution

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many prosecutions have been made under section 85 of the Water Resources Act 1991 for offences in north Staffordshire; and if he will make a statement. [20165]

Mr. Clappison: There have been 11 prosecutions for illegal discharges under section 85 of the Water Resources Act 1991 in the two Environment Agency pollution control districts which cover most of north Staffordshire. Seven of these offences related to pollution caused by agricultural discharges, three to industrial premises and one breach by a sewage treatment works of a consent condition in respect of colour.

Sewerage Discharges

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on sewerage discharge in upper Trent; and if he will make a statement. [20166]

Mr. Clappison: None.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many samples of discharge have been taken by the Environment Agency since 1 April 1996 in Stoke-on-Trent, North; of these, how many showed a breach of discharge consent under the Water Resources Act 1991; and in each case what was the nature of the breach. [20167]

Mr. Clappison: Statistics relating to the area of Stoke on Trent, North are not available. However, for the two relevant pollution control districts of the Environment Agency, since 1 April 1996, 567 sampling visits have been undertaken during which 364 samples were obtained. Of these, 19 indicated a breach of the conditions of a discharge consent. I understand that the Environment Agency has already provided the hon. Member with details of these cases and the results of subsequent investigations.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in how many cases the Environment Agency has granted new discharge consent without advertisement in north Staffordshire. [20168]

Mr. Clappison: Since the formation of the Environment Agency only one discharge consent has been issued in the two relevant pollution control districts of the agency. This related to the discharge of minewater and site drainage and was not advertised.

Water Protection Policy

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer of 5 March, *Official Report*, column 682, when he estimates his Department will issue the discussion paper on using economic instruments to achieve water protection policy objectives; and if he will make a statement. [20312]

Mr. Clappison: The Government intend to issue the paper during the spring.

UN Environment Programme

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the current financial position of the UN Environment Programme. [19137]

Mr. Clappison: The 19th governing council of the United Nations environment programme met in Nairobi from 27 January to 7 February. The Government's main objective was to secure decisions which would restore confidence in UNEP and hence reverse the sharp decline in UNEP's funding over recent years. Satisfactory proposals on the governing structure and UNEP's mandate were proposed by the president of the Governing Council, and gathered a wide measure of support from developed and developing countries, but were resisted by some member of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The governing council was suspended and the Secretary of State took the view that we should suspend our voluntary contribution to the environment fund until these issues are resolved. The United States and Spain took the same view. The Government are now actively seeking ways of resolving this problem with all interested parties.

Chemicals Convention

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards proposed negotiations on a chemicals convention at the UN General Assembly special session. [19138]

Mr. Clappison: The Government supported the recent UNEP governing council decisions on negotiation of legally binding instruments on prior informed consent for trade in certain hazardous chemicals, and on persistent organic pollutants. The governing council also invited the executive director of UNEP to develop a report outlining options for enhanced coherence and efficiency among international activities related to chemicals, including the instrument on the prior informed consent procedure under development and a likely future agreement on persistent organic pollutants. We will consider the conclusions of the report, including any proposal for a chemicals convention, when it is completed.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the last 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19770]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department has been responsible for a total of 63 Government Bills between 1982 and 1996. The breakdown for each year is as follows:

1982: 4
1983: 5
1984: 5
1985: 9
1986: 2
1987: 5
1988: 5
1989: 2
1990: 6
1991: 9
1992: 3
1993: 2
1994: 1
1995: 2
1996: 3

All of these Bills were approved by Parliament, except for one in 1983.

Water and Sewerage Companies

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total indicative value of the water and sewerage companies calculated for each year between 1989 and 1994. [20339]

Mr. Clappison: The total indicative value of the 10 water and sewerage companies calculated in 1989 was £15.2 billion. Indicative values were not recalculated for subsequent years.

Show Houses (Taxation)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conclusion he has reached following his consideration of the representations recently made to him about the taxation of show houses; and if he will make a statement. [20554]

Sir Paul Beresford: We are still considering our response to representations from the House Builders Federation and the Manufacturing and Construction Alliance that shows houses should be subject to the council tax rather than non-domestic rates. If we decide that show houses should be treated as domestic, we could effect this change through secondary legislation.

Advisory Committee on Release to the Environment

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the dates of, and attendees at, the meetings of his Department's release committee since its inception; what matters were discussed at each meeting; and if he will place in the Library copies of the agendas and papers discussed at each meeting. [20759]

Mr. Gummer: The Advisory Committee on Release to the Environment—ACRE—has been meeting several times a year since its inception as a statutory committee in 1993. I will write shortly to the hon. Gentleman with a list of dates of meetings, and attendees at the meetings. However, a description of the matters which were discussed at each meeting could be compiled only at disproportionate expense. It would be impracticable to place in the Library copies of the agendas and papers discussed at each meeting, but the advice provided by ACRE on consent application for the release and marketing of genetically modified organisms, together with key papers, is maintained in a public register at the Department of the Environment offices in Romney house, Marsham street, London.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with the Health and Safety Executive in regard to proposed amendments to European Council directive GO/219/EEC on genetically modified micro-organisms; what action he has taken following the consultations; and if he will make a statement. [20760]

Mr. Gummer: Following the European Commission's adoption in December 1995 of its proposed amendment to the directive, I agreed a strategy for negotiation of the proposal with the Health and Safety Executive based on support for its essential elements. This was reflected in an explanatory memorandum cleared by the Scrutiny Committees of both Houses of Parliament last year.

The proposal has been discussed at three meetings of the Environment Council which I have attended during 1996. The Health and Safety Executive was consulted and full account was taken of its advice. At the last Council, held on 9 December 1996, there was broad agreement between member states that the essential elements of the Commission's proposals should be supported.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports he has received from the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes in respect of the environmental implications of genetically modified organisms. [20761]

Mr. Gummer: None. The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes advises Health and Agriculture Ministers and the heads of Departments of Health and Social Services and of Agriculture for Northern Ireland on any matters relating to the irradiation of food or to the manufacture of novel foods or foods produced by novel processes.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the amendments proposed by the European Parliament report, A4-0070/97, to the proposal for a Council directive amending directive 90/219/EEC on the contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms (COM (95) 0640-C4-0271/96-95/0340 SYN). [20764]

Mr. Gummer: The Health and Safety Executive, in consultation with officials in the Department of the Environment and other interested Departments, studied the amendments in the light of the objectives which I agreed following the European Commission's adoption of its original proposal. Most of the amendments were consistent with the United Kingdom's objective of reducing ineffective administrative burdens at the same time as improving protection of human health and the environment by targeting areas of highest risk. A substantial number, however, would have undermined that objective.

The European Parliament voted on the proposed amendments on Wednesday 12 March. I am pleased that most of the amendments contrary to our objectives were rejected. A significant minority, however, were passed. Of particular concern is the proposal to alter the legal base of the directive from that which provides for the establishment of minimum safety standards for human health and the environment to that concerned with the establishment of harmonised standards to enhance the functioning of the internal market. The contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms has nothing to do with the internal market, so the proposed change of legal base would be quite inappropriate.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conferences his Department *(a)* has sponsored and *(b)* been represented at since January 1996 on genetically modified organisms and the environment. [20765]

Mr. Gummer: *(a)* On 10 March, my Department sponsored a national conference on biotechnology at which I made the opening speech. This conference was chaired by Lord Selborne, and the outcome of the conference will be reported to me shortly. The conference was informed by the outcome of three consultation conferences. One of those, on the environment applications of biotechnology, was sponsored by my Department.

(b) My officials attend conferences on genetically modified organisms from time to time, but we do not keep a central register of such attendances.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the *(a)* containment measures, *(b)* targeting of areas of risk, *(c)* incorporation of technological changes and *(d)* notification periods in Council directive GO/219/EEC on the contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms. [20771]

Mr. Gummer: In administering and enforcing the regulations which implement this directive inadequacies have been shown in all four areas.

(a) The containment measures set out in the directive are based on what is appropriate to large-scale activities. Safety would be better ensured by a more flexible approach to containment measures which would enable users of genetically modified micro-organisms to select those most appropriate to the particular type of activity they propose to undertake.

(b) The directive bases notification requirements on the classification of GMMs according to their inherent properties and on an inflexible test of the purpose and scale of intended activities. These criteria are not properly risk-based and therefore result in a disproportionate focus by competent authorities on activities of negligible risk.

(c) The procedure for amending some of the key technical annexes to the directive is far too protracted to allow scientific developments to be taken quickly into account.

(d) The notification periods are unnecessarily long. We have found that notifications can be processed long before the expiry of the periods prescribed in the directive. Notifiers must, however, observe the prescribed periods. The consequence is that the planning schedules of those engaged in contained use activities are needlessly extended and work is delayed.

I am pleased that the European Commission's proposal for amendment of the directive, currently under negotiation, includes provisions which would go a long way to remedying these inadequacies.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has evaluated from the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on the impact of the release of genetically modified organisms into the environment on human health and environmental protection. [20772]

Mr. Gummer: I have received no recent representations from the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on this subject.

Abattoirs (Liquid Waste Discharges)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations cover the discharge of liquid wastes from abattoirs; how these regulations are implemented; and what plans he has to review their operation. [20768]

Mr. Gummer: Discharges from abattoirs into the public sewer are regulated by the relevant sewerage undertaker under powers contained in the Water Industry Act 1991. Discharges from abattoirs directly into controlled waters are regulated by the Environment Agency under powers contained in the Environment Act 1995.

Slaughtered Cattle (Disposal)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what advice he has issued on the environmental implications arising from the disposal by *(a)* landfill and *(b)* incineration of cattle slaughtered in connection with the BSE crisis; [20828]

(2) what advice has been requested in the last year from *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency on the best practical environmental option of disposing of the backlog of cattle slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme. [20829]

Mr. Clappison: Cattle suspected of displaying signs of BSE are slaughtered and their carcases sent for direct incineration in plants contracted to MAFF, which are subject to authorisation by the Environment Agency or relevant local authority under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Agriculture made it clear in the House on 16 April 1996 that cattle wastes from the over-30-months scheme would be treated primarily by rendering, with the resultant material being disposed of by the best practicable environmental option. The disposal of wastes from the scheme is subject to Commission Regulation (EC) 716/96. The regulation requires that the wastes be directly incinerated, or processed at a rendering plant and then destroyed. The regulation does not permit landfill. Rendered material—meat and bonemeal and tallow—is either being incinerated or stored safely pending destruction by the best practicable environmental option—for example, incineration, burning for energy recovery by power stations.

The Government have sought advice from the independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee on methods of dealing with cattle wastes. SEAC's conclusions were published on 7 June 1996 in a news release issued by MAFF. A copy is available in the Library of the House. SEAC's advice has been made available to relevant enforcement bodies.

Green Belt, Nottinghamshire

Sir Jim Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he will take to protect the Nottinghamshire green belt from development proposals in the local plan. [21015]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Following a public local inquiry last year into objections to the Nottingham local plan, I understand that the inspector has recommended acceptance of the city council's proposals to release some green belt land for development. It is now for the council to decide whether to accept the inspector's recommendations, and publish any proposed modifications prior to adoption of the local plan.

In making this decision, the council will need to take account of national planning policies. In this regard, the Government remain committed to the protection of green belts, and to ensuring that opportunities for reuse of urban land for developments are maximised. I shall therefore need to be fully satisfied that loss of green belt land is unavoidable in order to meet the future development needs of Nottingham, when I come to consider the council's proposed modifications to its draft plan.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what performance targets have been set for the Ordnance Survey executive agency in the year 1997–98. [21123]

Sir Paul Beresford: The following performance targets have been set for Ordnance Survey in 1997–98:

1. To recover at least 86 per cent. of the costs incurred by the agency, representing an increase of 3 per cent.
2. To ensure that, by 31 March 1998, 97 per cent. of existing major detail is surveyed and available to customers in the national topographic database at any one time—an increase of 1 per cent. over 1996–97. The target will increase to 99 per cent. by the year 2002.
3. In order to provide a quality service to customers, to despatch products in response to orders as follows:

   95 per cent. of all land-line digital map units within five working days—reduced from six days; and

   92 per cent. of small scale products within five working days—an increase of 2 per cent.
4. To increase by 3 per cent. the annual revenue earned per number of staff employed.

These targets are closely associated with the main corporate aims of Ordnance Survey and demonstrate the agency's continuing commitment to customers and to improved value for money for all its stakeholders. These more stringent targets represent significant improvements and will deliver an increasing level of services.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further action he proposes to take against those local authorities whose direct labour and direct service organisations failed to meet their statutory financial objectives in 1995–96. [21124]

Sir Paul Beresford: On 14 January this year, 52 statutory notices were served on 36 local authorities concerning the failure of their direct labour and service organisations to meet the required financial objectives in 1995–96. My right hon. Friend has now considered the responses to those notices, and has decided to give 40 directions to 31 local authorities.

The directions take the following forms:

Preventing the authority from carrying out the work if it fails to meet the financial objective in 1996–97 or 1997–98.

for Wolverhampton MBC (grounds maintenance),

Preventing the authority from carrying out the work if it fails to meet the financial objective in 1997–98 or 1998–99.

for Liverpool city council (other catering, building maintenance)

for New Forest district council (other catering),

Requiring the authority to retender the work and to seek the consent of the Secretary of State if proposing to award the work in-house.

for Aylesbury Vale district council (refuse collection),

for Carrick district council (other catering),

for Cheltenham borough council (highways and sewers),

for Harborough district council (refuse collection),

for London borough of Merton (vehicle maintenance),

for London borough of Newham (grounds maintenance),

for North Hertfordshire district council (building maintenance),

for Oxfordshire county council (schools and welfare catering),

for Peterborough city council (other cleaning),

for Rochdale MBC (building maintenance),

Requiring authorities to retender work if they fail to meet the financial objective in 1996–97 or 1997–98, and to seek the Secretary of State's consent where the work has to be retendered and where the authority subsequently wish to award work in-house.

for Amber Valley district council (other cleaning),

for Bassetlaw district council (refuse collection),

for Birmingham city council (grounds maintenance),

for London borough of Brent (other cleaning),

for Knowsley MBC (other catering),

for London borough of Newham (highways and sewers),

for Northumberland county council (schools and welfare catering),

for Nottinghamshire county council (schools and welfare catering),

for Pendle borough council (refuse collection),

for Rochdale MBC (schools and welfare catering),

for Sefton MBC (vehicle maintenance),

for South Lakeland district council (refuse collection),

for South Tyneside MBC (schools and welfare catering),

for Stoke on Trent city council (highways and sewers),

for Westminster city council (grounds maintenance),

for Wolverhampton MBC (schools and welfare catering).

Requiring authorities to retender work if they fail to meet the financial objective in 1997–98 or 1998–99, and to seek the Secretary of State's consent where the work has to be retendered and where the authority subsequently wish to award work in-house.

for Amber Valley district council (grounds maintenance),

for Barnsley MBC (schools and welfare catering),

for Cannock Chase district council (highways and sewers),

for Cheltenham borough council (building maintenance),

for Oldham MBC (vehicle maintenance, building maintenance, highways and sewers),

for Peterborough city council (building maintenance),

for Wyre borough council (other cleaning).

Requiring authorities to retender work if they fail to meet the financial objective in 1998–99 or 1999–2000, and to seek the Secretary of State's consent where the work has to be retendered and where the authority subsequently wish to award work in-house.

for Tynedale district council (building maintenance).

The Secretary of State has also decided to take no further statutory action in respect of financial failure in 1996–96 by:

Bedfordshire county council (building cleaning, grounds maintenance, other catering)

Co. Durham district council (new construction over £50,000),

Corby borough council (sports and leisure management),

Hart district council (other catering),

London borough of Merton (other catering),

North Hertfordshire district council (sports and leisure management),

Peterborough city council (grounds maintenance),

Preston borough council (highways and sewers),

Wyre borough council (highways and sewers, vehicle maintenance).

This action demonstrates our commitment to protect the interests of local taxpayers, and ensure that they receive value for money services from their local authorities. Where authorities' in-house teams have failed to achieve their financial targets, and where they do not seem to have taken the steps necessary to bring about an improvement in their performance, we will not hesitate to take statutory action.

Community Alarm Systems

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has following his recent consultation exercise on local authorities' powers to provide community alarm systems; and if he will make a statement. [21127]

Mr. Curry: Having carefully considered the more than 100 responses received to our consultation, we have concluded that local authorities should be empowered to provide community alarms to anyone resident in their area, and to be able to charge for such services. Community alarms can help the elderly to continue to live in their own homes, disabled people to lead independent lives, and can also be useful in tackling crimes such as repeat burglary, domestic violence or racial harassment. We intend to bring forward legislation at the next convenient opportunity.

Central-local Government Information Flows

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to publish the Government's response to the recent efficiency scrutiny on information flows between central and local government; and if he will make a statement. [21128]

Mr. Curry: I have today published the Government's response to the report of the efficiency scrutiny on information flows between central and local government.

This scrutiny, which was published on 14 November 1996, forms part of the Government's war on waste campaign and was the first in a rolling programme of efficiency scrutinies on local government matters designed to cut the burden of paperwork and unnecessary bureaucracy between central and local government. The scrutiny focused in particular on certain key services—personal social services, education, housing and transport—and looked at the European regional development fund, the European social fund and monitoring of local government spending. The scrutiny report concluded that the paper flow could be cut by up to one third, and set out specific recommendations for streamlining information flows.

We have now consulted the local authority associations and other interested bodies, including the Audit Commission and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy—CIPFA—on the report and its recommendations. Responses we have received have been overwhelmingly supportive of the thrust of the report. In the light of this consultation, the Government have prepared their response to the scrutiny's recommendations, which takes the form of an action plan for implementation of the report's recommendations.

In recognition of the need for central and local government to work closely together, the implementation of the action plan will be overseen by the joint group of senior officials and representatives of the local authority associations, the Audit Commission and CIPFA which I established with local government when the report was published last November. The Government will also establish, with local government, a task force with a remit to make rapid progress in developing and facilitating electronic data transfer between local authorities and Government Departments. The task force has been asked to report by the summer.

The action plan sets out a substantial programme of work, involving a number of Government Departments, to rationalise the data that the Government require of local authorities and the arrangements for its collection. This work reflects the Government's on-going commitment to removing unnecessary burdens on local authorities in their dealings with central Government and should deliver considerable benefits for both central and local government in terms of efficiency gains and better quality information.

I am arranging for copies of the Government response to be placed in the Library of the House. Copies are being sent to the local authority associations and to individual local authorities in England.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Jobcentre Vacancies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans her Department has to ensure that jobcentres accept individual vacancies for display from private employment agencies only when there is a genuine vacancy; [19756]

(2) if she will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding jobcentre vacancies. [19757]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 18 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your questions about Jobcentre display of vacancies from private employment agencies and the policy on Jobcentre vacancies.

In accordance with Employment Service (ES) policy on working with external labour market organisations, the ES has an agreement with the Federation of Recruitment and Employment Services (FRES), the national umbrella body for private employment agencies, under which unemployed jobseekers have access to agency vacancies which are advertised in Jobcentres. This increase the number of jobs available to them through the Jobcentre network. Agency vacancies are accepted for display in Jobcentres only where there is a genuine vacancy; that is where there are details of a specific job, and where a contract exists between the agency and the employer. The service is at the discretion of ES local Business Managers who have guidance which sets out clear criteria for accepting agency vacancies.

Your second question relates to our policy regarding Jobcentre vacancies more generally. Jobcentres provide vacancy advertising services to employers under the provisions of the Employment and Training Act 1973. In 1996 Jobcentres handled over 2.5 million vacancies and helped over 2 million people into jobs. These included both full time and part time jobs and covered a range of occupations and pay levels.

Jobcentres work to guidance which advises them to get full information from employers about each vacancy to enable jobseekers and the ES to determine the suitability of the vacancy for individual clients. The guidance also stipulates that Jobcentres must not accept vacancies from employers which are illegal; would result in a breach of the law; or might put jobseekers at risk.

Once a vacancy has been accepted from an employer it is normally put on the Jobcentre vacancy display boards. The information displayed includes the job title, description of main duties, experience/qualification requirements, hours of work, salary and any additional relevant information.

I hope this is helpful.

Jobseeker's Direction

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the instruction to Employment Service adjudication officers contained in the "Adjudication Offices Guidance", volume IV, paragraph 26664.4, is required to be taken into account when a jobseeker's direction is issued to a claimant. [20295]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 18 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question asking whether the instruction to Employment Service adjudication officers contained in paragraph 26664.4 of the Adjudication Officer's guidance, is required to be taken into account when a Jobseeker's Direction is issued to a claimant.

The Adjudication Officer's guidance states that it is not reasonable to expect claimants to take steps that could result in an offer of employment that they would have good cause for refusing if it was notified to them by an employment officer. I can confirm that this is required to be taken into account when a Jobseeker's Direction is issued to a jobseeker.

I hope this clarifies the position.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if *(a)* drug and *(b)* alcoholism related conditions qualify as good causes for reducing the prospects of employment due to circumstances beyond their control for claimants of jobseeker's allowance. [20329]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 18 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about whether drug and alcohol related conditions qualify as good causes for reducing the prospects of employment due to circumstances beyond their control for claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance.

Jobseekers are generally required to be available for work for at least 40 hours or more each week. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. People who suffer from a mental or physical condition that limits the work they are able to do can restrict their availability for work in any way providing their restrictions are reasonable in the light of their condition. They do not have to have reasonable prospects of securing employment.

If an employment adviser accepts that a jobseeker has either a physical or mental health problem and that the restrictions placed are reasonable in the light of that condition no further action is taken on the claim and there would be no referral to adjudication on that account.

Drink and drug problems can interfere with mental and physical health and any jobseekers with a known problem will have their circumstances taken into account when considering their availability for employment. Advisers encourage such jobseekers to seek specialist help and employment as getting and keeping a job may go part of the way to solving the problem. However, should the problem affect their ability to do any work they would be referred to the Disability Employment Adviser in the Jobcentre who in turn may suggest they see their doctor or seek specialist help.

I hope this is helpful.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many primary schools in England and Wales have opted into grant-maintained status; and what are the average league tables scores for *(a)* grant-maintained schools and *(b)* schools under local education authority control. [20675]

Mrs. Gillan: There are now 486 grant-maintained primary schools in England. Pupil attainments are generally higher in GM schools than LEA schools; details of their relative performance in national curriculum assessments and GCSE examinations are given in the following tables.

Grant-maintained schools in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Table 1: Percentage of 7-year-old pupils achieving National Curriculum level 2 and above, 1996

	English		Mathematics		Science	
Key stage 1	*TA*	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*
LEA schools	79	—	82	82	84	—
Reading	78	78	—	—	—	—
Writing	76	80	—	—	—	—
Speaking and listening	82	—	—	—	—	—
GM schools	85	—	86	87	88	—
Reading	84	84	—	—	—	—
Writing	82	85	—	—	—	—
Speaking and listening	85	—	—	—	—	—

TA = teacher assessment.
Test = national test.

Table 2: Percentage of 11-year-old pupils achieving National Curriculum level 4 and above, 1996

	English		Mathematics		Science	
Key stage 2	*TA*	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*
LEA schools	60	57	60	54	65	62
GM schools	64	63	64	60	69	68

TA = teacher assessment.
Test = national test.

Table 3: Percentage of 14-year-old pupils achieving National Curriculum level 5 and above, 1996

	English		Mathematics		Science	
Key stage 3	*TA*	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*
LEA schools	60	56	61	56	59	55
GM schools	68	65	69	65	68	65

TA= teacher assessment.
Test = national test.

Table 4: Percentage of 15-year-old pupils achieving graded GCSE results in 1996

GCSE passes	*5 A+–C*	*5 A+–G*	*1+ A–G*
4A: all schools			
LEA schools	40.6	87.1	93.4
GM schools	50.1	91.1	95.3
4B: comprehensive schools only			
LEA comprehensives	40.0	87.0	93.3
GM comprehensives	46.4	91.1	95.6

Football Pools Industry

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the change in the number of jobs in the football pools industry in *(a)* Liverpool and *(b)* Merseyside since the national lottery was established; and if she will make a statement. [20769]

Mr. Paice: The Government are aware that some jobs are being lost in the football pools industry on Merseyside. We naturally regret job losses in any sector of the economy. While jobs will inevitably disappear as markets change in a successful and vibrant economy they will be replaced by new jobs providing new products and services. On balance, over 900,000 extra jobs have been created in Britain over the last four years, and unemployment on Merseyside has fallen by nearly 30,000. A wide range of employment and training measures is available to help those who lose their jobs take advantage of the employment growth currently taking place in the UK.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19382]

Sir John Wheeler: Seven charters and 25 charter standard statements have been published by Government Departments and agencies in Northern Ireland. The table gives details of the cost of publication and circulation of the charters and charter statements and the number issued in each case. Individual public service organisations are responsible for producing and distributing their own charters for those who use their services. The table shows costs of production and distribution in so far as they are available centrally.

The drafting of charters and charter standard statements is generally carried out as an integral part of the work of the services concerned and therefore the cost of drafting is not available.

Northern Ireland charters and charter standard statements

Charter/charter standard statement	*Costs of publication and circulation (£)*	*Number of copies issued*
Charters		
Northern Ireland Citizen's Charter	34,200	3,500
Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland: "Our Service Standards"	22,776	34,000
Parents Charter	114,000	347,000
Further Education	29,500	31,000
Patients and Clients Charter	87,110	18,000
Social Security Agency	6,885	16,000
Child Support Agency	4,135	3,700
Charter statement		
Northern Ireland Citizen's Charter Unit	1,161	11,000
Rivers Agency	3,300	1,100
Training and Employment Agency	43,968	60,000
Redundancy Service	2,800	13,000
Trading Standards Branch	3,838	1,370
Industrial Research and Technology Unit	3,200	200
Government Purchasing Agency	1,933	9,500
Valuation and Lands Agency	1,485	4,000
Statistics and Research Agency	2,220	410
Community Services	36,132	100,000
Maternity Services	14,041	100,000
Driver and Vehicle Licensing (NI)	2,930	2,750
Public Record Office (NI)	875	630
Planning Service	8,000	1,500
Rate Collection Agency	4,443	4,700
Construction Service	1,130	1,400

Northern Ireland charters and charter standard statements

Charter/charter standard statement	*Costs of publication and circulation (£)*	*Number of copies issued*
Roads Service	7,543	7,800
Water Service	8,440	7,000
Land Registry of Northern Ireland	8,000	1,500
Environmental and Heritage Service	10,000	6,800
Belfast Action Teams	8,245	5,000
Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency	1,800	5,000
Northern Ireland Prison Service	4,810	8,500
Prison Visitors		8,500
Compensation Agency	2,000	1,400

Ceasefire

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what savings to public funds he estimates occurred as a result of the IRA ceasefire; and if he will indicate where these sums were spent, breaking the figures down by heading. [19363]

Sir John Wheeler: Following the provisional IRA and loyalist ceasefires, the 1994 Northern Ireland public expenditure survey identified some £180 million over the period 1995–96 to 1997–98 which could be prudently reallocated from the plans for the law and order budget. The 1995 survey identified a further £106 million which could be reallocated from the Police Authority for Northern Ireland grant over the period 1996–97 to 1998–99. In addition to the survey changes, it was possible to release a further £12 million and £13 million during 1994–95 and 1995–96 respectively, largely from the PANI grant.

Resources reallocated from law and order, together with other easements internal to the Northern Ireland block, are included in an undifferentiated pool of resources available for reallocation within the block. Moreover, the pool of resources is also affected by external changes driven by national fiscal policy—that is, the Northern Ireland totals were reduced in the 1994 survey and increased in the 1995 survey. Consequently, while it is not possible to identify allocations to individual programmes as coming specifically from law and order, it is a fact that the totals allocated to Northern Ireland programmes, other than those from which the law and order savings were withdrawn, were enhanced by the value of those savings.

As a result of the breakdown of the PIRA ceasefire in February 1996, and of major public order problems, some £36 million had to be reallocated back into the PANI grant and compensation for 1996–97 and a further £120 million added back in the 1996 survey, covering the plans for the period 1997–98 to 1998–00.

Harryville Chapel Protest

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many police officers have been injured while policing the protest at Harryville chapel. [19830]

Sir John Wheeler: Ten police officers have been injured while policing the protests at Harryville.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many police officers have been deployed at the Harryville chapel protest over the past 26 weekends. [19832]

Sir John Wheeler: The average number of police officers deployed at Harryville chapel at weekends since Saturday 14 September 1996 is 180.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people *(a)* from and *(b)* from outside the Ballymena area have been arrested or cautioned over incidents related to the protest at Harryville chapel. [19831]

Sir John Wheeler: Twenty persons from the Ballymena area have been arrested in relation to incidents at Harryville chapel. One arrest has been made from outside Ballymena sub-division.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost of the policing operation at Harryville chapel in Ballymena for the past 26 weekends. [19829]

Sir John Wheeler: The cost of the policing operation at Harryville chapel from Saturday 14 September 1996 to Saturday 1 March 1997 has been calculated at £984,000, including all police manpower and associated costs.

Rate Bills

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many establishments in each council area in Northern Ireland will have their rate bill increased by more than *(a)* 25 per cent., *(b)* 50 per cent., *(c)* 75 per cent. and *(d)* 100 per cent., and how many will have their bill reduced in the 1997–98 financial year as a result of the recent rates revaluation. [20317]

Sir John Wheeler: The table provides the information requested:

	Total properties	*Increases*				*Decreases*
		Above 25 per cent. below 50 per cent.	*Above 50 per cent. below 75 per cent.*	*Above 75 per cent. below 100 per cent.*	*Above 100 per cent.*	
Antrim	1,458	187	116	70	123	606
Ards	2,514	410	341	125	219	952
Armagh	2,291	390	203	92	99	840
Ballymena	2,321	248	71	38	81	1,224
Ballymoney	1,053	88	30	12	27	609
Banbridge	1,623	175	93	58	129	831
Belfast	15,639	2,130	1,512	945	2,347	5,141
Carrick	1,050	78	37	23	58	721
Castlereagh	1,157	198	165	69	113	407
Coleraine	2,483	288	131	61	86	1,411
Cookstown	1,518	309	213	89	101	519
Craigavon	3,062	590	387	142	113	1,069
Down	2,349	382	209	105	173	994

	Total properties	Increases				Decreases
		Above 25 per cent. below 50 per cent.	Above 50 per cent. below 75 per cent.	Above 75 per cent. below 100 per cent.	Above 100 per cent.	
Dungannon	2,325	377	291	159	202	807
Fermanagh	2,745	497	383	174	196	959
Larne	1,207	99	41	23	53	803
Limavady	982	168	106	29	47	442
Lisburn	3,020	290	160	97	279	1,562
Derry	3,293	396	193	64	177	1,786
Magherafelt	1,646	302	184	74	110	670
Moyle	782	57	16	13	34	518
Newry and Mourne	3,433	485	219	98	177	1,641
Newtownabbey	2,207	272	101	38	155	1,127
North Down	2,251	460	180	139	260	396
Omagh	2,017	387	290	143	130	682
Strabane	1,419	250	195	64	105	534
Totals	65,845	9,513	5,867	2,944	5,594	27,251

The figures for increases above 25 per cent., 50 per cent., 75 per cent. and 100 per cent., 23,918 properties in total, include those who will benefit from the transitional relief scheme announced in February. Approximately 19,000, 79 per cent. of the 23,918, will qualify for relief having NAV £10,000 or less.

Department of Education

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the budgeted capital expenditure at DENI headquarters, Bangor, for the last financial year; what is the figure for the present financial year; and what estimate he has made for the next financial year. [20353]

Mr. Moss: The budgeted capital expenditure for the three years is as follows:

1995–96: £0.075 million

1996–97: £2 million

1997–98: £2.4 million

Earth Summit

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what preparations his Department is making for the UN General Assembly special session to review progress since the Rio earth summit of 1992, and for the preparatory committees leading up to the summit; and what consultations he has undertaken. [19139]

Mr. Moss: The Secretary of State for the Environment is taking the lead within Government on the preparations for the UN General Assembly special session in June to review progress since the Rio earth summit of 1992.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given on Wednesday 5 March 1997 to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), *Official Report*, column *634*.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the past 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19771]

Sir John Wheeler: All the Bills sponsored by the Northern Ireland Office in the last 15 years have been passed by Parliament. The details are as follows:

1982

The Northern Ireland Act

1985

The Elections (Northern Ireland) Act

The Northern Ireland (Loans) Act

1987

The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act

1989

The Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Act

The Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act

1991

The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act

'Social Security Contributions Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act

'Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act

'Social Security (Consequential provisions) (Northern Ireland) Act

1995

Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act

1996

The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act

The Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act

' Statute Law Revision or Consolidation Act

Ulster Hospital (Union Flag)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if a Union Flag has been provided to the Ulster hospital, Dundonald; if the Ulster hospital has been provided with the dates for flying the Union flag; if the Union flag was flown at this hospital on Commonwealth day; if the person responsible for flying the Union flag at the Ulster hospital is prepared to carry out this duty; and if he will make a statement. [20506]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The Ulster, North Down and Ards hospital health and social services trust has confirmed that it owns a Union flag and that it was flying on 6 February 1997, Commonwealth Day. However, the trust has advised that the flag was wrapped round the flag pole and had to be unwrapped by a member of staff once the wind died down. The schedule of the dates for flying the Union flag has been advised to staff and the person responsible for carrying out this duty has no difficulty in fulfilling same. However, there is no requirement for the trusts to fly the Union flag on these dates, and it is at the discretion of each organisation whether the flag should be flown on those buildings occupied by its staff.

WALES

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19387]

Mr. Hague: The available information is shown in the following table. Expenditure on drafting cannot be identified separately.

A *Charter*	*B* *Cost of publishing (£)*	*C* *Cost of distribution (£)*	*D* *Number of copies issued*
Parents charter for Wales			
1st Edition 1991	150,076	Included in B	60,000
2nd Edition 1993	73,943	Included in B	250,000
3rd Edition 1994	138,595	100,402	1,252,000
Patients charter for Wales			
1st Edition 1991	250,000	100,000	Over 1 million
2nd Edition 1994	43,793	Included in B	150,000
3rd Edition 1996	33,993	7,978	160,000
Further Education charter for Wales			
1993	41,354	1,175	40,000
Higher education charter for Wales			
1993	40,362	1,175	35,000
Tenants charter for Wales			
1992	175,987	Included in B	250,000
Heritage charter Statement			
1994	14,000	No added costs incurred	100,000
A Charter standard for farmers in Wales			
1995	15,391	Included in B	7,400

Public Bodies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people he has appointed to non-departmental public bodies in Wales. [20284]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 29 November 1996, Official Report, column *439*.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount of money paid to members of non-departmental public bodies in Wales for their service as members of organisations in the last year for which figures are available. [20282]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest year for which figures are available is 1995–96. The information requested is contained in "Public Bodies" 1996, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Upland Species and Habitats

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of state for Wales what targets the Government have endorsed in the UK biodiversity steering group report for the conservation of certain upland species and habitats. [20171]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the "Government's Response to the UK Steering Group Report on Biodiversity", published in May 1996 (Cm 3260).

Overgrazing

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, column *91*, on overgrazing, how many cases of overgrazing ADAS is currently investigating in Wales; when the investigations are expected to be completed; and if the results will be made public. [20210]

Mr. Hague: At my Department's request, ADAS is carrying out work in relation to the overgrazing and supplementary feeding conditions which attach to the payment of livestock production subsidies at 12 locations in Wales.

I have no plans to publish any reports which ADAS produce. Some reports will be made available to graziers and landowners affected as the basis for discussion where my Department believes it has demonstrated that livestock are grazing land in such numbers as to adversely affect the growth, quality or species composition of vegetation—other than vegetation normally grazed to destruction—on that land to a significant degree.

ADAS work currently under way will result in reports to my department during 1997.

Lamb and Beef Exports

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the value of *(a)* lamb and *(b)* beef exported from Wales in (i) 1985 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available. [20285]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Exports from Wales are not separately recorded.

NHS Trusts (Expenses and Rewards)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount of cash paid to members of NHS trusts as *(a)* expenses and *(b)* rewards for service in the last year for which figures are available. [20283]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: NHS trusts board members' costs for 1995–96 are as follows:

	£000
Non-executive directors' remuneration	1,067
Executive directors' remuneration:	
basic salaries	6,703
benefits	362
performance related bonuses	204
pension contributions	278
Compensation for loss of office	66
Other board members' costs[1]	329
	9,009

Note:

[1] Includes: recharges to any other health body; employers, NI contributions; reimbursement of "out-of-pocket" expenses; and reimbursement of travelling and other allowances, including home to work travel costs.

Source:

NHS trust's annual accounts.

Schools Budgets

Mr. Sweeny: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is *(a)* the average sum per pupil and *(b)* the average percentage of the general schools budget allotted by each local education authority int he current financial year for discretionary exceptions outside the potential schools budget and which is (i) delegated and (ii) not delegated to schools; [20564]

(2) what is *(a)* the average sum per pupil and *(b)* the average percentage of the general schools budget, allotted by each local education authority in the current financial year for (i) mandatory exception from delegation, (ii) discretionary exceptions outside the potential from delegation, (ii) discretionary exceptions outside the potential schools budget, (iii) discretionary exceptions within the potential schools budget and (iv) the aggregate schools budget. [20563]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is as follows:

	Mandatory exceptions		*Discretionary exceptions outside the PSB*		*Discretionary exceptions within the PSB*		*Aggregated schools budget*	
Local authority	*Average sum per pupil (£)*	*Percentage of the GSB*	*Average sum per pupil (£)*	*Percentage of the GSB*	*Average sum per pupil (£)*	*Percentage of the GSB*	*Average sum per pupil (£)*	*Percentage of the GSB*
Blaenau Gwent	144	6.1	235	9.95	178	7.5	1,806	76.4
Bridgend	148	6.2	241	10.1	189	7.9	1,804	75.7
Caerphilly	99	4.3	243	10.5	196	8.5	1,770	76.7
Cardiff	386	16.0	149	6.2	187	7.8	1,692	70.0
Carmarthenshire	350	12.7	266	9.7	194	7.1	1,935	70.5
Ceredigion	264	9.3	313	11.0	226	7.9	2,041	71.8
Conwy	408	15.4	254	9.6	191	7.2	1,794	67.8
Denbighshire	262	10.95	183	7.7	189	7.9	1,754	73.45
Flintshire	360	14.6	213	8.6	188	7.6	1,712	69.2
Gwynedd	181	6.8	284	10.7	219	8.2	1,977	74.3
Isle of Anglesey	166	6.5	263	10.35	208	8.2	1,904	74.9
Merthyr Tydfil	209	8.45	221	8.95	203	8.2	1,837	74.4
Monmouthshire	168	6.7	274	11.0	201	8.1	1,847	74.2
Neath Port Talbot	272	10.4	191	7.3	171	6.6	1,969	75.6
Newport	272	11.4	211	8.9	174	7.3	1,718	72.3
Pembrokeshire	256	9.5	268	9.9	216	8.0	1,958	72.6
Powys	338	11.8	372	13.0	186	6.5	1,968	68.7
Rhondda Cynon Taff	239	9.4	281	11.1	176	6.9	1,841	72.55
Swansea	123	5.4	150	6.6	161	7.1	1,847	81.0
Tarfaen	111	5.0	195	8.7	180	8.0	1,743	78.2
Vale of Glamorgan	287	12.4	199	8.6	128	5.55	1,699	73.4
Wrexham	125	5.7	201	9.1	176	8.0	1,704	77.2

Source:

Section 122 (formerly section 42) LEA budget statements for 1996–97 (where available audited figures have been used) and the 1996 school census pupil numbers.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the past 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19777]

Mr. Hague: Eight Bills have been sponsored by my Department in the last 15 years; Seven have so far been passed by Parliament, as follows: one in 1983, one in 1988, one in 1990, one in 1991, two in 1993, one in 1994.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much rate support grant the Welsh Office *(a)* provided to the Vale of Glamorgan in 1996–97 and *(b)* plans to provide in 1997–98. [20527]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The rate support grant system was replaced in 1990–91 by one that provides central Government support to local authority revenue expenditure by way of revenue support grant and

redistributed non-domestic rates. The allocations in respect of the Vale of Glamorgan for the years requested are given in the following table:

Central Government support for the Vale of Glamorgan county borough council

£ thousand

	Revenue support grant	*Share of redistributed non-domestic rates*	*Total support*
1996–97	62,358	16,300	78,658
1997–98	59,798	20,543	80,341

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is *(a)* the average sum per pupil and *(b)* the average percentage of the general schools budget allotted by each local education authority in the current financial year for (i) money allocated to schools via age-weighted pupil units, (ii) premature retirement compensation, (iii) school transport, (iv) statementing and support for statemented pupils and (v) school meals, net of income. [20513]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Local education authorities must allocate at least 80 per cent. of the aggregated schools budget on the basis of pupil numbers. To break down the ASB on the basis of age-weighted pupil units could be done only at disproportionate cost. Details of the other elements, of all of which are retained centrally by the local authority are as follows:

Local authority	*Premature retirement costs*		*School transport*		*Statement etc.*		*School meals net of income*	
	Average sum per pupil	*Percentage of the GSB*	*Average sum per pupil*	*Percentage of the GSB*	*Average sum per pupil*	*Percentage of the GSB*	*Average sum per pupil*	*Percentage of the GSB*
Blaenau Gwent	40	1.7	42	1.8	27	1.1	91	3.8
Bridgend	13	0.5	71	3	37	1.5	96	4
Caerphilly	21	0.9	79	3.4	61	2.7	75	3.3
Cardiff	18	0.7	27	1.1	80	3.3	64	2.6
Carmarthenshire	14	0.5	97	3.5	106	3.8	99	3.6
Ceredigion	15	0.5	155	5.5	96	3.4	91	3.2
Conwy	28	1	108	4.1	41	1.5	53	2
Denbighshire	39	1.6	85	3.6	17	0.7	38	1.6
Flintshire	36	1.5	98	4	39	1.6	44	1.8
Gwynedd	29	1.1	103	3.9	85	3.2	86	3.2
Isle of Anglesey	22	0.9	99	3.9	75	2.9	65	2.5
Merthyr Tydfil	11	0.4	59	2.4	35	1.4	105	4.3
Monmouthshire	32	1.3	132	5.3	32	1.3	69	2.8
Neath Port Talbot	27	1	80	3.1	17	0.7	32	1.2
Newport	33	1.4	51	2.2	23	1	78	3.3
Pembrokeshire	13	0.5	126	4.7	69	2.6	96	3.6
Powys	17	0.6	182	6.4	77	2.7	62	2.2
Rhondda Cynon Taff	13	0.5	97	3.8	20	0.8	115	4.5
Swansea	25	1.1	48	2.1	24	1	39	1.7
Torfaen	32	1.4	49	2.2	17	0.8	76	3.4
Vale of Glamorgan	16	0.7	65	2.8	73	3.2	54	2.3
Wrexham	38	1.7	110	5	18	0.8	41	1.8

Source:
Section 122 (formerly section 42) LEA budget statements for 1996–97 (where available audited figures have been used) and the 1996 school census pupil numbers.

A487 (Bypass)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the earliest possible commencement date for the construction of the bypass for Llanllyfni, Penygroes and Groeslon on the A487 in Gwynedd. [20744]

Mr. Hague: All major schemes—those costing over £3 million—in the forward trunk road programme have been reviewed in the light of the spending priorities I announced in the House of Commons on 12 December 1996, columns 405–19, on public expenditure in Wales in 1997–98. The competing priorities of individual schemes have been reassessed given the limited resources available. Details of the revised forward trunk road programme will be published on 20 March in the Welsh Office's departmental report. Copies of the report will be placed in the Library of the House.

Therapy Services

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what *(a)* treatment units, *(b)* professional staff and *(c)* financial resources are being made available to provide physiotherapy treatment, occupational therapy and physical rehabilitation for patients in south-east Wales from March 1997 to 1 January 2000. [20548]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Detailed informed on services is not held centrally. It is primarily the responsibility of Bro Taf and Gwent health authorities to purchase services and for the relevant trusts to provide appropriate numbers of staff and the facilities to deliver them.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of patients awaiting *(a)* physiotherapy treatment, *(b)* occupational therapy and *(c)* physical rehabilitation in the borough counties of Rhondda Cynon Taff, Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, Ogwr, Aberavon Neath, Merthr Tydfil, Powys, Swansea, Caerphilly, Newport, Torfaen and Monmouth; and what was the total number of patients awaiting such treatment in 1995 and 1996. [20549]

Mr. Jones: The information requested is not available centrally.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the planned *(a)* capacity and *(b)* resources for providing physiotherapy treatment, occupational therapy and physical rehabilitation for patients at the new district general hospital at Llantrisant. [20551]

Mr. Jones: Detailed planning of facilities is a matter for the East Glamorgan NHS trust.

Talygarn Treatment Centre

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which organisation owns the Talygarn treatment centre at Pontyclun in south Wales. [20550]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Talygarn rehabilitation centre is owned by the Secretary of State for Wales.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients were referred to, and treated at, the Talygarn treatment centre in 1995 and 1996; how many are currently being treated; and how many are proposed to be treated in 1997, 1998 and 1999. [20552]

Mr. Jones: In the financial year 1995–96, 417 new patients were reported as attending the Taylgarn treatment centre. Information on the number of referrals is not centrally available. Proposed levels of activity are a matter for the East Glamorgan NHS trust in contract negotiations with Bro Taf health authority and GP fundholders.

TREASURY

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *35*, if he will list the main differences between the main Peat Marwick consultancy cost-benefit analysis study on the Cardiff bay barrage presented to his Department in November 1987 and the second version presented in mid 1988. [16994]

Mr. Waldegrave: The economic evaluation report on a Cardiff bay barrage received in June 1988 was a revision of the one presented in November 1987. A valid detailed comparison cannot be made except at disproportionate cost. However, the revised study took account of the completion, by the board of the Cardiff Bay development corporation, of a regeneration strategy for the bay and the choice of a single barrage option. These led to significant changes in the assumptions made in the first study, including increases in infrastructure costs and land disposal values. The net present value of the barrage option remained positive. The estimated betterment figure of £227 million remained as in the original 1987 study.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, as part of the programme for a common system of VAT, he will agree to changing the status of the EC VAT Committee from an advisory committee to a regulatory committee with powers of implementation. [20075]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Government support limited reform of the VAT Committee with a view to improving its operation, but would oppose a change in its status to that of a regulatory Committee. The Government believe that unanimity in the Council should remain the basis for EC decisions on VAT matters.

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the steps taken in ECOFIN *(a)* to change the status of the EU VAT and Tax Committee following the Verona summit decision and *(b)* to create the provisional timetable for the European Commission's proposal for a common VAT system for member states. [20157]

Mr. Oppenheim: ECOFIN has taken no steps to change the status of the VAT Committee which was established by the sixth VAT directive in 1977. The informal Verona ECOFIN of April 1996 did, however, establish a new high-level working group on tax.

The European Commission's suggested programme for a "common system" for VAT to apply throughout the Community was presented to ECOFIN in October 1996, on a "take note" basis with no debate or discussion. There has been no other discussion or debate at ECOFIN about the suggested programme or its timetable.

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the VAT and Tax Committee established by ECOFIN has completed the draft code of conduct on VAT harmonisation. [20158]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Verona informal ECOFIN of April 1996 established the high-level group on tax—the Monti group—to examine member states' tax systems and to consider issues of fiscal erosion. Monti recommended in a personal report to the Dublin European Council that the high-level group be continued in the form of a taxation policy group. This report was submitted to Parliament with an explanatory memorandum. The Dublin Council agreed to the continuation of the group and the taxation policy group met for the first time on 11 March 1997. The question of a code of conduct on unfair tax competition was raised but there are no proposals on the table. There is no code of conduct on VAT harmonisation.

Inland Revenue (Standard Letters)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost of issuing a standard letter by the Inland Revenue requesting payment of a tax underpayment. [20314]

Mr. Jack: The individual cost of issuing a standard letter is not calculated, but it will vary according to the type of letter and method of issue.

Century Date Change (Computers)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce measures to ease the financial burden of millennium compliance of computer systems for companies. [20162]

Mr. Jack: As far as taxation is concerned, the position is that companies will normally be able to deduct the cost of making amendments to their existing software in computing their taxable profits. Capital expenditure on purchases of new software to deal with the millennium will normally qualify for capital allowances. Thus, I see no need for any special tax measures.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current average wage for *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [20213]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Dennis Roberts to Mr. John Battle, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question about current average wages for men and women. In his absence, the Director has asked me to reply.

The latest information, from the April 1996 New Earnings Survey, is shown below. I will also arrange for a copy of this letter to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey pay period was not affected by absence

	At April 1996
	£
All males	391.30
All females	283.00

Tax Underpayment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the minimum sum of tax underpayment for which the revenue will issue a letter requesting payment. [20315]

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue will generally issue a letter for payment where the circumstances of the case make it cost-effective to do so.

Abortions

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many abortions have been performed on girls under the age of 16 years (i) at Kettering general hospital and (ii) nationally in each year since 1987; and in each case what that figure was as a percentage of abortions performed *(a)* at the hospital and *(b)* nationally. [20207]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. William Powell, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question on how many abortions have been performed on girls under the age of 16 years (i) at Kettering General Hospital and (ii) nationally in each year since 1987; and in each case what was that figure as a percentage of abortions performed (a) at the hospital and (b) nationally. In his absence, the Director has asked me to reply.

For confidentiality reasons, abortion data are not released for individual hospitals. Figures for legal abortions performed on resident and non-resident girls aged under 16 in England and Wales for the years 1987–1995 are presented below:

Year	*Number of abortions on girls under 16*	*As a percentage of total abortions on women of all ages*
1987	4,075	2.3
1988	3,804	2.1
1989	3,576	1.9
1990	3,622	1.9
1991	3,317	1.8
1992	3,167	1.8
1993	3,269	1.9
1994	3,399	2.0
1995	3,401	2.1

Source:
Abortion statistics 1987–1995, England and Wales, series AB numbers 14–21, 96/5.

Live Births

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the number of live births in each of the last three years. [20860]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your recent question asking for the number of live births that occurred in England and Wales in each of the last three years for which data are available.

The figures requested are shown in the table below.

Live births in England and Wales

Year	*Live birth*
1995	648,138
1994	664,726
1993	673,467

These figures are published in the annual reference volume "Birth Statistics" Series FM1, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

EU Countries (Income)

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the countries of the European Union in rank order of income per head, using the latest available figures. [19277]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Edwina Currie, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on income per head in the EU.

The latest figures for GDP per head relate to 1996 and are based on projections made by the OECD using the relative rates of inflation between OECD countries and the USA as measured by their implicit price deflators for GDP. These projections are published in the February 1997 edition of the OECD publication *Main Economic Indicators* a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library. Too much emphasis should not be placed on the rankings when as in the case of income per head, countries are bunched closely together.

Michael Allcock Case

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many public interest immunity certificates were issued in the case of Inland Revenue *v.* Michael Allcock. [18855]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* No certificates or affidavits claiming public interest immunity were issued in this case, which was a criminal prosecution conducted by the Crown Prosecution Service and not by the Inland Revenue.

Inward Investment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the levels of overseas investment in (1) the United Kingdom, (2) France and (3) Germany from (i) other EU members and (ii) countries outside the EU for the years 1979 to 1996, *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* as a percentage change on the previous year and *(c)* as a real figure calculated on 1996 values; [20098]

(2) what were the levels of direct foreign investment in the United Kingdom from (i) the United States and (ii) Canada in each year from 1979 to 1996. [20099]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* Figures for the levels of foreign direct investment of each OECD country, by region and by country of origin, can be found in the OECD International Direct Investment Yearbook which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to meet representatives of the construction industry to discuss the implementation of landfill tax exemptions for waste from contaminated sites; and if he will make a statement. [20320]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* I have no such plans. Officials of HM Customs and Excise will meet representatives of the Building Employers Confederation on 20 March, and will give a full report of their meeting to Treasury Ministers.

Nomura Securities

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the possible impact of the current circumstances of Nomura Securities on United Kingdom companies in which it has an interest; and if he will make a statement. [20438]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* It is for the companies concerned to consider the situation and take such steps as they consider appropriate in their own commercial interests.

Investment Income (Tax)

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the average amount of income tax paid on investment income by *(a)* pensioner and *(b)* non-pensioner households with annual investment income of (i) less than £50, (ii) £50 to £99, (iii) £100 to £499 and (iv) over £500 for the most recent year for which information is available. [20555]

Mr. Jack: Reliable information on the investment income of households is not available. Information on individual taxpayers' investment income was given in my answer to the hon. Member on 18 February 1997—*Official Report*, columns *441–42*.

Abortion and Maternal Deaths

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many surgical terminations of pregnancy there were in each of the last 15 months for which figures are available; and how many maternal deaths there were in each month. [20150]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. Simon Hughes, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question on how many surgical terminations of pregnancy were performed in each of the last 15 months for which figures are available, and how many maternal deaths there were in each month. In his absence, the Director has asked me to reply.

The monthly number of surgical terminations of pregnancy performed on women residents and non-residents of England and Wales in the last 15 months for which data are available, namely April 1995–June 1996, are as follows:

	Number of surgical terminations
1995	
April	12,150
May	13,479
June	14,358
July	13,880
August	13,971
September	13,484
October	13,503
November	13,448
December	12,368
1996	
January	14,558
February	15,360
March	15,494
April	14,549
May	15,793
June	14,809

There were no maternal deaths recorded over the 15 month period.

Dependent Children

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the percentage of families with dependent children which are *(a)* married couples and *(b)* cohabiting couples in the category of families with dependent children designated as married/cohabiting couple family type for 1995 in table A4 of "Living In Britain". [20374]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Julian Calder to Mr. Edward Leigh, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question about the percentage of families with dependent children which are either married couples or cohabiting couples. In his absence, the Director has asked me to reply.

The following table, taken from the 1995 General Household Survey, provides this information.

Family type and marital status of lone mothers: families with dependent children, Great Britain 1995

	Number	*Per cent.*
Married couple	2,153	71
Cohabiting couple	207	7
Lone mother	610	20
single	237	8
widowed	30	1
divorced	207	7
separated	136	5
Lone father	52	2
All lone families	662	22
Base	3,022	

Heads of Households

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the percentage of households headed by a person who is *(a)* married, *(b)* co-habiting, *(c)* single, *(d)* widowed, *(e)* divorced, *(f)* separated and *(g)* co-habiting with someone of the same sex. [20375]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Julian Calder to Mr. Edward Leigh, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question on the marital status of the heads of households. In his absence, the Director has asked me to reply.

The following table, derived from the 1995 General Household Survey, gives the information requested.

Marital status of head of household	*Frequency (per cent.)*
Married	54
Cohabiting	6
Single	14
Widowed	14
Divorced	8
Separated	3
Same-sex cohabiting	[1]

[1] Estimated at 0.1 per cent.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the advisory cost limit for replies to parliamentary questions; when it was last increased; and if he will make a statement. [19354]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The advisory cost limit for replies to parliamentary questions is £450. It was last increased in 1993—*Official Report*, 18 February 1993, column *307*.

Labour Statistics

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average length of time that currently unemployed men aged *(a)* 50 to 54, *(b)* 55 to 59 and *(c)* 60 to 64 years have remained unemployed. [19249]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Harriet Harman, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the average length of time that currently unemployed men, by varying age groups, have remained unemployed.

The information you requested is given in the table below of median durations of spells of unemployment which were uncompleted in January 1997. Figures are not available for the 60–64 age band, and those for 60 and over are shown instead.

Median durations of male claimant unemployment in the UK in January 1997

Age	*Median duration of unemployment (weeks)*
50–54	46.6
55–59	56.4
60 and over	20.3

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* men and women aged (i) 16 and 17 years, (ii) 18 and 19 years, (iii) 20 to 24 years and (iv) over 24 years have never had a paid job since leaving school. [19586]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many people, broken down by age and sex, have not had a paid job since leaving school.

Estimates from the Labour Force Survey are shown in the attached table.

To help put the information into context I have provided an additional table which shows the total broken down by educational and economic status. For example, you can see that of the total of 1,675,000 nearly 80 per cent (1,329,000) were economically

inactive, that is they had not looked for work in the past four weeks or were not available to start work in the next two weeks or were not waiting to start a job they had already obtained.

These breakdowns are probably very seasonal especially for the younger age groups.

People who have not had a paid job since leaving school by age and sex

Great Britain, summer 1996 — *thousands*

Not seasonally adjusted	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*
Total	1,675	624	1,051
16–17	308	170	138
18–19	267	130	137
20–24	431	205	227
25+	669	120	549

Source:
ONS, Labour Force Survey.

People who have not had a job since leaving school by educational and economic status

Great Britain, summer 1996 — *thousands*

Not seasonally adjusted	*All*	*(of which:) Full-time student (not at school)*	*Not full-time student*
All (of which:)	1,675	438	1,237
ILO unemployed	346	68	279
Economically inactive	1,329	371	958

Source:
ONS, Labour Force Survey.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the general Government's expenditure per head in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available. [19552]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* In 1994–95, identifiable expenditure per head was £4,505 in Scotland and £3,760 on average for the United Kingdom, as given in table 7.6B of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1996–97 (Cm 3201).

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *389*, if he will list those categories of data collected by the Office of National Statistics which are based on postcode areas. [19629]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent Question on categories of data collected by the ONS which are based on postcode areas.

All data collected by ONS use post code reference systems where representative geographical samples are necessary and for the purposes of any geographical analysis. However local area data can only be provided to the extent that they are of sufficient quality and do not breach confidentiality obligations.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the future annual totals of MRSA deaths in England if present trends continue. [20028]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question asking what is his current estimate of the future totals of MRSA deaths in England if present trends continue. In his absence, the Director has asked me to reply.

Staphylococcus aureus is one of the more common causes of severe invasive bacterial disease in England and Wales. Each year the Public Health Laboratory Services' Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre receives at least 7,000 reports of blood stream infections caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*. Methicillin resistant strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* account for a minority of these reports (less than 25% in 1996).

There is no specific code for methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) within the international classification used for recording deaths in this country. Deaths resulting from such infections will be counted within the total number of deaths from all forms of *Staphylococcus aureus* infection. Statistical data on deaths from MRSA are not, therefore, available.

Mention of antibiotic resistance might be made on death certificates of patients whose death is due to *Staphylococcus aureus* infection, and such information could be ascertained by searching the text from death certificates. However, such data are likely to be liable to bias, as the probability that methicillin resistance is mentioned on a death certificate is likely to change with the perception of the public health importance of the condition. Registration data on deaths from *Staphylococcus aureus* infection are not suitable, therefore, for making reliable estimates of future trends in mortality from this condition.

Unemployment-related Benefits

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* men and women have made (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three or more claims for unemployment-related benefits in (1) Great Britain, (2) each standard region of England, (3) Wales and (4) Scotland for each major group of the standard occupational classification since January 1995. [19584]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 18 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many people have experienced at least one, two and three or more spells of claimant unemployment since January 1995, broken down by sex, region, and by major occupational group.

I have attached tables of the information requested, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Please note that for claimants who have had more than one spell of claimant unemployment since 1 January 1995, the information from their most recent claim has been used to determine the claimant's region and usual occupation.

SCOTLAND

Land Purchases (Grants)

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each grant which has been made to a voluntary body for the purchase of land by Scottish Natural Heritage since its inception to the latest available date, naming the area of land and the cost involved. [20015]

Mr. Kynoch: The information requested is set out in the table:

Applicant	*Sites*	*Hectares*	*Grant (£)*
Central Scotland Countryside Trust	Eastfield, West Lothian	18.3	14,615
Central Scotland Countryside Trust	Back of Moss, West Lothian	33.5	85,000
Central Scotland Countryside Trust	Easter Breich, West Lothian	33.00	75,000
Central Scotland Countryside Trust	Roughcastle, Falkirk District	32.00	12,000
Central Scotland Countryside Trust	Swinabbey, West Lothian	12.00	15,000
Central Scotland Countryside Trust	Wester Moffat, Monklands	6.00	3,900
Central Scotland Countryside Trust	Chapelhall, Monklands	5.1	5,400
Central Scotland Countryside Trust	Longriggend Farm	67.6	70,000
Central Scotland Countryside Trust	Easter Dunsyston	42.7	52,000
Crinan Harbour Association	Land purchase at Crinan Harbour	unknown	536
James Rice Memorial Trust	Shillay, Sound of Harris	54.90	8,000
John Muir Trust	Oldshoremore & Sandwood Estates	4,400.00	28,000
John Muir Trust	Torrin Estate	2,024.29	40,000
Kilmuir Village Woodland Association	Kilmuir Wood	12.00	500
Lochielside Crofters Woodland Trust Ltd.	Camasnagaul & Achaphubuil	30.77	7,957
National Trust for Scotland	Blackpotts Farm—St. Abbs Head	50.00	41,000
National Trust for Scotland	Kiltyrie Farm—Ben Lawers	82.00	50,000
National Trust for Scotland	Morenish Estate—Ben Lawers	1,303.00	20,000
National Trust for Scotland	Glencoe, visitors centre/campsite	17.81	178,750
National Trust for Scotland	An Torr Wood, Glencoe	18.00	24,607
National Trust for Scotland	Corrieshalloch	12.00	13,000
North Assynt Crofters Trust	North Assynt Estate	21,000.00	20,000
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Purchase of Mersehead Farm	257.00	86,800
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Insh Marshes	—	63,000
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Mosstown Farm, Loch of Strathbeg	—	20,000
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Fannyside Mill Farm—Lanark	154.00	15,000
Scottish Wildlife Trust	Rossie Braes and Salty Dyke—Montrose Basin	4.4	4,452
Scottish Wildlife Trust	Halls Farm, Woodhall Dean—East Lothian	24.00	5,000
Scottish Wildlife Trust	Purchase of Dullatar Marsh	41.7	5,539.75
Scottish Wildlife Trust	Purchase of Carsegowan Moss	49.9	5,833.50
Scottish Wildlife Trust	Purchase of South Shian Wood	21.7	8,235
Scottish Wildlife Trust	Purchase of Blackcraig Wood	17.00	6,900
Scottish Wildlife Trust	Gight Wood	—	2,800
Scottish Wildlife Trust	Eastbister Farm, Hill of White Hamars Reserve	—	7,800
Wigtown Bay Wildfowlers Club	Purchase of Maidland Merse	89.5	35,000
Woodland Trust	Backmuir Wood—Dundee	42.00	29,333
Woodland Trust	Ledmore and Migdale Woods	710.00	128,000
Woodland Trust	Portmoak Moss—Perth and Kinross	42.00	37,975
Woodland Trust	Abriachan Woods	133.60	7,471
Woodland Trust	Urquhart Bay Woods	0.80	2,500
Woodland Trust	Purchase of Aldouran Glen	12.00	8,750

Local Government Reforms

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sums his Department has spent on promoting local government reforms in each of the last three years. [20185]

Mr. Kynoch: The amount which the Scottish Office has spent on public information about local government reform in the most recent three financial years is set out in the table:

Financial year beginning:	*Amount (£)*
1 April 1994	139,507
1 April 1995	997
1 April 1996	13,790

External Consultants

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent on external consultants in each year since 1979. [20485]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Expenditure over the past five years by the Scottish Office and its associated agencies on external consultants was:

1991–92: £10,836,000

1992–93: £4,370,000

1993–94: £5,383,000

1994–95: £4,079,000

1995–96: £5,440,000

No comparable data are available for the periods prior to 1991.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the past 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19768]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The following Scottish Bills were sponsored by my Department during the past 15 years:

1996–97

Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill

Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Bill

Contract (Scotland) Bill

Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill

Scottish Legal Services Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration (Scotland) Bill

1995–96

Education (Scotland) Bill

Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

Deer (Scotland) Bill*

1994–95

Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill

Children (Scotland) Bill

1993–94

Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill

1992–93

Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Bill

Bankruptcy (Scotland) Bill

Crofters (Scotland) Bill*

Scottish Land Court Bill*

1991–92

Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill

1990–91

Natural Heritage (Scotland) Bill

Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Bill*

1989–90

Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Bill

Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill

1988–89

Transport (Scotland) Bill

Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill

Prisons (Scotland) Bill*

1987–88

Housing (Scotland) Bill

School Boards (Scotland) Bill

Civil Evidence (Scotland) Bill

Electricity (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Bill

Scottish Development Agency Bill

1986–87

Debtors (Scotland) Bill

Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill

Abolition of Domestic Rates etc. (Scotland) Bill

Animals (Scotland) Bill

Housing (Scotland) Bill*

1985–86

Housing (Scotland) Bill

Salmon Bill

Legal Aid (Scotland) Bill

1984–86

National Heritage (Scotland) Bill

Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill

Rating (Revaluation Rebates) (Scotland) Bill

Family Law (Scotland) Bill

1983–84

Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Scotland) Bill

Tenants Rights etc. (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Bill

Rating and Valuation (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

Roads (Scotland) Bill

Foster Children (Scotland) Bill*

Mental Health (Scotland) Bill*

Rent (Scotland) Bill*

1982–83

Electricity (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Bill

Land Valuations Amendment (Scotland) Bill

Divorce Jurisdiction, Court Fees and Legal Aid (Scotland) Bill

Mental Health (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

Agricultural Holdings (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

The 1996–97 Bills have yet to receive Royal Assent. All the other Bills were enacted. The list includes consolidation Bills, which are marked with an asterisk, but excludes private members' Bills. In addition, we have co-sponsored a large number of Great Britain-United Kingdom Bills during this period.

Health Service Property (Ayrshire and Arran)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the properties formerly used for health service purposes in Ayrshire and Arran, which are currently unoccupied and in the ownership of *(a)* Ayrshire and Arran health board, *(b)* the Ayrshire NHS trusts and *(c)* the Secretary of State; what is the total annual cost involved; what action is being taken to dispose of these proprieties; and if he will make a statement. [20726]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Any such property formally in the ownership of the Secretary of State if accounted for, and managed by, individual health boards and NHS trusts. The information requested is not held centrally.

Inward Investment

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many inward investment projects have been attracted to Scotland in the 11 months to the end of February; what is the value of the planned investment concerned; and how many planned jobs will be created or safeguard thereby. [21155]

Mr. Kynoch: In the 11 months to the end of February 1997, Locate in Scotland and the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department helped to attract to Scotland a total of 80 inward investment projects. These projects involve planned investment of £3.0 billion and the expected creation or safeguarding of 13,679 jobs.

Electronic Surveillance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what guidance chief constables in Scotland operate under in relation to electronic surveillance of suspects; and what is his Department's involvement in the process; [14131]

(2) on how many occasions chief constables in Scotland have authorised electronic surveillance of suspects outside the terms of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 in each of the last five years; [14132]

(3) what new proposals he has in respect of the powers of chief constables in Scotland to implement electronic surveillance of suspects; in what circumstances electronic surveillance operations are currently permissible. [14135]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* Electronic surveillance of suspects may be authorised by chief constables in Scotland in accordance with non-statutory guidelines on intrusive surveillance issued by the Scottish Office in 1985.

Under the current guidelines, intrusive surveillance may be authorised only in circumstances where the investigation concerns serious crime, normal methods of investigation have been tried and failed, or are unlikely to succeed, and there is good reason to think that the use of equipment would be likely to lead to an arrest and a conviction or, where appropriate, to the prevention of acts of terrorism.

Figures for each of the last five years are not available centrally.

Consumer Protection

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will assess the advantages of extending the provisions of part V of the Crime and Punishment Bill (Scotland) to members of the Faculty of Advocates to enhance consumer protection. [19073]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to extend the provisions of part V to members of the Faculty of Advocates. Such a proposal would require consultation with those affected and further detailed consideration in the light of experience of the implementation of these provisions in relation to solicitors.

Children (Sexual Abuse)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* rape and *(b)* sexual assault victims were under the age of 16 in each of the last five years. [19123]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Information is not collected centrally on the age of victims in recorded crimes of rape, assault with intent to rape or ravish or indecent assault.

Sex Offenders

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will assess the advantages of extending the length of probation orders for those who commit sexual offences to a maximum of five years. [19074]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* No representations have been received proposing such a change. Any views put forward will be considered by the working group tasked with any future review of the national objectives and standards for social work services in the criminal justice system in respect of probation. Any legislative changes recommended by that group would be considered.

Salmon Strategy Task Force

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to implement recommendation No. 33 of the report of the Scottish Salmon strategy task force. [20816]

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has received a copy of the task force report. This Department will be closely involved in formulating the Government's formal response to the recommendations affecting fisheries in England. However, no decisions will be taken until the consultation process is complete.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19395]

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of his Department's spending on each charter produced under the citizens charter programme. [20183]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table:

Charter	*Drafting* £	*Publishing* £	*Distribution* £	*Total costs* £	*Number issued*
Patients	n/a	n/a	n/a	41,729	33,350
Parents (1991)	n/a	170,782	24,365	195,147	36,000
(1995 up-date)	n/a	77,452	24,530	101,982	75,067
Tenants	n/a	69,000	n/a	69,000	32,000
Further and higher education	n/a	n/a	n/a	144,700	64,800
Justice	n/a	61,362	1,700	63,062	29,000
Local environment	n/a	n/a	n/a	20,600	n/a
Serving crofting					
First edition	n/a	5,117	n/a	5,117	10,000
Second edition	n/a	4,282	80	4,362	3,000
Serving farmers					
First edition	n/a	5,304	n/a	5,304	4,500
Second edition	n/a	Nil	n/a		4,000
Rent registration service	1,720	n/a	n/a	1,720	100
Scottish Office statistical services	600	Nil	Nil	600	n/a
Scottish Office inquiry reporters unit	565	878	700	2,143	3,500
Scottish Office planning services	6,000	3,200	1,300	10,500	6,000

Charter	Drafting £	Publishing £	Distribution £	Total costs £	Number issued
Executive agencies					
Scottish fisheries protection agency	250	150	50	450	200
Scottish agricultural science agency					
First edition (1994)	n/a	950	n/a	950	150
Second edition (1996)	n/a	1,248	n/a	1,248	173
Historic Scotland	n/a	1,350	n/a	1,350	6,500
Scottish prison service 3 charter standard documents					
(1) public	200	408	—	608	2,982
(2) prisoners	200	760	No extra costs incurred	960	12,008
(3) visitors	200	222	—	422	43
Scottish Office pensions agency	148	1,619	No extra costs incurred	1,767	37,500
Students awards agency for Scotland	500	5,000 per annum	No extra costs incurred	5,000 per annum	225,000 per annum

n/a indicated that the information requested is either not available or is not known.
Figures on numbers issued are actual numbers issued where known or numbers printed where not known.
The SAAS charter is incorporated in the booklet "Student Grants in Scotland" which is revised and re-issued each year to all students.
The statistical services charter is published on the back of all statistical bulletins, so there are no separate costs and it is difficult to estimate numbers issued.

Glenfeshie and Rothiemurchus Estates

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been paid from public funds in each of the past 20 years to the owners of *(a)* Glenfeshie and *(b)* Rothiemurchus estates for the purposes of (i) conservation and (ii) forest regeneration. [19911]

Mr. Kynoch: Information in the form requested on payments by Scottish Natural Heritage and its predecessor bodies is not available, but I have asked the SNH to write to the hon. Member.

Payments made by the Forestry Commission for the purposes of replanting after felling; work to encourage natural regeneration; and new planting are set out in the table:

Year	Amount (£)
Glenfeshie	
1979	1,860
1987	8,370
Rothiemurchus (figures prior to 1983 not available)	
1987	2,970
1989	10,265
1990	2,773
1991	263
1992	5,336
1993	57,535
1994	273,549
1995	85,859
1996	419,893

Mr. W. J. Duff

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on each investigation since 25 August 1986 into the claims for treatment made by Mr. W. J. Duff. [19050]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* Mr. Duff has been the subject of checks under random sampling arrangements and more systematic monitoring. As a result of such monitoring, Mr. Duff was referred to a service committee in December 1990 in respect of one patient. Mr. Duff was found not to be in breach of his terms. He was referred in January 1994 to the NHS tribunal and then to the General Dental Council. Subsequently, his name was removed from the dental list of Greater Glasgow health board, he was excluded from practising in the NHS and his name was removed from the council's register.

Slaughterhouse Hygiene

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date his Department first received a copy of *(a)* the draft report on slaughterhouse hygiene written by Mr. Swann, and *(b)* the final report issued by the Meat Hygiene Service; what was the grade of the civil servants who assessed each report; and what reports of their contents were made to Ministers, and on what dates. [20125]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* My Department received the report written by Mr. Swann on the afternoon of 6 March 1997 and the final report issued by the Meat Hygiene Service earlier that day. I discussed the contents with officials on 6 and 7 March.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland with which external bodies the Scottish Office consulted on the draft report on slaughterhouse hygiene written by Mr. Swann; and to which such bodies it made the report available. [20124]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* The report which was received by my Department on 6 March 1997 has been made available to the Pennington Group, which is considering its contents in finalising its report on E. coli.

Assisted Businesses (Political Objectives)

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if businesses and organisations with declared political objectives can, or could obtain, financial support in the form of grants, loans and other assistance from *(a)* local enterprise companies, *(b)* Highland and Islands Enterprise, *(c)* Scottish Enterprise and *(d)* any of their predecessor bodies. [20416]

Mr. George Kynoch: It is very unlikely that a business or organisation whose declared objectives were exclusively or largely political would qualify for financial support from any of these bodies. Applications for

assistance for projects are normally considered against a number of criteria including commercial viability, number of jobs created or safeguarded and conformity to the objectives of the scheme in question.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Quota

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* for each member state in the European Union and *(b)* (i) England, (ii) Wales, (iii) Scotland and (iv) Northern Ireland the current milk quota (1) in tonnes and (2) per head of the population; and what is the average milk quota per head of population in the European Union as a whole. [20536]

Mr. Baldry: The table shows the milk quota allocated to each member state in the 1995–96 quota year, its population in 1995 and quota per head. The table also includes quota registered to producers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland which has been used to determine the quota per head in these countries.

Milk quota allocation to member states in 1995–96

Member state	*Total quota (000 tonnes)*	*Population (000)*	*Quota per head (tonnes)*
Belgium	3,310	10,145	0.33
Denmark	4,455	5,214	0.85
Germany	27,865	81,944	0.34
Greece	631	10,442	0.06
Spain	5,567	39,170	0.14
France	24,263	58,048	0.42
Ireland	5,246	3,580	1.47
Italy	9,930	57,344	0.17
Luxembourg	269	405	0.66
Netherlands	11,075	15,433	0.72
Austria	2,737	8,054	0.34
Portugal	1,872	9,951	0.19
Finland	2,366	5,109	0.46
Sweden	3,303	8,810	0.37
United Kingdom	14,590	58,606	0.25
England	10,429	48,903	0.21
Wales	1,487	2,917	0.51
Scotland	1,225	5,137	0.24
Northern Ireland	1,440	1,649	0.87
Total EU 15	117,478	372,255	0.32

Source:

1. Quota information for EU member states—Council Regulation 3950/92.

2. Quota information for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—Intervention Board.

3. Population information for EU member states (excluding the UK)—EU Commission.

4. Population information for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—The Office for National Statistics.

Note:

Quota information for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland reflect the quota registered with producers in these countries. The sum of the quota registered in these countries will not equal the UK total allocation because of the quota held in the national reserve.

Correspondence

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a substantive reply will be made to the letter of 20 January from the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth to the Minister of State concerning Mr. Harvey Richmond. [20115]

Mr. Baldry: The matter raised in the letter from the hon. Member is a complex one requiring detailed investigation. A reply will be forwarded to the hon. Member by 24 March at the latest.

Cattle Feed

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if avoparcin was licensed as a feed additive in the rations of non-lactating cows prior to the introduction of the Beef (Emergency) Control Order 1996; and if he will make a statement. [20752]

Mrs. Browning: I can confirm that avoparcin was authorised as a feed additive for non-lactating cows prior to the introduction of the Beef (Emergency) Control Order 1996.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Department took to revoke the licence for the use of avoparcin as an in-feed antibiotic in dairy cows after the Council of Ministers declined to add it to annexe 1 of directive 70/524/EEC and on what dates; and if he will make a statement. [20751]

Mrs. Browning: As a result of concerns expressed by Denmark and Germany, in July 1995, the Council of Ministers decided not to support the entry of avoparcin into annexe 1 of directive 70/524/EEC for use in feed for dairy cows and member states were requested to withdraw project licences. We did not do so as the independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee—VPC—which advises the Government, had been satisfied that the criteria of safety, quality and efficacy had been met for avoparcin, and because the Scientific Committee on Animal Nutrition—SCAN—was examining evidence submitted by the Danes and the Germans in support of their bans on avoparcin as a feed additive for all species. SCAN concluded that, on the basis of science, the evidence presented did not establish a risk to human health, animal health or the environment. The VPC welcomed the SCAN report and its conclusions but expressed some concern about the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics as additives in animal feed and over the misuse of antibiotics. However, at the December 1996 Standing Committee on Animal Nutrition, the Commission proposal banning the use of avoparcin as an additive to animal feed was agreed. We will therefore be implementing the ban and revoking existing product licences by the 1 April 1997 deadline.

Incineration Contracts

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the locations in respect of which the Intervention Board has offered contracts to incinerator companies for which planning permission has subsequently been *(a)* refused and *(b)* granted. [20811]

Mr. Baldry: The Intervention Board offers contracts to incineration companies only when it has obtained all necessary consents and licences.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the incinerator companies to whom the Intervention Board has issued letters of intent for the burning of *(a)* cattle carcases and *(b)* the rendered meat and bonemeal remains of slaughtered cattle in the past six months. [20809]

Mr. Baldry: Nine letters of intent have been issued to prospective suppliers of carcase burning facilities. The companies are:

P. J. Hayman

Euromet

Kingsclear Technologies and Associated Companies Ltd.

Sacone Industries Ltd.

Canfield Incineration Ltd.

Time-Right Ltd.

WRE Services Ltd.

Durga Environmental Ltd.

Bronzeoak Thermal Processing Ltd.

No letters of intent have been issued in respect of incineration of rendered meat and bonemeal although there have been expressions of interest by potential suppliers in a current tender.

Earth Summit

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what preparations his Department is making for the UN General Assembly special session to review progress since the Rio Earth summit of 1992 and for the preparatory committees leading up to the summit. [19135]

Mr. Boswell: The Department of the Environment is taking the lead within the Government on preparations for the UN General Assembly special session. Officials in the Ministry have provided advice, as appropriate, for the preparatory discussions taking place in sessions of the secretariat of the UN commission on sustainable development, particularly in relation to agricultural, ocean resource and land use issues.

Scrapie

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the incidence of scrapie-associated fibrils in the central nervous system of dogs in the United Kingdom. [19437]

Mrs. Browning: No case of scrapie-like transmissible spongiform encephalopathy has ever been confirmed in a dog in the United Kingdom, or reported in any other country in the world.

Brains from culled hounds in packs throughout Great Britain, which are traditionally fed fallen livestock, and so may be considered a high risk population exposed to potentially infected tissues before controls were introduced in September 1990, have been examined and the results considered by Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee in August 1994 and subsequently re-evaluated by it in June 1995. The committee concluded that the results were inconclusive because there were certain limitations in the protocol of the study. It was recognised however, that the study established that in the dogs studied there was no evidence of a pathologically overt SE similar to that reported in the domestic cat.

Feline Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date his scientists first reported to him their view that the occurrence of feline spongiform encephalopathy was causally linked with the epidemic of BSE. [19438]

Mrs. Browning: This was first reported in 1993 and recorded in the report of the chief veterinary officer—"Animal Health—1993", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. It stated that the uniformity of the lesion profile in feline spongiform encephalopathy—FSE—complements the results of primary transmission of FSE and BSE to mice, in which similarities suggest that FSE is the result of exposure of cats to the BSE pathogen prior to September 1990 when statutory controls were introduced.

Chlamydial Disease Research Unit

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to close the unit researching chlamydial disease at the central veterinary laboratory; what alternative research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on this disease. [19439]

Mrs. Browning: In deciding to reduce MAFF support for research on chlamydia when the existing projects came to an end, the programme of chlamydia research supported by the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department—£460,000 in 1996–97—was taken into account.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the last 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19767]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has sponsored the following numbers of Acts over the last 15 years, all of which have been passed by Parliament:

Session	*Number of Bills*
1981–82	1
1982–83	4
1983–84	2
1984–85	2
1985–86	1
1986–87	0
1987–88	1
1988–89	1
1989–90	1
1990–91	1
1991–92	0
1992–93	2
1993–94	0
1994–95	1
1995–96	0

Mineral Hydrocarbons

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the ban was implemented on the use of mineral hydrocarbons in food manufacture; and what were the reasons for the ban. [20697]

Mrs. Browning: Restrictions on the use of mineral hydrocarbons in food have been in place since at least 1949. The current regulations came into force in 1966. These are based on the general principle applying to the use of all food additives, that they should be permitted only under strict control and where there is a demonstrated technological need, and take account of the duty of Ministers to have regard to the desirability of restricting so far as practicable the use of substances of no nutritional value as ingredients of food.

Channel Tunnel (Animal Electrocution Apparatus)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what advice he has issued to the operators of the channel tunnel with regard to recommissioning the animal electrocution apparatus in the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement; [20710]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost of recommissioning the animal electrocution apparatus in the channel tunnel. [20712]

Mrs. Browning: The Department has drawn to the attention of Eurotunnel its obligation to maintain electrified grids in the channel tunnel. These grids are designed to deter animals from passing through the tunnel, not to electrocute them. This is one of a series of measures intended to prevent animals entering the channel tunnel.

The electrified grids currently installed in the tunnel are not operational. I met Eurotunnel's chairman this morning to discuss this. Eurotunnel is working urgently on devising a technical solution which is capable of being implemented. The cost of that work is a matter for Eurotunnel.

Rabies

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the relative risk of rabies infection entering Britain from *(a)* free-living animals entering via the channel tunnel and *(b)* animals entering by other means; and whether he has commissioned a risk assessment. [20711]

Mrs. Browning: Measures are in place to prevent rabies infection entering Great Britain either from *(a)* animals entering the channel tunnel or *(b)* animals entering by other means.

(A) The controls in place to prevent animals from entering the channel tunnel include fencing, video recording, routine surveillance by service personnel, deterrent lighting, and routine baiting for small animals.

Electrified grids have been installed in each of the tunnels as an additional deterrence to animals. However, due to technical difficulties, these are not currently operational. I met the chairman of Eurotunnel this morning to discuss this. He assured me that Eurotunnel is working urgently on devising a technical solution capable of being implemented very rapidly.

The environment in the channel tunnel is extremely hostile and would not sustain any animal life because of the train movement—the air vortex created by a train in the tunnel is likely to kill any animal the size of a dog or fox—and because of arrangements designed to ensure that the tunnel is not a source of food.

(B) The legislation on rabies quarantine is in place to prevent rabies infection entering by other means.

Slaughtered Cattle (Disposal)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, in date order, the consultation papers and research reports which he has commissioned, since 20 March 1996, on the options for, and public health and environmental implications of, the disposal of cattle slaughtered as a result of BSE-related programmes; and if he will set out the bodies producing each document. [20827]

Mrs. Browning: As on other issues in relation to spongiform encephalopathies, the Government look to their independent Spongiform Encephaphalopathy Advisory Committee. A special sub-group was set up to look at a range of environmental issues which met on 6 May 1996. The report of that group to the main committee was discussed at the committee meeting on 29 May 1996 and resulted in a public document which was issued by the Department on 7 June 1996. A copy is in the Library of the House.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. French: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements he has made to ensure that the information paper on meat hygiene which he promised in his statement on 12 March, *Official Report*, columns 372-74, is publicly available. [21264]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I laid in the Library of the House on 18 March 1997 a copy of the information paper, "Driving up meat hygiene standards". It is freely available on request from the MAFF helpline—phone 0645-33-55-77. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) is also sending copies to industry, enforcement and consumer organisations.

Departmental Cash Limits

Mr. French: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are proposed to the cash limit for class III, vote 2-Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for 1996–97. [21265]

Mr. Boswell: The cash limit for class III vote 2 for 1996–97 will be reduced by £280,000 from £892,586,000 to £892,306,000. This reduction covers the surrender by the Ministry to the Exchequer of funds matching payments to the tanning industry.

"Agriculture in the United Kingdom"

Mr. French: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the latest volume of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom" to be published. [21266]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1996" was published today and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Slaughter Practices

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he plans to support the European Commission's proposals that *(a)* minimum stunning currents should be laid down by law and *(b)* the 1993 directive on welfare at slaughter should be amended to require both carotid arteries to be severed at slaughter. [20077]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* Interested organisations have been asked for their comments on proposals received from the European Commission in respect of directive 93/119/EC on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing. The UK approach to both issues identified by the hon. Member will be carefully considered, taking into account the views expressed by all those consulted.

BSE

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library a copy of *(a)* the contract between the Ministry of Agriculture and Electrophoretics International covering work to develop a diagnostic test for BSE and *(b)* a copy of the evaluation made of that work. [20664]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* *(a)* MAFF has no contract with Electrophoretics International—EI—to develop a diagnostic test for BSE. It did, however, have an agreement with EI which was one of collaboration. As required by the terms of that agreement, we have written to EI requesting its agreement in writing to our placing a copy in the Library of the House. If EI agrees, we will do so once we have its reply.

(b) Since no work was commissioned by MAFF from EI, no such evaluation has been made.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received over the past 12 months regarding the disposal of BSE-infected carcases to landfill sites. [20523]

Mrs. Browning: Between 21 March 1996 and 14 February 1997, the Department's BSE correspondence unit dealt with in excess of 7,200 letters on BSE-related issues, some of which would have concerned the disposal of BSE suspect carcases to landfill sites. Establishing the precise number could be done only at disproportionate cost.

State Veterinary Service

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many vets were employed by the State Veterinary Service in each year from 1979 to present. [17629]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[pursuant to his reply 27 February 1997]:* The number of veterinary surgeons employed by the State Veterinary Service at 1 January each year since 1980 is detailed in the table. Since 1980, the structure of the State Veterinary Service has changed several times. The central veterinary laboratory which previously formed part of the State Veterinary Service, became the Veterinary Laboratories Agency in April 1990. The CVL figures are incorporated in this return for the years 1 January 1980 to 1 January 1990. As from 1 June 1990, the figures do not include the CVL. The veterinary investigation service became part of the VLA on 1 October 1995 and is not included in these figures since then.

Year	*Number of vets*
1980	583.0
1981	571.0
1982	549.0
1983	549.5
1984	545.5
1985	530.5
1986	511.5
1987	464.5
1988	442.5
1989	442.0
1990	450.0
1991	407.0
1992	414.5
1993	420.0
1994	410.3
1995	394.5
1996	301.2
1997	289.5

SOCIAL SECURITY

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the past 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19773]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table:

Parliamentary session	*Bills*
Sponsored by the Department of Social Security	
1995–96	1
1994–95	4
1993–94	3
1992–93	2
1991–92	1
1990–91	4
1989–90	1
1988–89	1
Sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Security	
1987–88	2
1986–87	1
1985–86	2
1984–85	3
1983–84	2
1972–83	3
1981–82	3

All Bills received Royal Assent. 1. The Department of Social Security was formed in July 1988. The figures given for 1981–82 to 1987–88 are for Bills sponsored by the former Department of Health and Social Security.

All-work Test

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations his Department has had from the Disability Alliance in

relation to the Benefits Agency medical services and complaints from disabled people about the all-work test for incapacity benefit; what reply he is sending; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement. [20057]

Mr. Burt: No recent representations have been received by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. However, I received a letter from the Disability Alliance on 12 March. I have replied to the Disability Alliance today, sending it the information that it has requested. I have also sent a copy of my reply to the right hon. Member.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the expenditure on rent rebate and council tax benefit for unemployed claimants in each year from 1978–79 to 1996–97; [20297]

(2) what was the expenditure on housing benefit for unemployed claimants in each year from 1978–79 to 1996–97. [20298]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Disaggregated information is not available for the years before 1994–95 and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Expenditure on unemployed claimants

	Total housing benefit and Council tax benefit[1] (or community charge benefit or rate rebates)	*Housing benefit (rent rebate)*	*Housing benefit (rent allowance)*	*Council tax benefit*
1978–79	241	—	—	—
1979–80	270	—	—	—
1980–81	354	—	—	—
1981–82	555	—	—	—
1982–83	700	—	—	—
1983–84	814	—	—	—
1984–85	912	—	—	—
1985–86	1,015	—	—	—
1986–87	1,101	—	—	—
1987–88	1,142	—	—	—
1988–89	1,211	—	—	—
1989–90	1,127	—	—	—
1990–91	1,489	—	—	—
1991–92	1,747	—	—	—
1992–93	2,187	—	—	—
1993–94	2,331	—	—	—
1994–95	2,626	738	1,542	346
1995–96	2,679	617	1,765	297

Note:

[1] Council tax benefit was introduced in 1993–94 and replaced community charge benefit, formerly rate rebates.

Sources:

1. Figures underlying table 5 in the 1996 departmental report.
2. Housing benefit management information system.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the number of 18 to 24-year-olds claiming housing benefit and *(b)* the average housing benefit payment to 18 to 24-year-olds. [20343]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table.

	Housing benefit recipients	*Average weekly housing benefit*
Claimants aged 18 to 24	452,000	£45.61

Source:

Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample May 1995.

Notes:

1. Figures exclude cases eligible for housing benefit but whose entitlement was 'nil' after account taken of non-dependant deductions.
2. Age is given as age of claimant only.
3. Recipients may be single persons or couples.

Savings

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide data from the family resources survey on the average amount of savings held per household in *(a)* Post Office accounts, *(b)* tax-exempt special savings accounts, *(c)* building society accounts, *(d)* bank accounts, *(e)* other accounts, *(f)* gilts, *(g)* unit trusts, *(h)* stocks and shares, *(i)* personal equity plans, *(j)* national savings bonds, *(k)* save-as-you-earn and *(l)* premium bonds, broken down by gross weekly household income divided into £100 bands. [20478]

Mr. Burt: This information is not available.

The family resources survey collects data on the amount of money respondents have in different accounts, but only for those respondents who are willing to provide an estimate of the value of their total savings and report a value between £1,500 and £20,000. Around 35 per cent. of all households surveyed fall into this category.

Income Support

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the number of 18 to 24-year-olds claiming (i) income support and not housing benefit and (ii) income support and housing benefit and *(b)* the average payment in each case. [20299]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Housing benefit and income support claimants aged 18–24 years (Great Britain, May 1995)

	Number of claimants (000s)	*Average weekly amount of housing benefit (£s)*	*Average weekly amount of income support (£s)*
Income support without housing benefit	482	—	41.52
Income support with housing benefit	382	47.58	54.33

Notes:

1. Average amounts have been rounded to the nearest penny, recipients to the nearest thousand.
2. Housing benefit figures excludes cases where there is no entitlement because of non-dependant deductions.
3. Age is given as age of claimant only.
4. From October 1996, most 18 to 24-year-olds would receive jobseeker's allowance instead of income support.

Sources:

1. Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. inquiry, with income support, taken at the end of May 1995.
2. Income support statistics quarterly inquiry, May 1995.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of 18 to 24-year-olds claiming income support by benefits office in each year since 1992. [20300]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the number of 18 to 24-year-olds claiming income support and *(b)* the average income support payment to 18 to 24-year-olds. [20340]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Income support claimants aged 18–24 years (Great Britain)

	Number of claimants (000)	*Average weekly income support (£)*
May 1995	864	47.18
May 1996	804	48.21

Notes:

1. Average amounts have been rounded to the nearest penny, claimants to the nearest thousand.
2. Sample size 5 per cent.
3. Age is given as age of claimant only.
4. From October 1996, most 18 to 24-year-olds would receive jobseeker's allowance instead of income support.

Source:

Income support statistics quarterly inquires, May 1995 and May 1996.

War Pensions (Gulf War)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *719*, what research his Department has evaluated to indicate that present medical evidence does not support a causal relation between increasing disablement and exposure to organophosphates. [20344]

Mr. Heald: My answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *719*, referred to the pattern of claimed disablement seen to date in Gulf claimants. The immediate toxic effects arising from exposure to high-dose organophosphates are the subject of medical consensus. The longer-term disabling effects of high exposure are not established; nor are the effects of low-dose exposure known, either short-term or chronic.

These conclusions are based on evaluation of the medical and scientific literature and discussion with expert toxicologists in academic departments, at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

Child Benefits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the combined value of child dependency addition and child benefit for the child of a widowed mother in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms as a percentage of average earnings, in November 1979 and at each subsequent uprating date; and what were the factors underlying each fall in value which occurred. [20650]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is in the tables:

Child benefit and widowed mothers allowance child dependency increase for first child

Uprating date	*Cash as a percentage of average earnings at each uprating date*	*Real terms as percentage of average earnings at April 1996*
November 1979	11.0	8.0
November 1980	10.2	7.7
November 1981	9.8	7.2
November 1982	9.7	7.2
November 1983	9.0	7.1
November 1984	8.7	6.9
November 1985	8.4	6.8
July 1986	8.0	6.7
April 1987	7.7	6.5
April 1988	7.2	6.4
April 1989	6.8	6.2
April 1990	6.4	5.9
April 1991	6.3	5.9
October 1991	6.5	6.1
April 1992	6.4	6.1
April 1993	6.2	6.1
April 1994	6.1	6.0
April 1995	6.0	5.9
April 1996	5.9	5.9

Child benefit and widowed mothers allowance child dependency increase for subsequent Children

Uprating date	*Cash as a percentage of average earnings at each uprating date*	*Real terms as percentage of average earnings at April 1996*
April 1991	6.3	5.9
October 1991	6.2	5.8
April 1992	6.1	5.8
April 1993	6.0	5.9
April 1994	5.9	5.8
April 1995	5.8	5.7
April 1996	5.7	5.7

1. The average earnings of full time adult employees were calculated using the new earnings survey and average earnings Index, both produced by the Office of National Statistics.
2. The retail prices index (all items) was used to put child benefit and widowed mothers allowance child dependency addition into real terms as at April 1996. This was then compared with average earnings for April 1996 to give the percentage quoted.
3. The factors underlying the fall in value are:

(a) Since 1980, CDIs have been uprated on the basis that the uprated amount of the CDI is reduced by an amount equal to the cash increase in child benefit.

(b) The rate of child benefit was not increased in 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *199*, how many and what proportion of medical examinations in connection with claims for disability living allowance or attendance allowance were carried out in February by doctors who were members of disability appeal tribunals. [20959]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested.

It is estimated that, out of a total of 24,401 medical examinations in connection with claims to disability living allowance and attendance allowance which were allocated to examining medical practitioners in February, approximately 5 per cent. were allocated to doctors who also sit as members of disability appeal tribunals.

Note:

The total number of examinations allocated includes those which may have been subsequently aborted or have not yet been carried out.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact of the recent amendments to the Social Security (Adjudication) Regulations on the number of and hearings of appeals. [20963]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 6 March, *Official Report*, column *718*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will amend the Social Security (Adjudication) Regulations 1995 to require tribunal members to inform appellants of any salary or fees they have received from his Department, other than for their work as tribunal members, in the preceding six months. [20962]

Mr. Evans: No such amendment is considered necessary.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will instruct the Benefits Agency medical services not to use doctors who are members of disability appeal tribunals for the purpose of examining claimants in connection with claims for disability living allowance or attendance allowance. [20960]

Mr. Burt: No.

There is no reason why membership of a disability appeal tribunal should be incompatible with work for Benefits Agency medical services as long as appeals do not relate to cases specifically handled by the doctor. To limit BAMS to using, for the examination of claimants at the request of the adjudication officer, only those doctors who are not members of disability appeals tribunals would unnecessarily reduce the number of people who could be involved on this work.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will amend the Social Security (Adjudication) Regulations 1995 to require that the action taken by a tribunal clerk to supply tribunal members with copies of documents relating to an appeal should be the same, irrespective of whether the appeal is to be decided without an oral hearing. [20961]

Mr. Evans: This is a procedural matter which is not appropriate for regulation.

War Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the Minister of State, the right hon. Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, with representatives of the Royal British Legion and of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People on 12 March to discuss noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss and war pensions. [20762]

Mr. Heald: My right hon. and noble Friend Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish explained that the change in the approach to noise-induced hearing loss in war pensions was made neither as a matter of policy nor of re-interpretation of the legislation, but because of the requirement to reflect current medical understanding. As a consequence, and as with all such changes, he was obliged under the existing legislation to introduce it as soon as it was identified. He also confirmed that no pensioner would have their pension reduced: all existing awards would be honoured using exceptional powers to maintain payment even where the award had no foundation. Those claiming for the first time, who were suffering from service-related NISHL assessed at 20 per cent. or above, would receive a pension.

The experts advising the Royal British Legion raised the issue of the relationship between hearing loss (impairment) and speech-hearing disability. It was agreed that the Department's medical advisors would meet the experts to discuss the possible relevance of this complicated area; officials have already written to Professor Lutman. We remain satisfied that we are applying current medical understanding in the way that the law on war pensions requires.

National Insurance

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes he proposes to the national insurance contributions rules before the beginning of the next tax year. [21042]

Mr. Heald: The Social Security (Contributions) Amendment (No. 3) Regulations were laid on Friday 14 March and will come into force by 6 April. These make three changes to national insurance contributions. First, they maintain the alignment of tax and NICs treatment of jobmatch work incentive allowances. Secondly, they change the date of payment of class 1A contributions for employers ceasing to trade or transferring business to another company. Thirdly, they exempt from NICs allowances paid to service personnel, other Crown servants and employees of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the British Council based overseas. A similar exemption has existed in tax legislation for some years. These regulations therefore bring the treatment of overseas allowances for crown servants under national insurance legislation into line with their tax treatment.

I also intend to introduce a fourth measure, also to come into force from 6 April. This will also maintain alignment of tax and NICs on employer-funded training. Regulations for this will be laid shortly.

Departmental Agencies (Performance Targets)

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what performance targets he has set his Department's agencies for 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [21043]

Mr. Lilley: The targets I have set my Department's executive agencies for 1997–98 are as set out.

The targets represent a significant challenge to each agency, and focus effort on the key elements of their individual businesses.

Further information on the agencies' plans for 1997–98 is contained in their individual business plans which have been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The targets for 1997–98 are:

BENEFITS AGENCY

1. Benefit accuracy

Income support accuracy—to pay the correct amount in 87 per cent. of cases.

Jobseeker's allowance accuracy—to pay the correct amount in 87 per cent. of cases.

Incapacity benefit accuracy—to pay the correct amount in 94 per cent. of cases.

Family credit accuracy—to pay the correct amount in 91 per cent. of cases.

Disability living allowance accuracy—to pay the correct amount in 96 per cent. of cases.

2. Claims clearance times

Jobseekers' allowance claims—65 per cent. in 10 days and 90 per cent. in 21 days.

Faster family credit—90 per cent. in 5 days.

3. Financial recovery and financial control

160,000 claims of those obtaining benefit by deception to be withdrawn within 10 days of fraud investigation and 185,000 within 28 days.

Security savings—£2100 million.

Overpayment recovery—£120 million.

Social fund loans recovery—£333 million.

4. Resource management

To manage the agency's resources to deliver its business plan within allocations.

To keep to the cash limit agreement with Treasury for the discretionary social fund budget approved by Parliament.

CONTRIBUTIONS AGENCY

1. Records Maintenance

New accounts properly registered for: 95 per cent. of juveniles in advance of their 16th birthday, and 90 per cent. of adults without NI accounts within eight days of receipt of complete application forms.

Changes to personal details properly recorded, completing 92 per cent. of cases within 15 days.

NI contributions properly recorded for: 98 per cent. of appropriate notifications for class 1 contributors by 31 December 1997 or within 30 days thereafter; 90 per cent. of class 2–3 contributors within five days of receipt of payment.

NI details properly recorded following investigation: for 90 per cent. of cases by 31 March 1998 where there are inappropriate submissions by employers; for 85 per cent. of cases in 90 days where contributors/others identify an inaccuracy.

2. Information provision

95 per cent. of requests from Government agencies and Departments within: three days when no clerical action is required; 10 days with clerical involvement; and 45 days when detailed investigation is necessary to establish the NI position.

92 per cent. of requests from pension providers and scheme administrators completed within 25 days.

95 per cent. of customer inquiries and complaints within 20 days.

3. Conformance

£3.55 billion of NI contributions collected by the NI fund.

£170 million of arrears identified and reference made to the Inland Revenue for collection.

NI rebates accurately paid to pension providers, with 98 per cent. of cases completed within one calendar month after the recording of an accurate end of year return.

Contracting-out certificates properly issued, clearing 99 per cent. within five days.

Variation and surrender action properly completed, clearing 96 per cent. within 10 days.

Initiate investigation action within 10 days, where schemes are in breach of contracting-out conditions.

CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY

1. Performance

£500 million of maintenance to be collected or arranged.

97 per cent. of payments to parents with care to be made within 10 working days of receipt.

Cash value of all assessments checked in the year to be correct in at least 85 per cent. of cases.

60 per cent. of second-tier reviews to be cleared within 13 weeks and 95 per cent. within 26 weeks.

A minimum of 525,000 cases to be cleared; 60 per cent. of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 26 weeks and on 31 March 1998 no more than 5 per cent. of all applications received by the agency to be over 52 weeks old.

WAR PENSIONS AGENCY

1. Performance

Disablement Claims—66 per cent. cleared in 145 days.

War Widows' Claims—82 per cent. cleared in 70 days.

Claims accuracy—95 per cent.

Appeals status—At 31 March 1998, to have no more than 28 per cent. of outstanding appeals more than 260 days old.

Appeals volume—To clear 10,000 appeals during 1997–98.

2. Resource Management

To manage the agency's administration resources so as to deliver the business plan within budget allocation.

3. Customer satisfaction

To complete a survey of welfare service clients by 31 March 1998.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AGENCY

1. Financial targets

Manage the agency's income and expenditure (derived from normal trading activities), as presented on audited accruals accounts, so that the agency recovers its full economic costs through receipts from customers within a tolerance of plus or minus 2 per cent.

Manage the ITSA purchaser vote so that the agency's expenditure outturn is in line with allocations and estimates—final outturn to be within 1 per cent. of the forecast provided for the end-of-year review of expenditure in December 1997.

To reduce unit costs and prices in order to deliver to overall business efficiency improvement of 5 per cent.

2. Customer service targets

Measure customer satisfaction using the business excellence model, an industry standard and achieve a 10 per cent. BEM score improvement for customer satisfaction.

Deliver 95 per cent. of services to customers to service levels for budget, time and quality as agreed within contracts.

Young Offenders

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what procedures exist to ensure that parents whose children are sentenced to be detained do not continue to receive *(a)* child benefit and *(b)* other benefits in respect of them. [18099]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Shaw, dated 17 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what procedures exist to ensure that parents whose children are sentenced to be detained, do not continue to receive a) Child Benefit and b) other benefits in respect of them.

Customers receiving Child Benefit are obliged to report any changes of circumstances in accordance with the instructions contained in their order book. This would include instances when a child is detained in legal custody. Similarly, those in receipt of Widows Benefit, Retirement Pension, Income Support or short term benefits which include an additional amount for a dependent child must report the changes.

Customers receiving benefit by Automated Credit Transfer are periodically sent details of what changes of circumstances should be reported.

The position is different for people receiving Family Credit (FC). Entitlement is calculated and benefit is awarded for a fixed period for a family's circumstances at the date of the claim. If a child subsequently leaves a household, entitlement continues unless the child is included within another family claiming FC. There are no provisions within FC legislation for payments to cease in any other circumstances involving children.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Truro Benefits Agency

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many information officers are currently employed at Truro Benefits Agency to give advice on the types and amounts of benefits available on retirement. [20197]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Jamieson, dated 17 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many information officers are currently employed at Truro Benefits Agency (BA) to give advice on the types and amounts of benefits available on retirement.

It is one of the aims of the BA to provide the best service in the most cost effective way. We are aware that the provision of distinct Customer Service roles are extremely valuable in providing customer groups with increased access to the Benefit Agency. With this in mind the provisions of outreach and liaison work have been examined to confirm that they are the best and most cost-effective ways of meeting local needs. District Managers have the flexibility and local knowledge to target resources and continue to provide the most appropriate services for their local community.

Cornwall District includes the BA offices at Falmouth, Launceston, Penzance, St. Austell and Truro (Lemon Quay House). There is currently a Customer Service Manager for the District based at Truro. The Customer Service Manager is available to give information and advice on the best way of accessing BA services. The District Information Officer (DINO) has recently been moved to Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) Implementation duties. The reinstatement of the full range of DINO responsibilities for Truro will be considered in late Summer when the conversion of all JSA will have taken place.

All reception staff are trained to give information and advice on benefits on retirement. In addition to this eight members of staff are available to answer telephone queries on Retirement Pension and to discuss complicated matters face to face with customers in the Truro office. Customers are welcome to call at Truro Office (Lemon Quay House) or to telephone (01872 355000) for the information.

There is also a national telephone service "Pensions Info-Line" for DSS material on pensions, the telephone number is 0345 313233 and is charged at the rate of a local call.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

HEALTH

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

11. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the extent of MRSA and measures taken to combat its spread. [19172]

Mr. Horam: The Department is currently working with professional groups on the revision of clinical guidelines on MRSA. We have also sponsored an educational video for nurses and issued an information leaflet on MRSA to nursing and residential homes. The public health laboratory service recorded incidents of MRSA in 177 hospitals in England last year, affecting just over 19,000 patients. Health authorities are required—through their contracts with providers—to ensure that adequate infection control arrangements are in place within hospitals. Hospitals are similarly required to ensure that their hospital infection control team covers all hospital facilities.

Insulin Pens (Disposable Needles)

13. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received about disposable needles for insulin pens. [19174]

Mr. Malone: We have received a number of representations in favour of allowing general practitioners to prescribe insulin injection pen needle on the national health service.

St. Cross Hospital, Rugby

14. **Mr Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about clinical services at St. Cross hospital at Rugby. [19175]

Mr. Malone: The delivery of safe and effective clinical services is a matter for health authorities and trusts which are best placed to take into account local needs and circumstances.

Health Boards and Trusts (Membership)

15. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to review the membership of health boards and trusts following criticisms by the health service ombudsman. [19176]

Mr. Malone: We are currently studying the report of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration on the issues raised in the health service commissioner's report for 1995–96.

Factor 8

16. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability throughout England of recombinant factor 8. [19177]

Mr. Horam: Our aim is to ensure that the best health care is obtained for the resources available. We believe that aim is best achieved when decisions on appropriate

treatments are made locally, taking account of the patient's individual needs, the alternative treatments available, and the availability of resources.

Community Pharmacies

17. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve assistance to small community pharmacies; and if he will make a statement. [19178]

Mr. Malone: The essential small pharmacy scheme already provides financial support to pharmacies located more than 1 km from the next nearest pharmacy and which dispense at least 6,000 and fewer than 18,636 national health service prescriptions in a year.

Tobacco Companies

18. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will encourage tobacco companies to enter into an agreement to make available the same sum of money as they spend on advertising and promotion to health promotional groups. [19179]

Mr. Horam: The Government have no such plans.

Drugs Budget

19. **Sir Roger Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the analysis his Department has carried out of the drugs budgets of general practitioner fundholders and of non-fundholders. [19180]

Mr. Malone: Health authorities allocate prescribing budgets annually, to both fundholding and non-fundholding general practitioners, to meet patient needs. Guidance is issued to help health authorities achieve equity between fundholding and non-fundholding practices and the national health service executive's regional offices oversee the whole process to ensure fairness. Analysis of the management of drugs budgets by fundholders and non-fundholders shows a 6 per cent. saving by each wave of fundholders compared with trends in expenditure by non-fundholders. These savings are "locked in" and currently represent some £100 million each year.

Prescription Charges

20. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on prescription charges. [19181]

Mr. Malone: Only those who can afford to do so are asked to pay prescription charges. Extensive exemption arrangements mean that 85 per cent. of prescription items are dispensed free to patients, for example because of their age, income or medical condition.

Cancer Treatment (Lancashire)

21. **Mr. Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions he proposes to make to improve hospital cancer treatment facilities in Lancashire. [19182]

Mr. Horam: Four Calman cancer units are being developed, at Preston and Chorley; Blackburn and Burnley; Blackpool; and Lancaster, Kendal and Barrow.

A new radiotherapy facility has been built at Preston acute hospitals national health service trust. The radiotherapy unit opened and treated the first patient on 24 February 1997.

The cancer unit at Preston and Chorley will be developed in due course into a Calman cancer centre—over the next five years.

Private Finance Initiative

22. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the contribution the private finance initiative is making towards capital expenditure in the NHS. [19183]

Mr. Horam: The contribution that the private finance initiative will make to national health service capital spending is estimated to be as follows:

Year	*Amount £ million*
1996–97	65
1997–98	166
1998–99	307
1999–00	4212

Orthodontists (North West)

23. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to address the shortage of orthodontists in the north west. [19184]

Mr. Malone: Orthodontics is one of the priority areas for training additional specialist registrars in the year 1997–98, and as shown in the table, the number of specialist orthodontists in training has risen significantly in the last two years.

Numbers of orthodontic specialists in training

	Whole time equivalent registrars	*Senior registrars*
30 September 1994 (England and Wales)	50	28
30 September 1995 (England and Wales)	56	34
28 February 1996 (All UK)	85	42

For 1997–98 the standing workforce advisory group (SWAG) has recommended that not less than six and not more than 21 orthodontic specialist posts should be created.

Bed Blocking

24. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on bed blocking. [19185]

Mr. Burns: We have consistently emphasised the need for health and local authorities to work closely together in this area. The implementation of the community care reforms required health authorities and local authorities to reach agreements about arrangements for hospital discharge. It is also a key element of the work which health authorities undertook to implement the guidance on national health service responsibilities for continuing care.

On 28 November 1996, we announced the continuing care challenge fund which is targeted at initiatives which aim to alleviate delays in discharge by avoiding inappropriate admissions to acute hospitals, facilitating discharge following rehabilitation and avoiding unnecessary readmissions by ensuring the availability of support at home. A total of £16 million has been allocated to 69 health authorities in 1996–97 and £20 million, matched by £40 million from health and/or local authorities will be available to 95 health authorities in 1997–98.

Doctors (Training)

25. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the correlation between the numbers of students entering medical schools and the shortfall of doctors in the NHS. [19186]

Mr. Malone: The Government are advised by the Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee—MWSAC—on the balance between future supply and demand for doctors. In 1995, we accepted the MWSAC recommendation for an increase of the target medical school intake by 500 to 4,970 by 2000; and funds are being provided for this through the higher education funding councils.

MWSAC is now working towards its third report and has taken evidence from a number of interested parties. It will make recommendations based on the evidence and analysis.

NHS Budgets

26. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the percentage change in the proportion of NHS budgets spent on administration since 1989. [19187]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) on 3 December 1996, column *635*.

Changes over the years in the roles and responsibilities of family practitioner committees, family health services authorities, district health authorities, and regional health authorities, and the transfer of functions to national health service trusts, mean that the figures are not directly comparable. These figures also include expenditure on medical negligence, capital charges grants to voluntary bodies and some health care services, for example, health promotion.

NHS Capital Expenditure

27. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on capital expenditure in the health service. [19188]

Mr. Horam: The last 10 years have seen the largest sustained building programme in the history of the national health service with over 700 schemes each costing over £1 million being completed. It is anticipated that £1.9 billion will be spent in 1996–97 on constructing, improving and modernising NHS buildings using both public capital.

NHS Waiting Lists

28. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of people on NHS waiting lists at the latest available date. [19189]

Mr. Horam: Provisional figures show that, on 31 December 1996, there were 1,095,940 parents waiting for admission to national health service hospitals in England on an in-patient or day case basis, only 2 per cent. of whom had been waiting more than a year.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting *(a)* over one year and *(b)* over 18 months for treatment (i) in each region and (ii) nationally in December 1996; and how many (1) in each equivalent region and (2) nationally were waiting for *(a)* and *(b)* in March 1991. [20370]

Mr. Horam: The table gives the information requested. Information on the number of patients waiting over 18 months is not available for 1991. Regions have been adjusted as far as possible to allow comparisons between 1991 and 1996, but some differences remain, notably due to boundary changes in south Humber, Bedfordshire and Morecambe bay.

Patients waiting over one year at end December 1996 (provisional)

Region	*Patients waiting over one year*	*Of which: Patients waiting over 18 months*
Northern and Yorkshire	2,563	0
Trent	5,277	0
Anglia and Oxford	1,561	22
North Thames	4,007	59
South Thames	2,924	28
South and West	2,507	12
West Midlands	288	0
North West	2,813	2
England	21,940	123

Patients waiting over one year at end March 1991

Region	*Patients waiting over one year*
Northern and Yorkshire	17,801
Trent	10,525
Anglia and Oxford	19,713
North Thames	36,593
South Thames	26,265
South and West	24,452
West Midlands	17,473
North West	16,939
England	169,761

Regions not directly comparable due to boundary changes, notably in south Humberside, Morecambe bay and Bedfordshire.

Primary Care

29. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to meet general practitioners from north Derbyshire to discuss his Department's plans for primary care. [19190]

Mr. Malone: We have already sent copies of the White Papers "Primary Care: The Future—Choice and Opportunity" and "Primary Care: Developing the Future", to all general medical practitioners. Subject to parliamentary approval of the NHS (Primary Care) Bill, we shall be writing to all general medical practitioners, and issuing guidance to health authorities and NHS trusts, advising them how they can pilot some of the new arrangements for the delivery of primary care.

Special Hospitals

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pending the result of the inquiry by Judge Fallon, what action should be taken by the chief executive of a special health authority high-security psychiatric hospital on receipt of a dossier of allegations concerning another special hospital; and if he will make a statement concerning the reporting relationships between the chairmen and chief executives of the special hospitals and the chairman and chief executive of the High Security Psychiatric Services Commissioning Board. [17802]

Mr. Burns: It would not be appropriate to comment on matters that may be considered by his honour, Mr. Peter Fallon in the course of his deliberations.

Chairmen and chief executives of the three hospital authorities are responsible for providing high secure psychiatric services, as commissioned by the NHS executive on behalf of the Secretary of State, taking advice from the High Secure Psychiatric Services Commissioning Board.

Prescriptions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of *(a)* the value of prescribed products which are imported from overseas having been manufactured in the United Kingdom and *(b)* the savings achieved as a result of not purchasing direct from a United Kingdom manufacturer. [18874]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available.

Medical Officers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those responsible for the duties formerly carried out by municipal authority medical officers of health; for which geographical areas each is responsible; who appoints such people; what are their usual minimum qualifications; to whom they are accountable; what statutory provisions relating to the former duties of these medical officers *(a)* apply and *(b)* do not apply to these persons; and what subsequent legislation governs their activities. [20012]

Mr. Horam: The Local Government Act 1972 provides for the appointment by the local authority of

'Such officers as they think necessary'

such for the proper discharge of their functions and obligations. Each local authority may appoint "proper officers" (defined in s270 of the 1972 Act) for particular purposes.

Children in Need

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children below the age of 16 years were found in need in central London in the last year for which figures are available. [20410]

Mr. Burns: The relevant figures are not available centrally.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* GPs and *(b)* GP practices the Government estimate will become fundholders from April 1997; and what projections he has made for subsequent years. [20371]

Mr. Malone: A total of 1,714 general practitioners in 646 practices will join the fundholding scheme on 1 April this year. This will give a total of 15,137 GP fundholders in 4,381 practices. This means that 58 per cent. of people in England will have a fundholder as their GP from this April.

GPs have until 31 July 1997 to apply to join the eighth wave of GP fundholding.

Hepatitis B

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expert advice he has received or has requested about the advantages of *(a)* antenatal screening for and *(b)* infant vaccination against hepatitis B; and if he will make a statement. [20211]

Mr. Horam: The United Kingdom has one of the lowest prevalence rates of hepatitis B carriage in the world. Our current policy is to target immunisation at groups at increased risk of infection including babies born to women who are chronic carriers of the hepatitis B virus or who have had acute hepatitis B infection during pregnancy.

The National Screening Committee is considering the antenatal screening programme for hepatitis B and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation is considering what may be the most appropriate future strategy for the control of hepatitis B, in the context of the whole childhood immunisation programme.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received from the Children's Liver Disease Foundation about *(a)* antenatal screening for and *(b)* infant vaccination against hepatitis B; and if he will make a statement. [20212]

Mr. Burns: I met representatives of the Children's Liver Disease Foundation on 11 March. Antenatal screening for hepatitis B and childhood immunisation against hepatitis B were among the matters discussed at the meeting.

Ondine's Curse

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data his Department has collated concerning the incidence in the United Kingdom of congenital central hypoventilation syndrome (Ondine's curse); and if there is any record of a patient outgrowing the disorder. [20208]

Mr. Horam: The Department does not collate this data. The national health service executive is currently funding a research project into the management of children who require long-term ventilation support. This study includes the collation of data on children affected by congenital central hypoventilation syndrome. There is no record of a patient outgrowing this condition.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of employees of the Medicines Control Agency who possessed a qualification in *(a)* epidemiology and *(b)* statistics on (i) 1 June, (ii) 1 August, (iii) 1 October and (iv) 1 November 1995. [20558]

Mr. Malone: It is not possible to state how many employees employed by the Medicines Control Agency had a qualification in either epidemiology and statistics as the agency does not keep such records.

Social Services Expenditure

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure on social services in 1979–80; what estimate he has made of the level of that expenditure in the present year; and what is the real terms percentage change in expenditure between the two years. [20687]

Mr. Burns: In 1979–80, net expenditure on personal social services was £1,314 million. Local authorities have budgeted to spend £7,923 million on personal social services in 1996–97, 129 per cent. more in real terms than in 1979–80.

Bristol Royal Infirmary

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set up an inquiry into the delivery of paediatric cardiac surgical services at Bristol royal infirmary from 1990 to 1995. [21263]

Mr. Dorrell: Yes. Concerns about the quality and management of paediatric cardiac surgical services and related issues at that time lead me to believe that an inquiry is necessary. However, the General Medical Council is currently considering proceedings in respect of paediatric cardiac surgery at the United Bristol Healthcare national health service trust and I would not wish to prejudice its deliberations. Therefore this inquiry will not start until the GMC has completed its proceedings. Further announcements about the remit and form of the inquiry will be made in due course.

Earth Summit

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what preparations his Department is making for the UN General Assembly to review progress since the Rio Earth summit of 1992 and for the preparatory committees leading up to the summit. [19140]

Mr. Horam: The Government are committed to ensuring the United Kingdom meets the targets set at the Rio Earth summit. The Department is working, together with other Government Departments, to deliver those with health implications.

Lewisham Hospital

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of *(a)* the number of surgical procedures cancelled at Lewisham hospital since the imposition of the emergency-only admission policy in November 1996 and *(b)* the likely figure at the end of the current financial year. [19412]

Mr. Malone: Ministers are aware that elective surgery has been rescheduled at Lewisham hospital. The delivery of services locally is a matter for health authorities and trusts. The Department of Health does not analyse cancelled surgical procedures at a local level. The hon. Member may wish to contact Professor Maurice Lessof, chairman of Lewisham hospital NHS trust for details.

Accident and Emergency Service

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make an official visit for north-east London to review the working of the accident and emergency service. [19780]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no immediate plans to visit north-east London to review the working of the accident and emergency services.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the last 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19776]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is:

Parliamentary session	*Bills*
Sponsored by Department of Health	
1995–96	3
1994–95	3
1993–94	0
1992–93	2
1991–92	1
1990–91	0
1989–90	2
1988–89	0
Sponsored by Department of Health and Social Security	
1987–88	2
1986–87	1
1985–86	2
1984–85	3
1983–84	2
1982–83	3
1981–82	3

All Bills received Royal Assent.The Department of Health was formed in July 1988. The figures given for 1981–82 to 1987–88 are for Bills sponsored by the former Department of Health and Social Security.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each month in 1994 the total attendance allowances paid to members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. [20148]

Mr. Malone: The available information for each month in 1994 is as follows:

Month	Attendance allowance £
January	2,025
February	2,025
March	1,725
April	1,725
May	1,925
June	1,725
July	1,925
August	No meeting
September	2,650
October	2,025
November	1,825
December	1,625

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the *(a)* daily attendance and *(b)* preparation allowance payable in October 1995 to a member of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. [20147]

Mr. Malone: The available information per meeting in October 1995, was *(a)* £100 and *(b)* £60 per member.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the changes which have been made in the subcommittees of the Committee on Safety of Medicines with effect from 1 January 1996; whether those changes were made by regulations in terms of schedule 1 of the Medicines Act 1968; and if he will make a statement. [20137]

Mr. Malone: The sub-committee on pharmacovigilance was established on 1 January 1996.

The committee may, with the approval of Ministers, appoint sub-committees under regulation 6 of the Medicines Commission and Committees Regulations 1970. Regulation 6 was made under paragraph 1 of schedule 1 to the Medicines Act 1968.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which chairmen of the Committee on Safety of Medicines have resigned before the scheduled conclusion of their period of office. [20142]

Mr. Malone: None.

Product Licences

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the last five years for which information is available the (i) mean, (ii) standard deviation and (iii) range of the times from receipt of a valid application for a product licence for a new chemical entity until the date for which a product licence is granted or declined. [20138]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not collected by the Medicines Control Agency. The agency publishes information on its licensing performance in the Medicines Act information leaflet. The leaflet is published bi-monthly and copies are placed in the Library.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the public announcements on issues of drug safety made by or on behalf of the licensing authority since 1 January 1986, which resulted in a compulsory variation of product licences; and if he will list for each what body or individual made the announcement on behalf of the licensing authority. [20143]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on 9 May 1996 at columns *244-45* and 9 July 1996 at column *148*.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what public health reasons postponed the start of despatch of the "Dear Doctor" letters dated 18 October 1995; and if he will make a statement; [20139]

(2) if, prior to 13 October 1995, the Medicines Control Agency gave a written undertaking to Professor Hershel Jick and his colleagues that their unpublished data on the safety of oral contraceptives would be treated in confidence; [20151]

(3) if, at the meeting of the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products on 17–18 October 1995, the United Kingdom representatives informed the CPMP that the Committee on Safety of Medicines had met on 13 October 1995. [20152]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 17 March 1997 column *472*.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the oral contraceptives which contain desogestrel or gestodene which currently have a product licence; and for each product if he will list the company which holds the product licence and the date on which the product licence was granted. [20140]

Mr. Malone: The following currently granted marketing authorisations for oral contraceptives contain desogestrel or gestodene.

Oral contraceptives containing desogestrel

Marvelon 150/30
Organon Laboratories Ltd.
Granted 4 November 1981

Marvelon 75/50
Organon Laboratories Ltd.
Granted 4 November 1981

Mercilon tablets
Organon Laboratories Ltd.
Granted 11 February 1986

Gracial 25/40
Organon Laboratories Ltd.
Granted 28 February 1996

Gracial 125/30
Organon Laboratories Ltd.
Granted 28 February 1996.

Oral contraceptives containing gestodene

Minulet tablets
John Wyeth and Brother Ltd.
Granted 27 August 1987

Tri-minulet tablets
John Wyeth and Brother Ltd.
Granted 20 February 1989

Minesse
John Wyeth and Brother Ltd.
Granted 17 March 1995

Harmonette 23

John Wyeth and Brother Ltd.

Granted 28 June 1995

Femodene tablets

Schering Health Care Ltd.

Granted 22 July 1986.

Clinical Trials

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the statutory instruments which regulate the approval of clinical trials by the licensing authority; and if he will make a statement. [20141]

Mr. Malone: The following is the information:

The Medicines (Exemption from Licences) (Clinical Trials) Order 1995 (S.I. 1995/2808).

The Medicines (Exemption from Licences and Certificates) (Clinical Trials) Order 1995 (S.I. 1995/2809).

The Medicines (Exemption from Licences) (Clinical Trials) Order 1974 (S.I. 1974/498).

The Medicines (Exemption from Licences) (Special Cases and Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 1972 (S.I. 1972/1200)

The Medicines (Exemptions from Licences) (Special and Transitional Cases) Order 1971 (S.I. 1971/1450)

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the ministerial responsibilities of the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) on 13 October 1995; and what change was made to these responsibilities prior to his move to the Home Office in November 1995. [20144]

Mr. Horam: The ministerial responsibilities of the Under-Secretary of State, on 13 October 1995 and until his move to the Home Office in November 1995 were published in "Vacher's Parliamentary Companion", copies of which are available in the Library.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees of the Medicines Control Agency on 13 October 1995 had a qualification in epidemiology; and if he will make a statement. [20145]

Mr. Malone: It is not possible to state how many employees employed by the Medicines Control Agency on 13 October 1995 had a qualification in epidemiology as the agency does not keep such records.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve the recruitment and retention of staff in the Medicines Control Agency with a qualification in epidemiology. [20146]

Mr. Malone: The Medicines Control Agency has an epidemiology unity with the post-licensing division which has staff with expertise and experience in pharmaco-epidemiology. Regarding recruitment and retention, the MCA is continually looking at ways in which to increase the complement of professional staff in general, including use of the agency's delegated authority to speed up the recruitment process and the flexibilities in terms and conditions which may be available.

Clinical Depression

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to include targets for improving the diagnosis and treatment of clinical depression in a future review of the "The Health of the Nation" programme. [20200]

Mr. Burns: We have no plans to introduce such targets.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people suffer from clinical depression in the United Kingdom each year. [20201]

Mr. Burns: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' survey of psychiatric morbidity carried out in Great Britain in 1993 revealed that 21 per thousand people aged between 16 to 64 years suffered from depression in the preceding week before the survey.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent his Department currently supports research into clinical depression; and what future plans he has for such support. [20202]

Mr. Burns: The Department's policy research programme has commissioned a number of studies into severe mental illness, many of which are related to depression. The national health service research and development programme strategy established a national mental health programme in 1992. The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant in aid from the Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC has a comprehensive portfolio of research on depressive illness, both at its own establishments and in the form of grant support to universities. These programmes are on-going.

Organophosphates

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reason the Government have not imposed a ban on the use of organophosphates; [20337]

(2) what restrictions exist on the sale of substances containing *(a)* malathion and *(b)* other organophosphates. [20338]

Mr. Horam: Organophosphates are insecticides, widely used on crops, animals—including sheep dips—and have some uses in the home and garden. Additionally, malathion, an OP, is used for treatment of headlice. Use of OPs for any of these purposes is strictly controlled.

Pesticides, such as those used on crops or in the home, must be approved by Ministers before they can be advertised, sold, supplied, stored or used. The independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides—ACP—advises the regulatory Ministers on the granting, amendment or revocation of individual approvals. Applicants for pesticides approvals must show that their products are effective, humane and pose no unacceptable risk to human beings, non-target species or the wider environment before approval is granted.

For a human medicinal product to be marketed in the United Kingdom it must receive a marketing authorisation granted by the licensing authority on the basis of safety,

quality and efficacy. Malathion is an authorised human medicinal product in the UK. There is no evidence to suggest that malathion when used for the treatment of head lice has led to any serious adverse effects. Its supply as a human medicine is restricted to sale in pharmacies only.

The Veterinary Products Committee is the independent group of scientific experts which advises the Government on veterinary medicines, including those containing organophosphorus substances. Before they can be marketed in the UK, all veterinary medicines must satisfy the statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Safety in this context includes the consumer of any product from the treated animal, the operator and the environment, as well as the health and welfare of the treated animal.

As to the reasons for not imposing a ban on OPs, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave him on 6 March 1997, column *707*.

Mineral Hydrocarbons

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the cancer risks associated with mineral hydrocarbons; and if he will list the conclusion of this research. [20695]

Mr. Horam: There has been no recent research commissioned or evaluated by the Department of Health into the cancer risks associated with mineral hydrocarbons.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those medicines containing mineral hydrocarbons which are sold across the counter at pharmacies. [20696]

Mr. Malone: There are 79 licensed medicinal products containing mineral hydrocarbons as the active constituent that may be supplied at pharmacies without prescription. A list of these medicines will be placed in the Library shortly.

NHS Beds (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* acute, *(b)* long stay and *(c)* other NHS beds there were in north Yorkshire in 1992; and how many there are currently. [20880]

Mr. Horam: The information available centrally can be found in "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest information is for 1995–96.

Finished Consultant Episodes

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* individual patients were treated and *(b)* finished consultant episodes were recorded by each NHS trust in north Yorkshire in the latest year for which figures are available. [20886]

Mr. Horam: Information on the number of patients treated is not available centrally. Data on finished consultant episodes for each trust in England is available in "Ordinary and day case admissions for England", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest year for which figures are available is 1995–96.

Local Pay

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent by NHS trusts in north Yorkshire on local pay negotiations in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97.

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not centrally held.

Nurses

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses have *(a)* left NHS employment and *(b)* completed basic nurse training in north Yorkshire in each of the last five years. [20877]

Mr. Horam: Information relating to nurses leaving national health service employment is collected by the Office of Manpower and Economics and is available in the annual report of the Review Body for Nursing staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine. Copies of the review body's annual reports are available in the Library.

The hon. Member may wish to contact the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, for details of nurses who have completed basic nurse training.

Patients (Readmissions)

Mr. Bayley: to ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients discharged following *(a)* surgery of all kinds, *(b)* cataract operation, *(c)* appendectomy, *(d)* prostatectomy, *(e)* hysterectomy and *(f)* total hip replacement in each NHS trust, were subsequently readmitted to hospital as an emergency within 28 days of the discharge in each of the last three years. [20885]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by north Yorkshire NHS trusts on preparing PFI schemes. [20883]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on 17 July 1996, column *562*. Further information is not held centrally.

NHS Trusts (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which north Yorkshire NHS trusts reduced their rate of elective admissions for patients of non-fundholding general practitioners in the final quarter of 1996–97. [20878]

Mr. Malone: Information is not available centrally in the form requested. Information by health authority on the number of elective finished consultant episodes is collected and figures for the final quarter of 1996–97 will be available later this year.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much was spent on hospitality by NHS trusts in north Yorkshire in *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1995–96; [20889]

(2) how many NHS consultants employed by each NHS trusts in north Yorkshire undertake private work; and what proportion of their time they spend on private work; [20873]

(3) what was the average number of hours worked by junior hospital doctors in each NHS trusts in north Yorkshire in each year since 1992–93; [20876]

(4) how much was spent on attendance fees, travel and expenses for NHS staff from north Yorkshire to attend conferences *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1995–96. [20888]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what would be the cost of making all NHS wards in north Yorkshire single sex wards; [20879]

(2) how many pay beds there are currently in each NHS trust in north Yorkshire; and how many were there in 1992. [20872]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Patients (Purchasing)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the procedures which North Yorkshire health authority has *(a)* ceased purchasing and *(b)* placed restrictions on purchasing for patients. [20875]

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for North Yorkshire health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the authority, Mrs. Susan Wrigley, for details.

Lease Cars

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many lease cars were provided for NHS managers in north Yorkshire in 1992; and how many are provided currently. [20887]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact trusts and the health authority in North Yorkshire for details.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the results of the pilot study for an alternative to litigation for clinical negligence will be available. [20837]

Mr. Horam: The mediation pilot scheme is expected to run until the end of this year. An evaluation of the project should be completed early in 1998. Ministers will then consider, in the light of the evaluation, whether further action is needed to encourage mediation as a possible alternative to litigation in resolving cases of alleged clinical negligence.

Depression Alliance

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the work of, and provide financial support for, the Depression Alliance. [20871]

Mr. Burns: The Depression Alliance provides information, advice, support and fellowship to all who suffer from depression and their carers and promotes research into the causes and prevention of depression. The Department provides financial support amounting to £33,000 in the current financial year and will provide £89,000 in 1997–98.

Ambulances (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulances there were in the North Yorkshire ambulance service fleet in 1992; and how many there are currently. [20882]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally. The second report of the Health Committee in Session 1994–95, copies of which are available in the Library, provides some information about the number of emergency ambulances in service at the time of the report.

Dental Patients

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were registered as NHS patients with a general dental practitioner in north Yorkshire in each year since 1992–93. [20874]

Mr. Malone: The table shows the number of adults, children and total number of patients registered at 30 September in each year from 1992 to 1996 in North Yorkshire family health services authority. Since May 1994, the Dental Practice Board has continued to improve procedures for eliminating duplicate registrations. This will have resulted in a lower registration figure.

General Dental Service: Number of child and adult registrations[1,2] *in North Yorkshire at 30 September from 1992 to 1996*

	Child registrations	*Adult registrations*	*All registrations*
September 1992	108,254	351,027	459,281
September 1993	112,996	343,918	456,914
September 1994	114,580	333,895	448,475
September 1995	113,699	319,965	433,664
September 1996	114,098	315,910	430,008

Notes:

[1] Dentists receive scheduled payments a month in arrears. Therefore the September figures relate to the status of registrations at the end of September. An active registration is one for which payment has been made in respect of September and which the registration was not due to lapse until after September.

[2] The number of registrations counted on the Dental Practice Board data basis is not the same as the number of patients registered, since it is possible for one patient to be registered with more than one dentist. Over the period April 1994 to September 1996 a considerable number of such duplicate registrations have been cleaned from the database. The Dental Practice Board processes which ensure the correct recording of registrations have also been tightened.

Cancer Deaths

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the patients in each NHS trust died within *(a)* one year and *(b)* five years of being diagnosed as

suffering from cancer of the (i) trachea, bronchus or lung, (ii) large bowel, (iii) female breast and (iv) ovary in the most recent period for which data are available. [20884]

Mr. Horam: Information on diagnosis and mortality is not collected in the form requested.

Corticosteroid

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the documented side-effects of the drug corticosteroid; and if this research is in the public domain. [20834]

Mr. Malone: The Department of Health has not commissioned research into the side-effects of corticosteroids. The available research into the side-effects of corticosteroids, as with all medicines, was assessed at the time of granting the individual products' marketing authorisations and continues to be evaluated by the Medicines Control Agency whenever new information emerges. A national programme for monitoring the side-effects of marketed medicines exists which includes evaluating data obtained from various sources such as the yellow card system, scientific literature, and information received from other regulatory authorities.

Much research has been published in the literature about the side-effects of corticosteroids and is therefore in the public domain. In addition, the side-effects for corticosteroids are well documented in product information which is produced by the manufacturer and authorised by the licensing authority, and in the "British National Formulary" which the Department sends free of charge to all doctors.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of current hospital admissions in the United Kingdom relate to adverse effects arising from the drug corticosteroid. [20836]

Mr. Horam: The information available centrally relates to the number of admissions to hospitals in England where an adverse reaction to "Drugs medicaments and biological substances in therapeutic use" has been recorded.

Information for 1994–95, which is the latest available year, shows that 886 finished consultant episodes—less than 1 in 10,000—related to adverse effects arising from the drug corticosteroid.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of food poisoning were reported in *(a)* York and *(b)* north Yorkshire in each year since 1979. [20838]

Mr. Horam: The figures are published annually in the series MB2 "Communicable disease statistics", copies of which are available in the Library. For 1996 data I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 13 February 1997, at column *286*. Provisional figures for the fourth quarter have been placed in the Library.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16789]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health was not formed until July 1988, therefore information is not available for the period before then.

A list of the number of written and oral parliamentary questions answered by the Department in the sessions 1988–89 to 1995–96, as supplied by the POLIS database, is available in the Library.

Other information requested is shown in the table:

Session	*PQ answered with "disproportionate cost" in reply*	*PQ answered with "Not available/collected centrally" in reply*
1988–89	21	156
1989–90	10	200
1990–91	18	193
1991–92	6	130
1992–93	35	327
1993–94	39	227
1994–95	42	310
1995–96	24	276

Source:
1. POLIS database.
2. Due to the on-going development of the POLIS database and the way figures were collated statistics given previously may now be out of date. The figures supplied in this reply are therefore not comparable with those given previously.

Medicines Commission

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the meeting dates for 1996 and 1997 of the Medicines Commission. [20149]

Mr. Malone: Medicines Commission meetings were held on the following dates in 1996:

17 May
19 July
20 September
15 November.

There have been no meetings so far this year. Meetings are scheduled for the following dates in 1997:

21 March
18 April
20 June
19 September
14 November.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 19 March 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Metropolitan Police Committee's advice on proposed objectives for the Metropolitan police in 1997–98. [21370]

Mr. Howard: Following consultation with the chairman of the Metropolitan Police Committee and the Commissioner, I have approved the following objectives for the Metropolitan police in 1997–98:

(i) To increase the security of the capital against terrorism;

(ii) to solve at least 20 per cent. of burglaries, 15 per cent. of street robberies and at least maintain at the present level detections for offences of supplying illegal drugs;

(iii) to reduce crimes of local concern in identified crime prone areas on every division;

(iv) to improve public reassurance through visible, effective patrolling and problem solving;

(v) to improve the briefing, tasking and debriefing of operational officers;

(vi) to equip operational staff with the management information they need to do their jobs;

(vii) to structure our central support services to ensure the best support to operational policing.

These objectives and details of how to address the Government's key objectives for policing are set out in the "Metropolitan Police Policing Plan 1997–98" which the Commissioner is issuing with my approval. I will be sending copies to all hon. Members whose constituencies fall wholly or partly within the Metropolitan police district and arranging for copies to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent report by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary on complaints and discipline in the Metropolitan police. [21392]

Mr. Maclean: I have today placed in the Library a note of the recommendations from the report, together with the Commissioner's responses and the police authority responses, which take into account the advice my right hon. and learned Friend and I have received from the Metropolitan Police Committee.

Asylum

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers from Saudi Arabia have been granted *(a)* refugee status, *(b)* exceptional leave to remain and *(c)* permanent residence in the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years by year of arrival. [20930]

Mr. Kirkhope: During the period 1987 to 1996, a total of 10 nationals of Saudi Arabia were granted asylum, or refused asylum but granted exceptional leave, in the United Kingdom. During the same period, fewer than 10 Saudi nationals, previously granted asylum or exceptional leave, were accepted for settlement—this excludes any such persons subsequently accepted for settlement on non-asylum related grounds.

A full breakdown of the above, by the year of arrival in the United Kingdom, is not available.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open Government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20940]

Mr. Howard: The information requested is as follows:

(a) *Investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration*

Commission for Racial Equality

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Data Protection Registrar

Horserace Betting Levy Board

In addition, consideration is being given to the possibility of including all executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) within the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

(b) *Scrutiny by the Audit Commission*

None (the Audit Commission has responsibility only for *local* government).

(c) *Scrutiny by the National Audit Office*

Commission for Racial Equality

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Data Protection Registrar

Gaming Board for Great Britain

Parole Board

Police Complaints Authority

(d) *Statutory provisions for Open Government*

The following executive NDPBs are required by statute to publish annual reports:

Alcohol Education and Research Council

Commission for Racial Equality

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Data Protection Registrar

Gaming Board for Great Britain

Horserace Betting Levy Board

Horserace Totalisator Board

Parole Board

Police Complaints Authority

Those NDPBs which are subject to scrutiny by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration are also subject to the code of practice on open government, and other NDPBs are being asked to develop codes of practice on similar lines.

(e) *Performance Indicators*

Home Office NDPBs are encouraged by the relevant sponsoring unit to develop and publish performance indicators and associated targets wherever possible.

(f) *Provisions under the Citizen's Charter*

Those executive NDPBs which offer a service to the public are encouraged to adopt the principles set out in the citizens charter and to publicise how these are being reflected in their working arrangements—for instance, the Commission for Racial Equality has published a statement of charter standards and the Gaming Board has published customer service targets in its annual report.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20906]

Mr. Howard: The information requested is as follows:

(a) *Publication of annual reports*

Alcohol Education and Research Council (statutory)
Commission for Racial Equality (statutory)
Criminal Cases Review Commission (statutory)
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (statutory)
Data Protection Registrar (statutory)
Gaming Board for Great Britain (statutory)
Horserace Betting Levy Board (statutory)
Horserace Totalisator Board (statutory)
Parole Board (statutory)
Police Complaints Authority (statutory)

(b) *Publication of annual accounts*

Alcohol Education and Research Council (statutory)
Commission for Racial Equality (statutory)
Criminal Cases Review Commission (statutory)
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (statutory)
Data Protection Registrar (statutory)
Gaming Board for Great Britain (voluntary)
Horserace Betting Levy Board (statutory)
Horserace Totalisator Board (statutory)
Parole Board (statutory)
Police Complaints Authority (statutory)

(c) *Publication of the minutes of meetings*

The Commission for Racial Equality keeps copies of the Commissioners' monthly meetings, which are available to the public. (voluntary arrangement)

(d) *Publication of the agendas of meetings*

The Commission for Racial Equality keeps copies of the Commissioners' monthly meetings, which are available to the public. (voluntary arrangement)

(e) *Publication of registers of members' interests*

The Police Complaints Authority and Horserace Betting Levy Board have registers of members' interests which are currently not published. The Commission for Racial Equality voluntarily publishes a register of its members' interests in its annual report.

In addition, the Gaming Board plans to set up a register and the Horserace Totalisator Board are considering this issue.

Firearms

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the disposal of weapons banned under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. [20693]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The majority of the lawfully held weapons which will become banned under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 will be destroyed by the police in accordance with local police arrangements. Some weapons which are compatible with current police firearms standards may be retained for police training purposes; others of particular interest may be taken into local museum collections.

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if a category A inmate awaiting determination of extradition proceedings can be held or apply to be held in Northern Ireland. [20367]

Miss Widdecombe: No. The Extradition Act 1989 makes no provision for a separate jurisdiction for Northern Ireland. Under section 9 of the Extradition Act, the court of committal can only remand a person in custody to a prison in England and Wales.

Immigration Forms

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to replace the current application forms for foreign nationals wishing to apply for leave to remain in the United Kingdom. [21371]

Mr. Kirkhope: The current application forms expire on 14 April 1997. Revised versions of the six existing forms have been prescribed, together with a new form for those applying for an extension of stay or indefinite leave to remain following the refusal of asylum. These will be valid until 14 April 1998. From today until 14 April 1997 applications may be made on either the newly prescribed forms or the existing versions. Only the newly prescribed versions may be used for applications made on or after 15 April 1997. The new forms will be available shortly from the application forms unit—0181 760 2233—and copies have been placed in the Library.

John Kinsella

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reach a decision on his review of the case of John Kinsella. [20534]

Mr. Kirkhope: My right hon. and learned Friend has decided that the case of John Kinsella should be referred to the Court of Appeal under section 17(1)(a) of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968. A letter was sent from the Home Office to the Court of Appeal on 17 March 1997.

Scientific Procedures (Dogs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps were taken to ensure that the dogs acquired from sources *(a)* within the European Union and *(b)* outside the European Union used in scientific procedures during 1995 were purpose bred. [20659]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The provenance of imported dogs is routinely checked. In 1995, all such dogs were purpose-bred for laboratory use.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Kenya

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the present humanitarian situation in Kenya; and if he will make a statement. [20971]

Dr. Liam Fox: Much of Kenya is currently experiencing drought conditions, the worst affected areas being in eastern and north-eastern provinces. The British Government have provided emergency assistance totalling £3.9 million through Oxfam and the World Food Programme, mainly for the provision and distribution of food for pastoralist communities. The long rains, expected at this time, are now beginning to fall in some parts of the country. We are continuing to monitor the situation carefully.

ENVIRONMENT

Energy Efficiency

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to promote cleaner and more efficient energy use. [19453]

Mr. Clappison: The Government actively promote energy efficiency through a wide range of initiatives and programmes across all sectors, including information and advice, voluntary schemes, and selective use of grants, incentives and regulation. The Government also established, and fund, the Energy Saving Trust. The trust's resources for the years to 1999–2000 were increased in the November Budget by £21.5 million, to £71.5 million.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list *(a)* the number and *(b)* the cost of (i) television advertisements, (ii) national newspaper advertisements and (iii) other advertisements that will be made in total as part of the energy efficiency advertising campaign; [20967]

(2) how many calls have been received by Intelmark from members of the public in response to the current energy efficiency advertising campaign; [20969]

(3) what is the total cost of the current energy efficiency advertising campaign; [20965]

(4) if he will give the dates that the current energy efficiency advertising campaign *(a)* began and *(b)* will end; [20964]

(5) how many additional inquiries from members of the public have been made to local energy advice centres, as a result of the current energy efficiency advertising campaign; [20968]

(6) if he will list *(a)* the number and *(b)* the cost of (i) television advertisements, (ii) national newspaper advertisements and (iii) other advertisements to date as part of the energy efficiency advertising campaign; [20966]

(7) how much money is being paid to Intelmark to deal with inquiries from members of the public as part of the current energy efficiency campaign. [20970]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: These are matters for the Energy Saving Trust, the independent private company which has developed and is running the current energy efficiency campaign.

Flood Alleviation

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for how much of the year it is estimated that water will flow naturally through the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton flood alleviation scheme channel; and for how much of the year water will have to be pumped into the channel in order to keep the water moving. [20951]

Mr. Clappison: Water will flow naturally through the flood relief channel all year round without the need for pumping.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens' charter. [20943]

Sir Paul Beresford: Details of the executive non-departmental bodies sponsored by my Department are listed in the Cabinet Office publication, "Public Bodies 1996". A copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on Thursday 22 February 1996, *Official Report*, column 259. Since then, Central Manchester development corporation has been wound up. Otherwise, the position in respect of the bodies covered by that answer remains unchanged.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20903]

Sir Paul Beresford: Details of the executive non-departmental bodies sponsored by my Department are listed in the Cabinet Office publication, "Public Bodies 1996". A copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on Tuesday 27 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *454–55*. Since then, Central Manchester development corporation has been wound up. Otherwise, the position in respect of the bodies covered by that answer remains unchanged.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Water Services publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20952]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on Monday 22 July 1996 *Official Report*, column *29*.

Commission for the New Towns

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current remit of the Commission for the New Towns; and if he will make a statement. [20851]

Sir Paul Beresford: The current remit of the Commission for the New Towns is to continue disposing of the remaining new town land holdings and other assets at a rate consistent with maximising receipts and securing value for money, while also disengaging from its remaining liabilities in an orderly cost-effective manner.

The role of the commission after March 1998 was addressed in the reply given on 11 March 1997 by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration *Official Report*, columns *120–21*.

Details of how the commission carried out its remit can be found in its annual report and accounts 1995–96, copies of which were laid before Parliament on 15 October 1996.

Millennium Park (Grimsby)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to announce his decision on the application for planning permission made by Kestonbond Holst Ltd. of Laceby, North East Lincolnshire, to build its proposed millennium park in Grimsby. [21163]

Sir Paul Beresford: No decision on whether the application to which my hon. Friend refers, should be called in for determination by the Secretary of State, can now be made until after the general election.

Housing

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the scheme for construction contracts under the Housing Grant, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 will become operative. [21138]

Mr. Clappison: The consultation paper, "Making the Scheme for Construction Contracts", which the Department of the Environment published last November, pointed out that it was reasonable to assume that the scheme would not be laid before Parliament before spring 1997. We have made good progress with the consultation exercise but it is now clear that we will not be laying the scheme in the current Session.

The consultation document canvassed views about the need for an "adjustment period" between the making of the scheme and the implementation of the complete legislative package. The responses showed that an adjustment period of a few months could well be needed. The precise duration may depend, to some extent, on the date the scheme is approved by Parliament.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will implement revised arrangements for administering European structural funds for England. [21388]

Mr. Curry: Following my announcement of 3 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *580*, we notified the European Commission about the revised arrangements, and issued draft administrative guidance to programme monitoring committee partners, the local authority associations and the Training and Enterprise Councils National Council. The consultation demonstrated general support for introducing a more strategic, integrated approach to the administration of European structural fund programmes in England through the introduction of action plans and a single European regional development fund vote. Detailed points have been made about the implementation of this approach which the Government will consider further.

We expect the European Commission to agree the 1997 to 1999 objective 2 programmes during April. To ensure that work on the implementation of these programmes can proceed without delay, we shall therefore finalise and issue the administrative guidance as soon as possible.

The Government have taken account of the views of local partners about the position in the Mersyside objective 1 area where, as with objective 5(b) areas, there is an on-going six-year programme covering the period until December 1999. In all these areas, the revised arrangements will apply where the appropriate programme monitoring committees wish to adopt them for the remaining life of the current programmes.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Sykes: To ask the secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the final receipt from the sale of the Housing Corporation's loan portfolio to NatWest Markets. [21389]

Mr. Curry: The purchase price will be subject to changes in the underlying portfolio and to movements in the gilt rate until completion on 26 March, and I cannot therefore give a figure for the final sale receipt until after Parliament has risen. However, I shall write to my hon. Friend when the final figure is available, and place copies of the letter in the House Libraries.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Garel-Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has yet completed the sale of the Building Research Establishment. [21423]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Yes. The sale transaction was completed earlier today.

Air Quality

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the mean *(a)* winter season and *(b)* annual concentrations of nitrogen dioxide at each national air quality monitoring site in each year since 1986–87, or the first year when the site commenced monitoring. [20276]

Mr. Clappison: A copy of the requested information, for national automatic air quality monitoring sites, has been placed in the Library of the House. Statistical information on air quality, including nitrogen dioxide, is also available in the Department of the Environment's "Digest of Environmental Statistics No. 18, 1996" and "Air Pollution in the United Kingdom: 1995" published on behalf of the Department by the National Environmental Technology Centre. Copies of both reports have been placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

Nirex Reports

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that Nirex prepares quantitative analysis of the in-model and out-of-model factors which could significantly affect the calculated risk produced by Nirex 97. [20677]

Mr. Clappison: None. However, Nirex will need to satisfy the Environment Agency of the robustness of its safety case for any underground repository.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will send Cumbria county council copies of the Nirex reports N94, N96, N97, N98 and N99; [20676]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the Nirex DSAT reports N95, N96, N97, N98 and N99. [20955]

Mr. Clappison: The Department does not have copies of these reports.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the relationship between the identified geological features and the measured responses reported in Nirex report 5/96/003; [20678]

(2) what period of time will be allowed for independent peer review of the document Nirex 97. [20679]

Mr. Clappison: This information should be requested from UK Nirex Ltd.

Business Rates

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about delays to preparations for, or provision of information about, the proposed business rate relief for village shops and similar businesses; and if he will make a statement on the timetable for implementing such relief. [20453]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have received a number of representations about rate relief for village shops. To allow local authorities sufficient time to prepare for the scheme, we intend to bring the rate relief measures into force from 1 April 1998.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals have been put to him, since 1 January 1995, from organisations representing small businesses, for *(a)* abolition of the business rates system and its replacement by another system for raising revenue and *(b)* fundamental changes in this system as it affects small businesses; and which proposals were received from more than one such organisation. [20452]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have received a number of different proposals from organisations representing small businesses for the reform of the rating system.

Harbour Porpoises

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to identify special areas of conservation, under the EU habitats and species directive, for harbour porpoises; and if he will make a statement. [20518]

Mr. Clappison: None. The available scientific evidence is insufficient to identify sites which meet the requirements set out in article 4(1) of the directive relating to aquatic species which range over wide areas.

Land Reclamation

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much land has been reclaimed by development corporations since their inception; and if he will make a statement. [20470]

Mr. Curry: The urban development corporations have made substantial progress in the reclamation of derelict and contaminated land.

A total of 2,976.3 hectares of land had been reclaimed up to 31 March 1996.

Pollution Inspectorate (Report)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the report TR-Z2-11 (Oldfield 95) prepared for HMIP. [20691]

Mr. Clappison: None. This is a matter for the Environment Agency.

Go-Karts

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the current arrangements for health and safety inspections carried out at go-kart circuits; and if he will make a statement. [20539]

Sir Paul Beresford: Operators of go-karts are either employers or self-employed people conducting an undertaking. As such, they are subject to the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and relevant regulations under the Act.

Circuits are inspected by either the Health and Safety Executive or local authorities depending on the main activity at the premises.

Building Regulations

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions are included in the Building Regulations 1991 *(a)* to ensure that underground drainage systems are resistant to damage by rats and *(b)* to prevent rats escaping from the sewerage systems; and if he will make a statement. [20987]

Mr. Clappison: The Building Regulations 1991 are cast in functional form, and as such contain no specific guidance on protecting underground drainage systems from rats. However guidance on the construction of drainage systems is provided in the approved document to part H of the Building Regulations, and includes advice on measures to deal with infestation of drains and private sewers by rodents.

Sewer Baiting

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the legal responsibility of local authorities and the water service companies with respect to sewer baiting. [20988]

Mr. Clappison: There is no specific duty on water and sewerage companies in relation to the control of rats in sewers. However, all sewerage undertakers have programmes to control and reduce the number of rats in their systems. This includes the use of baits in pumping stations and air vents to stop rats entering the system, or on ledges within sewers.

Local authorities have a long-standing duty to keep themselves informed about the sufficiency of drainage systems in their area to ensure that they do not pose a threat to public health. Failure to control rat infestations on property could be enforceable by the local authority environmental health officer under part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, if it is judged to be a statutory nuisance.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Prime Minister's Question Time

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a staement on *(a)* his assessment of, and *(b)* consultations on, possible changes to the format of Prime Minister's Question Time; and what was the outcome. [20451]

Mr. Newton: I have nothing further to add to my speech in the debate on parliamentary procedure on 11 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns 631–71.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to amend the Standing Orders to limit the time taken by Front-Bench spokespersons on speeches at the Scottish Grand Committee. [20448]

Mr. Newton: I think matters of this kind are better dealt with informally.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Ms Marie Younie

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received concerning the case of Marie Younie and the governing body of Belfairs community college in Leigh; and if she will make a statement concerning the conduct of the governing body and the Funding Agency for Schools in relation to their treatment of Ms Younie and the legal costs involved in her case. [20633]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend has received many representations in support of both the governing body and Ms Younie since the breakdown in their relations. It is not possible to guarantee good working relations in any occupation and it is particularly unfortunate when this happens in schools. Nevertheless, this is an internal school matter. It is for the governing body to determine what action is deemed appropriate, but the Funding Agency for Schools is responsible for ensuring propriety in the use of public funds by grant-maintained schools.

Free School Meals

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will rank primary schools in order of the proportion of children eligible for free school meals. [20509]

Mrs. Gillan: Information on the proportion of children eligible for free meals for any particular school is not published centrally.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many Bills her Department and its predecessor Department have sponsored in each of the last 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19772]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The Department has sponsored a total of 32 Government Bills between 1982 and 1997. The breakdown for each year is as follows:

	Bill	*Result*
1981–82	Employment Bill	Passed
1982–83	Education (Fees and Awards) Bill	Passed
1983–84	Education (Grants and Awards) Bill	Passed
	Trade Union Bill	Passed
1984–85	Education (Corporal Punishment) Bill	Withdrawn
	Further Education Bill	Passed
1985–86	Education Bill (Lords)	Passed
	Education (No.2) Bill	Passed
	Education (Amendment) Bill	Passed
	Sex Discrimination Bill (Lords)	Passed
	Wages Bill	Passed
1986–87	Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill	Passed
1987–88	Education Reform Bill	Passed
	Employment Bill	Passed
1988–89	Dock Work Bill	Passed
	Employment Bill	Passed
1989–90	Education (Student Loans) Bill	Passed
	Employment Bill	Passed

	Bill	Result
1990–91	School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill	Withdrawn
	School Teachers' Pay and Conditions (No.2) Bill	Passed
1991–92	Education (Schools) Bill	Passed
	Further and Higher Education Bill	Passed
	Offshore Safety Bill	Passed
1992–93	Education Bill	Passed
	Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill	Passed
1993–94	Education Bill (Lords)	Passed
	Sunday Trading Bill	Passed
1994–95	(Disability Discrimination Bill	Passed Supporter)
	(Jobseekers Bill	Passed Supporter)
1995–96	Education (Student Loans) Bill	Passed
	Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Bill	Passed
1996–97	Education Bill	In Process

Skills Mismatch

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the extent of skills mismatch on a regional basis. [19470]

Mr. Paice: The Department funds an annual survey of employers' recruitment difficulties which provides data at regional level and monitors similar data from the CBI. Recruitment difficulties tend to be higher in the southern regions of the country. However, they are generally lower in these regions than they were at the peak of the economic cycle in 1990. Many recruitment difficulties may not be due to skills mismatch.

Employment Service

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what performance targets will be set to ensure that the Employment Service achieves its aims and objectives in 1997–98. [21391]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Employment Service's aim is to promote a competitive, efficient and flexible labour market by helping unemployed people into work, while ensuring they understand and fulfil the conditions for receipt of jobseeker's allowance. This aim is supported by five objectives.

I have set the Employment Service targets for each of its objectives as follows:

Objective A:

To offer unemployed people, particularly the longer-term unemployed and others at a disadvantage in the labour market, help and advice in finding work or appropriate training; and to encourage employers to recruit them.

Targets

1. To place 1.75 million unemployed people into work, of whom 1,050,000 million are JSA claimants.
2. 47.5 per cent. of total JSA claimant placings to be long-term (six months plus) claimants.
3. To place into work 75,000 JSA claimants out of work for two years or more.
4. 43 per cent. positive outcomes for JSA claimants invited to a 12-month advisory interview.
5. 150,000 ES clients to start on training for work.

Objective B:

To offer people with disabilities particular help and advice in finding and retaining work or appropriate training; and to help and encourage employers to make such opportunities available to them.

Target:

6. 4.8 per cent. of total unemployed placings achieved to be people with disabilities.

Objective C:

To advise jobseekers of the labour market conditions for receipt of jobseeker's allowance and to ensure that those receiving it are available for and actively seeking work, where appropriate by requiring specific activities of individual claimants.

Targets:

7. 10 per cent. of initial claim enquiries not to be pursued as new claims.
8. 145,000 submissions to adjudication where there is an arguable case with supporting information to show that the claimant is not available for, actively seeking or willing to accept work.
9. 70 per cent. of adjudication decisions made within 14 days.
10. 97 per cent. of Training for Work allowance payments to be accurate.
11. To ensure 90 per cent. of claims to JSA are passed to the Benefits Agency within seven days from date of claim.
12. To ensure that the accuracy of ES activity on a JSA claim is 97 per cent.

Objective D:

To provide services to all clients in accordance with published standards and expectations, developed in line with the citizens charter initiative.

Standard:

13. To deliver the standards of service in the jobseeker's charter.

Objective E:

To manage the delivery of programmes and services efficiently, effectively and economically, and within the resources available.

Target:

14. To achieve £40 million in efficiency savings.

In addition, the Employment Service will be measured against the following criteria, to ensure that it is satisfactorily operating the jobseeker's allowance:

to achieve effective joint working between ES and BA;

to improve the service to jobseekers;

jobseekers should improve the effectiveness and intensity of their jobsearch;

the intervention regime operates effectively, both qualitatively and quantitatively; and staff and clients understand the purpose of jobseeker's agreements and use them effectively.

Remploy

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what targets Remploy has been set in its 1997–98 annual performance agreement. [21390]

Mr. Paice: My noble friend the Minister of State has written to the chairman of Remploy approving the 1997–98 annual performance agreement between the Department and the company. This agreement covers the

year from 1 April 1997. It has been negotiated by the chief executive of the Employment Service on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The targets are:

the average number of disabled people employed by Remploy Ltd. will be at least 9,800;

the average number of disabled people employed under the Interwork scheme will be at least 3,000;

at least 200 disabled employees will move from Remploy factories to Interwork, having been employed there for at least one year, or from Interwork or factories to open employment;

Remploy Ltd. will keep within a total unit cost target (operating deficit per disabled worker) of £10,000;

the unit of cost of Interwork should be no more than £4,400;

Remploy Ltd. will keep within an operating deficit of £99 million (including reorganisation costs).

The text of the annual performance agreement has been placed in the Library.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent in each year from 1990 to 1996 on the teachers' early retirement scheme in respect of retirements on grounds of ill-health; and what was the number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female teachers covered in each year, broken down in respect of (i) class teachers and (ii) head teachers in (1) England and (2) Wales. [15157]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* The estimated expenditure on ill-health retirements and the number of male and female teachers by grade and sector is shown in the table. These are all teachers who were in receipt of ill-health pensions in the year in question.

	Estimated total expenditure on ill-health retirements	*Maintained schools sector*								
		Heads			*Other teachers*			*Other sectors*		
	£ million	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
		Numbers of teachers								
1990–91	273	1,119	1,176	2,295	7,313	14,882	22,195	4,730	5,972	10,702
1991–92	320	1,278	1,300	2,578	8,167	16,722	24,889	5,215	6,498	11,713
1992–93	376	1,413	1,408	2,821	9,072	18,552	27,624	5,830	7,126	13,956
1993–94	450	1,632	1,595	3,227	10,231	20,618	30,849	6,474	7,772	14,246
1994–95	517	1,961	1,842	3,803	11,725	23,475	35,200	6,862	7,924	14,786
1995–96	574	2,176	1,972	4,148	12,841	25,627	38,468	7,627	8,924	16,551

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, columns 346–47, what was the role of Professor Caddy in relation to evaluating evidence concerning the crash of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [20605]

Dr. Liam Fox: In 1996, Professor Caddy conducted an independent scientific review of forensic analysis cases carried out at the Forensic Explosives Laboratory—formerly the Royal Armaments Research and Development Establishment—which might have been affected as a result of the contamination of a centrifuge with a high explosive, RDX. The forensic analysis of Lockerbie evidence was carried out at this laboratory. Professor Caddy's report stated

"it can only be concluded that the results from all cases remain a true measure of the presence of the explosive RDX".

This statement covered the Lockerbie case.

Government Communications Headquarters

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to announce a decision on the options presented in the consultants' review of future needs of GCHQ; and if he will make a statement. [20632]

Mr. Rifkind: The study into GCHQ's future accommodation needs, and how they will be met, is being conducted by an in-house team of civil servants with professional advisers. The outcome will be presented to the director of GCHQ this spring. If it is concluded that the private finance initiative is likely to offer a viable solution, Ministers will be consulted and an announcement made as soon as possible thereafter.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of GCHQ. [20627]

Mr. Rifkind: GCHQ has had to adapt quickly to the world's changes, but the need for good intelligence to guide policy making, crisis management and military operations remains as strong as ever. GCHQ will continue to make a major contribution to the nation's security well into the next century.

Mr. Jones: To ask the secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the terms of reference for the consultants' review of future needs of GCHQ; and if he will make a statement. [20630]

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) on 17 January 1997, column *424*.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to publish the findings of the consultants' review of future requirements of GCHQ; and if he will make a statement. [20629]

Mr. Rifkind: Any advice that GCHQ has received from the professional advisers engaged for this study will include privileged or confidential information which, if disclosed, might affect GCHQ's legal or commercial position, or those of third parties. I do not therefore propose to publish this information.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what basis the contract to carry out a review of future needs of GCHQ was tendered; how many bids were made; what criteria were used to decide the successful bidder; what was the cost of the review; and if he will make a statement. [20631]

Mr. Rifkind: The review is being conducted internally by GCHQ; a number of external advisers are involved but GCHQ maintains control of the study. The advisers' contracts were tendered and awarded in accordance with standard public sector procurement practice in order to ensure value for money in the delivery of these services. It is not Government policy to provide details of the expenditure of the intelligence and security agencies.

Family Reunion Applications

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the current number of family reunion applications from nationals at British missions in *(a)* Kenya, *(b)* Ethiopia, *(c)* Eritrea, *(d)* Egypt and *(e)* elsewhere at the latest date for which information is available. [20928]

Dr. Liam Fox: The number of family reunion applications at the British embassy in Addis Ababa from Somali nationals in 1996 was 603. The number of family reunion applications from nationals of other countries, or of applications at other British missions is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20904]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the following table:

Publish	*Annual reports*	*Annual accounts*	*Minutes of meetings*	*Agendas of meetings*	*Register of members interests*
British Council	[1]Yes (statutory)	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No
Britain-Russia Centre	Yes (statutory)	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No
British Association for Central and Eastern Europe	Yes (statutory)	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No
Commonwealth Institutes in London and Edinburgh	Yes (statutory)	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No
Great Britain-China Centre	Yes (statutory)	Yes (statutory)	No	No	[2]Yes
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No	No
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	Yes (voluntary)	Yes (voluntary)	No	No	[3]Yes
Commonwealth Scholarship Commission	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No	No
Crown Agents Holding and Realisation Board	Yes (statutory)	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No

[1] Under the provisions of the Charities Act 1993.
[2] Executive committee members only.
[3] From 1 April 1997.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20942]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the following table:

Publish	*Investigation by Parliamentary Commissioner*	*Scrutiny by Audit Commission*	*Scrutiny by NAO*	*Statutory provisions for open government*	*Performance indicators*	*Performance under citizens charter*
British Council	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Britain-Russian Centre	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
British Association for Central and Eastern Europe	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Commonwealth Institutes in London and Edinburgh	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Great Britain-China Centre	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Westminster Foundation For Democracy	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Commonwealth Scholarship Commission	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Crown Agents Holding and Realisation Board	No	No	Yes	No	No	No

Entry Clearance Fees (Bangladesh)

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of fees charged in pounds sterling for applications for entry clearance in Bangladesh; what was the level of fees charged on *(a)* 1 January 1996 and *(b)* 1 January 1994; and if he will make a statement. [20428]

Dr. Liam Fox: Entry clearance fees are set in sterling at rates which apply worldwide. The fees which applied on the dates in question can be found in the Consular Fees Order 1989 No. 152 (as amended), the Consular Fees Order 1995 No. 1617 and the Consular Fees Order 1996 No. 1915. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Somali Nationals

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications have been received at British missions from Somali nationals seeking family reunion in the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [20929]

Dr. Liam Fox: The number of family reunion applications at the British embassy in Addis Ababa from Somali nationals in 1996 was 603. Neither figures for previous years nor applications from Somali nationals at missions in other countries are held centrally. They could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Thomas Hamilton

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister when Ministers were informed that Thomas Hamilton of Dunblane was a police informer. [20656]

The Prime Minister: Lord Cullen's inquiry looked very closely into Thomas Hamilton's background and his relationship with the police and no information came to light to suggest that he had ever been a police informant. Inquiries of the four forces in whose area Thomas Hamilton ran boys' clubs and of the Scottish crime squad have confirmed this.

Organophosphates

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy that organophosphates will not in future be used to protect British troops. [20336]

The Prime Minister *[answer 18 March 1997]:* The Ministry of Defence aims to provide the best available means to protect its military personnel, including, where appropriate, the use of pesticides for environmental health purposes. I am advised that pesticides in the services' inventory are kept under review to ensure that appropriate products are available for use in a variety of situations. Some organophosphate pesticides will continue to be included in the inventory as long as these are judged to provide the best available protection in particular areas of actual or potential deployment.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister in how many cases in the past 12 months he was advised that the cost of answering a parliamentary question would exceed £450; and in how many of those cases he declined to provide an answer on grounds of disproportionate cost. [20651]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clywd) on 27 February, *Official Report*, column *320*.

Parliamentary Delegations

Mr. Butler: To ask the Prime Minister what changes there are in the composition of the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of the Western European Union. [21454]

The Prime Minister: Following the recent death of Martin Redmond, who served as a member of the United Kingdom delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of Western European Union from 1987, the hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) has been appointed as a representative in place of Mr. Redmond and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) has been appointed as a substitute.

TRANSPORT

Worcester Transport Package

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide guidance to Hereford and Worcester county council on the steps it needs to take to demonstrate that it has consulted local people in respect of its next package bid for Worcester; and if he will make a statement. [20808]

Mr. Watts: If Hereford and Worcester county council needs guidance on any aspect of developing the transport package for Worcester, including the adequacy of its public consultation arrangements, they should consult officials at the Government office for the west midlands or my Department.

Croydon Tramlink

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the passenger forecasts for Croydon tramlink. [21049]

Mr. Bowis: This is a commercial matter for Tramtrack Croydon Ltd., the private sector consortium which has won the concession to build, operate and maintain Croydon tramlink.

Driving Test Centre, Aylesbury

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the driving test centre in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. [21024]

Mr. Bowis: The lease for the present driving test centre in Aylesbury expires on 21 June 1997. The Driving Standards Agency is negotiating a short-term lease to

remain at the centre until an alternative property, offering better facilities for candidates and examiners, can be found within the town.

Jubilee Line Extension

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of future funding plans for the Jubilee line extension on the safety of the line. [21025]

Mr. Bowis: There has been no change in the position on safety, which remains the first priority for London. Underground Ltd. in all aspects of its undertaking, including the Jubilee line extension.

Road Traffic Accidents (Hemsworth)

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* fatal and *(b)* non-fatal road traffic accidents occurred in Hemsworth in (i) 1979, (ii) 1990 and (iii) 1996. [20720]

Mr. Bowis: Information is not readily available by parliamentary constituency. Information is available by local authority, and I list the figures for Wakefield metropolitan district council.

Accidents in Wakefield district by road class and severity

		Year of accident		
Accident severity	*1st road class*	*1979*	*1990*	*1995*
Fatal	'A' road	15	7	6
	Other	17	16	8
	All roads	32	23	14
Serious injury		272	330	221
Slight injury		830	849	981
	All roads	1,102	1,179	1,202

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20933]

Mr. Bowis: Following are the answers for each of the Department of Transport's executive NDPB's.

(a) The Traffic Director for London, the Trinity House Lighthouse Service (THLS) and the Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB).

(b) None.

(c) The Traffic Director for London, the London Regional Passengers' Committee (LRPC), THLS and NLB.

(d) None.

(e) The Traffic Director for London, THLS and NLB.

(f) The Traffic Director for London.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of the Rail Regulator publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this in each case is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20891]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 19 July 1996, *Official Report*, Volume 281, column *682–83*.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of the Rail Regulator which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20936]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 19 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *682*.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20895]

Mr. Bowis: Following are the answers for each of the Department of Transport's executive NDPB's.

(a) The Traffic Director for London and the London Regional Passengers' Committee (LRPC), under statutory requirement. The Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB) and Trinity House Lighthouse Authority (THLB), as a consolidated report under statutory requirement.

(b) The Traffic Director for London, under statutory requirement and the LRPC, voluntarily. The NLB and THLB as a consolidated report, under statutory requirement.

(c) The LRPC, voluntarily.

(d) The LRPC, voluntarily.

(e) None.

M40

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the deterioration of the M40; and if he will make a statement. [20477]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 18 March]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Dr. Kim Howells, dated 19 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about his assessment of the deterioration of the M40 motorway.

As you may be aware, a Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) contract under the Government's Private Finance Initiative has been awarded to UK Highways M40 Ltd for the operation and maintenance of the M40 from Junction 1 to Junction 15. The contract is 30 years and work began on 6 January 1997.

The age and type of construction of individual sections of the M40 vary considerably and hence there are significant variations in the residual life of both pavement and surfacing.

Prior to the DBFO contract the Agency's Agents responsible for maintaining the motorway undertook regular surveys of the structural and surface conditions of the road. They maintained the M40 in accordance with Highways Agency standards. All of the

Agents records were made available to tenderers bidding for the DBFO contract. For the section between junctions 1A and 3 the contract requires that the road be widened from 3 lanes to 4 and this will inevitably necessitate substantial treatment of the existing carriageway.

Part of the route between junctions 6 and 8 is in need of major maintenance and the DBFO contract stipulates that the existing concrete carriageway shall be overlaid with "black top" during the course of this year.

The DBFO Contract requires that the contractor undertake routine inspections and structural assessments of the road and that they maintain the road to a high standard. This mechanism will ensure that the road will not deteriorate in the future as the penalty for failure to meet their obligations would be termination of the contract.

I am confident that the M40 is not deteriorating and that with the current contract a high standard of maintenance is assured for the next thirty years.

Vehicle Excise Discs

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assumptions the Treasury uses when calculating the cash flow loss to the Exchequer of being paid in two instalments for six-month vehicle excise discs as against the single instalment for a 12-month disc. [20908]

Mr. Bowis: The cash flow loss depends on the interest and inflation rates pertaining at any time. At the current Treasury discount rate of 6 per cent., and inflation of around 2.8 per cent., the loss on the private and light goods licence would be some £3.20 if the annual duty were paid in two six-monthly instalments.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many (i) six-month and (ii) 12-month vehicle excise discs were issued for the last year in which figures are available. [20910]

Mr. Bowis: The number of licences issued against VED payments in the UK in 1995–96 was:

(i) 6 month: 20,342,490

(ii) 12 month: 17,933,098.

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total administrative cost of issuing vehicle excise discs for the last year in which figures are available. [20909]

Mr. Bowis: The issue of vehicle excise discs is an integral part of the vehicle registration and licensing system. The total administrative cost in the UK in 1995–96 was some £128 million, excluding enforcement.

TREASURY

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* EMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992 and the broad function to be carried out by the contractor, and the value of the contract in each case. [17609]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury has awarded only two contracts to the contractors mentioned since 1992:

(a) EDS in December 1993, valued at £1,475.80 for the supply and installation of a memory board and

(d) Capita in March 1994, valued at £22,031.25 for a consultancy to review the personnel statistic division.

Coal Mining

Mr. Barron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many persons employed in the coal mining industry had as their place of abode a location within *(a)* each travel-to-work area and *(b)* each local authority area in South Yorkshire in each of the last seven years; [17536]

(2) how many persons employed in the coal mining industry had their place of work within *(a)* each travel-to-work area and *(b)* each local authority area in South Yorkshire in each of the last seven years; [17595]

(3) what information he has collected since 1990 on the *(a)* place of residence and *(b)* place of work of persons employed in the coal mining industry. [17596]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 25 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Kevin Barron, dated 19 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions on information that has been collected since 1990 on persons employed in the coal mining industry in South Yorkshire.

Information by place of residence is not available at this level of detail. Estimates based on returns from employers, for place of work and travel-to-work area, are available biennially from 1989. The Statistics of Trade Act (1947) requires that I do not publish data which could reveal information about individual employers. The reduction in the number of businesses engaged in coal mining in South Yorkshire has caused me to treat most of the information you seek as confidential. Within the aforementioned restrictions I have supplied the available information in the attached table.

Employees in coal mining[1] in south yorkshire

Local authority district	*1989*	*1991*	*1993*	*1995*
Barnsley	[2]—	2,900	[2]—	[2]—
Doncaster	6,200	5,200	—	—
Rotherham	5,200	—	—	—
Sheffield	—	—	—	—
Total	16,500	13,100	4,000	1,100
Travel-to-work area[3]				
Barnsley	—	—	—	—
Doncaster	6,000	5,200	—	—
Rotherham/Mexborough	4,600	—	—	—
Sheffield	—	—	—	—
Total	16,500	13,200	4,000	1,100

Source:

ONS 1989–1993; Census of Employment.

1995; Annual Employment Survey.

[1] 1989: Standard Industrial Classification 1980; coal extraction and manufacture of solid fuels.

1991–95: Standard Industrial Classification 1992; mining and agglomeration of hard coal.

[2] Confidential.

[3] Includes areas outside South Yorkshire.

Duplicate NHS Numbers

Mr. Barron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent, and what other contributions have been made, by the General Register Office and the Registrars of Births and Deaths towards the costs of correcting the problem of duplicate NHS numbers. [19102]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Kevin Barron, dated 19 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your recent question on how much has been spent by the General Register Office and the Registrars of births and deaths towards the costs of correcting the NHS duplicate number problem.

To date, the Office for National Statistics (incorporating the General Register Office) has spent £33,000 on discussions with the NHS Executive, analysis of problems causing duplicate NHS numbers for babies, and planning and programming software changes. Registrars of births and deaths have not spent money on correcting the NHS duplicate number problem.

In addition, advice and instruction have been given to Registrars during routine helpline work. This is provided as part of the General Register Office day-to-day support of the local registration service.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate what the unemployment level would have been for the United Kingdom if inactive jobseekers were included in the totals in each year from 1992 to the present; [20097]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of unemployed people in the United Kingdom who were not active in their search for employment but wished to be employed, in each year from 1992 to the present. [20096]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 19 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions on time series of the numbers of people unemployed, inactive job seekers and people who were not active in their search for employment but wished to be employed.

Estimates available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) are shown in the attached table. The LFS uses the widely accepted International Labour Office (ILO) definition of unemployment. The ILO measure covers people who were available to start work in the two weeks following their LFS interview and who had either looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview of were waiting to start a job they had already obtained.

People who would like a job, but have not sought one in the last four weeks, or have looked for work but are not available to start in the next two weeks are not unemployed according to the ILO definition. However, the ONS appreciates that there is a lot of interest in these groups. We regularly publish information about the numbers and characteristics of these people in the LFS Quarterly Bulletin. For example, table 31 in Quarterly Bulletin Number 18, published in December 1996 shows that 6 per cent of those in Great Britain who wanted a job, but were not seeking one were "discouraged workers" (i.e. they were not looking for work because they believed no jobs were available).

Detailed analyses of any aspect of the LFS, including the groups you have asked about, are possible via the publicly accessible LFS database.

The Labour Force Survey Quarterly Bulletin is available in the House of Commons Library. The LFS database can also be accessed via the House of Commons Library.

People who are ILO unemployed or are economically inactive and would like a job

	ILO unemployed	*Inactive wanting a job of which:*	
		Seeking work[2]	*Not seeking work*[3]
1992[1]	2,769	326	1,707
1993	2,936	324	1,972
1994	2,736	276	2,155
1995	2,454	283	2,153
1996	2,334	227	2,261

[1] In spring 1992 only the inactive people of working age (men 16–64, women 16–59) were asked if they wanted a job. People over working age were not asked. All inactive people aged 16 and over were asked the question in other years.
[2] But not available to start within next two weeks.
[3] Within last four weeks. Also note that more detailed analysis of this category is available in the LFS Quarterly Bulletin.
Source:
ONS, Labour Force Survey.

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees work in a workplace which employs fewer than 10 people in the Hemsworth constituency. [20725]

Mrs. Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 19 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many employees work in a workplace which employs fewer than 10 people in the Hemsworth constituency.

Information is available from the Annual Employment Survey on workplace units employing between 1 and 10 employees (inclusive). At September 1995 there were 3,,300 employees working at such workplaces in the Hemsworth parliamentary constituency.

Basic Pension Plus

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the change in the amount of tax which people on (1) *(a)* a quarter, *(b)* a half and *(c)* three quarters of average earnings and (2) average earnings can expect to pay (i) over their working life and (ii) over their lifetime under the proposed tax regime of the Government's basic pension plus proposal, relative to the existing tax regime. [20435]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The precise details of the scheme will be decided in the light of full consultation on the Green Paper. Estimates of the amount of tax paid by people over their working life and entire lifetime would also depend on the exact nature of changes in the tax regime, work patterns and life expectancy. Broadly speaking, over a lifetime, the two different tax treatments are equivalent from the saver's

point of view—apart from the treatment of the lump sum—as long as the person's marginal rates of tax are the same in work and in retirement.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the level in 2040 of the single and married person's tax allowances for those over the age of 65 years if these allowances are uprated in line with *(a)* prices and *(b)* earnings; and what proportion of average earnings this would represent. [20433]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* Allowances at 1996–97 prices and the proportion of average earnings these represent are in the tables.

Income tax allowances (£) in 2040–41

	Increased in line with	
	Prices	*Earnings*[1]
For people aged 65 to 74		
Personal allowance	4,910	11,740
Married couple's allowance[2]	3,115	7,455
For people aged 75 and over		
Personal allowance	5,090	12,170
Married couple's allowance[2]	3,155	7,545

[1] Assuming a 2 per cent. real growth in earnings each year and without statutory rounding in annual increase.
[2] Tax relief for these allowances is restricted to 15 per cent.

Proportion of average earnings in 2040–41 which income tax allowances represent

	ased in line with	
	Prices	*Earnings*
	Per cent.	*Per cent.*
For people aged 65–74		
Personal allowance	11	27
Married couple's allowance	7	17
For people aged 75 and over		
Personal allowance	12	28
Married couple's allowance	7	17

UK Overseas Investments

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of United Kingdom overseas investments are in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* the European Union, *(c)* the United States of America, and *(d)* the rest of the world. [20686]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Andrew Hunter, dated 19 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the overseas investment.

The figures requested are shown in the table below. They are based on flows and stock of direct investment overseas i.e. where the United Kingdom company has a significant and lasting interest in an enterprise operating overseas. No information is available centrally regarding the geographical breakdown of portfolio investment overseas.

Direct Investment: Percentage of UK Total

Area	*Flows during 1995*	*Stock at end 1995*
Germany	6	5
EU (including Germany)	37	36
USA	40	31
Rest of the world	23	33

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has agreed the business plan for the Office for National Statistics for the period 1997–2000. [21421]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Yes. Copies of the plan, giving details of the performance targets I have set for 1997–98, have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Authorities (Restitution)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to implement the recommendations in the Law Commission report "Restitution: Mistakes of Law and Ultra Vires Public Authority Receipts and Payments" (Law Com. No. 227). [21456]

Mr. Streeter: The Government have given careful consideration to the report, which makes recommendations falling under two quite separate heads. The Government have accepted the Law Commission's recommendations for general legislation on the restitution of benefits conferred under a mistake of law and will introduce legislation implementing those recommendations when a suitable opportunity arises. The further recommendations, relating to ultra vires receipts by public authorities, raise other issues, which we are now considering.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open Government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20939]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor's Department sponsors two such bodies: the Legal Aid Board and the Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board. However, the latter has been inactive since March 1992 when the Lord Chancellor announced his decision to postpone implementation of the authorised practitioners scheme.

The Legal Aid Board is subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, scrutiny by the National Audit Office, statutory provisions for open government, performance indicators and provisions under the citizens charter. It is not subject to scrutiny by the Audit Commission.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members's interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20892]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor's Department sponsors two such bodies: the Legal Aid Board and the Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board. However, the latter has been inactive since March 1992 when the Lord Chancellor announced his decision to postpone implementation of the authorised practitioners scheme.

The Legal Aid Board publishes annual reports which are laid before Parliament. Annual accounts are included in that report, as is information about the background of board members. The board does not publish the agendas or minutes of meetings of the board or its committees. There are statutory requirements for the board to publish information as to the discharge of its functions in relation to legal aid and for the Lord Chancellor to lay before each House of Parliament a copy of every statement of accounts and report of the auditors sent to him in accordance with requirements under the Legal Aid Act 1988.

Office for the Supervision of Solicitors

Mr. Amess: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department who arbitrates in instances where the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors is unable to agree with the Legal Services Ombudsman in respect of complaints dealt with by both bodies. [20849]

Mr. Streeter: There is no provision for arbitration in such cases. However, the Legal Services Ombudsman has confirmed that, in practice, the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors complies with all his recommendations to pay compensation to a compliant. In cases where the ombudsman recommends that a compliant be reconsidered, recommendations will have been complied with once the Office has formally reconsidered the complaint. The ombudsman cannot direct the office to arrive at a particular decision.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will make a statement on the composition of the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors; [20850]

(2) what criteria the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors employs in determining complaints referred to it; how many complaints it has received to date; how many complaints have been referred to the Legal Services Ombudsman; and in respect of how many of these the ombudsman has found in favour of the plaintiff. [20852]

Mr. Streeter: The composition of the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors and the handling of complaints are matters for the Law Society and the office.

During 1996, the Legal Services Ombudsman reported on 1,282 cases dealt with by the office and its predecessor, the Solicitors Complaints Bureau. In 389—30 per cent.— of those reports, there was a finding favourable to the complainant in that the ombudsman made a recommendation in their favour or recorded a formal criticism of the professional bodies handling of the original complaint.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Hygiene

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to implement the recommendations of the hygiene advisory teams report by William Swann; what was the total cost of producing this report; and to which industry bodies it was circulated. [19662]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statements made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 6 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns *1023–35*, and 12 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns *372–85*. The review was carried out by the hygiene advice teams, made up of one official veterinary surgeon and one meat hygiene inspector. It involved visits to all licensed plants, producing a written report and agreeing an action programme for each plant. A summary report was produced. The total cost was £436,000.

The final report was made available at the meeting of the Meat Hygiene Service industry forum held on 5 August 1996. Representatives of the following industry bodies were present:

British Meat Manufacturers Association
British Pig Association
British Poultry Meat Federation
Farmers Union of Wales
Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers
International Meat Traders Association
National Farmers Union
National Federation of Meat and Food Traders
Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers
Scottish Federation of Meat Traders Association.

Cattle Feed

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date avoparcin was first licensed for use in the feed of beef cattle over three months old; what were the Swann committee recommendations relating to feed antibiotics in calves *(a)* under three months and *(b)* over three months of age; on what date the Swann committee recommendations were first made; what factors determined the degree of consideration given by the Veterinary Products Committee to Swann committee recommendations prior to the issuing of a licence for cattle over three months old; and if he will make a statement. [20658]

Mrs. Browning: Avoparcin was first licensed for beef cattle over three months old on 20 July 1976.

A copy of the Swann committee's report is in the Library of the House. It is entitled: "Report of the Joint Committee on the use of Antibiotics in Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Medicine" and was published in November 1969. At that time the feeding of antibiotics,

without prescription, was permitted only for pigs and poultry. About the use of antibiotics in calves, the report said:

"We recommend that 'feed' antibiotics conforming to paragraph 9.11 should be available without prescription for calves up to 3 months of age".

The report made no recommendation for calves over three months of age.

The Veterinary Products Committee always takes account of the principles of the Swann committee's report when it considers the statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy, in considering applications for marketing authorisations for antibiotics.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement of (ii) voluntary. [20901]

Mr. Boswell: The annual reports and accounts of the following executive non-departmental public bodies, for which my right hon. and learned Friend is responsible, are published:

Apple and Pear Research Council
Food from Britain
Home-Grown Cereals Authority
Wine Standards Board of the Vintners' Company
Horticultural Development Council
Horticulture Research International
Meat and Livestock Commission
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Sea Fish Industry Authority
Milk Development Council.

Legislation requires, in each case, that the annual report and accounts are published. Minutes and agendas of executive non-departmental bodies' meetings are not published. There is no statutory requirement to do so.

The MAFF executive non-departmental public bodies will state in their individual codes of best practice for board members, which are currently being adopted, that registers of members' interests will be made available to the public. There is no statutory requirement to publish registers of members' interests.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20944]

Mr. Boswell: The information required on executive non-departmental public bodies is as follows:

SUBJECT TO:

(a) Investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner

Agricultural Wages Committees

(b) Scrutiny by the Audit Commission

None

(c) Scrutiny by the National Audit Office

Wine Standards Board of the Vintners' Company
Agricultural Wages Committees
Agricultural Wages Board
Regional Flood Defence Committees
Food from Britain
Sea Fish Industry Authority
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Horticulture Research International
UK Register of Organic Foods
Milk Development Council

National Audit Office access rights to the other bodies are as follows:

Home-Grown Cereals Authority (in respect of publicly voted money)
Meat and Livestock Commission (in respect of agency work
Horticultural Development Council arrangements are being finalised
Apple and Pear Research Council arrangements are being finalised

(d) Statutory provisions for open government

Access to government information is set out in a code of practice which the bodies are currently adopting. There are no statutory provisions for open government.

(e) Performance Indicators

Wine Standards Board of the Vintners' Company
Home-Grown Cereals Authority
Food from Britain
Sea Fish Industry Authority
Meat and Livestock Commission
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Horticulture Research International
Agricultural Wages Committees
UK Register of Organic Foods
Horticultural Development Council
Milk Development Council
Apple and Pear Research Council (details are being finalised)

(f) Provisions under Citizen's Charter

To date, the Home-Grown Cereals Authority, the Meat and Livestock Commission and the Sea Fish Industry Authority have all published citizens charter standards of service.

Animal Protection

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends to support the proposal by the German Government that article 3 of the EC treaty should be amended to include among the activities of the Community a contribution to the improvement of animal protection; and if he will make a statement. [20946]

Mrs. Browning: At the intergovernmental conference, we have made clear our view that there should be a formal, legal obligation on the Community to take account of the welfare requirements of animals in specific areas such as agriculture and transport. The draft protocol that we tabled last July would achieve this aim. Germany has made a slightly different proposal, which also recognises the Community's role in improving animal welfare, but is more generalised in its scope. We believe that the more

specific approach we have proposed is more likely to lead to the result we seek and is therefore the better of the options.

Flood Alleviation

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the estimated cost of the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton flood alleviation scheme at the time that the plans were first put out for public consultation; and what is the current estimated cost of the scheme. [20947]

Mr. Boswell: Following the local public inquiry held in 1992, the cost of the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton flood alleviation scheme was estimated to be £73.4 million—on a fixed price basis. The Environment Agency's current estimate is some £83 million, which includes nearly £9 million for projected inflation. The costs will be partially offset by income from the sale of sand and gravel excavated from the flood relief channel.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the number of households that will be protected by the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton flood alleviation scheme, once it has been completed. [20949]

Mr. Boswell: The Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton flood alleviation scheme is designed to provide protection from a one in 65 year flood event for 12,500 people, 4,800 domestic properties and 700 commercial buildings locally. In addition, the presence of the scheme will help to prevent disruption of roads and railways and the loss of communications systems and public utilities over a much wider area.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated completion date for *(a)* the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton flood alleviation scheme and *(b)* the subsequent landscaping. [20948]

Mr. Boswell: Work on the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton flood alleviation scheme is expected to be finalised before the end of 2001, and the main flood relief channel should be completed by the end of 2000. Landscaping is being carried out in parallel with the construction works and should be finished within the same, overall time scale.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration has been given in the plans for the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton flood alleviation scheme, to the effects of the lowering of the water table, lower average rainfall, and climate change on the likelihood of flooding in the area, and the volume of water which will flow though the new channel. [20950]

Mr. Boswell: These aspects have been fully considered by the Environment Agency during scheme design. The existence of the flood relief channel will have no measurable impact on groundwater levels. While there has been a trend towards lower average rainfall in southern England in recent years, studies related to global climate change suggest that there could be an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme events, the type of event against which this scheme is intended to provide protection. It is too early to quantify any such changes, but clearly it would be imprudent to design a scheme for anything less than the flood conditions experienced in the past 50 years.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Science Base

17. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received from British industry on the funding of the United Kingdom science base. [19457]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have regular meetings with different sections of British industry to discuss its involvement with our excellent science and engineering base, the funding for which has increased by over 10 per cent. in the past decade.

Investment

18. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the latest figures for the flows of inward and outward investment to and from the United Kingdom. [19458]

Mr. Lang: Inward investment into the United Kingdom amounted to £19 billion in 1995, a threefold increase on 1994. Outwards flows totalled nearly £24 billion as United Kingdom firms continued to build on their position in international markets.

23. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the relative importance of each of the factors taken into account by potential inward investors when selecting a country for investment; and if he will make a statement. [19465]

Mr. Lang: Inward investors locate in the United Kingdom for a variety of reasons that are unique to each company. Some of the reasons most regularly given by investors include our low corporation tax, low cost of production, established enterprise culture, a skilled and adaptable work force and our established industrial infrastructure.

33. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade which EU countries have invested more per employed person than the United Kingdom in the period since 1979. [19477]

Mr. Greg Knight: Since 1979 business investment in the United Kingdom has accounted for a greater proportion of gross domestic product than in France, Germany and Italy.

Trade Deficit

20. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's overall deficit on total trade in goods in the years *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [19462]

Mr. Nelson: In each year since 1994 the deficit in trade in goods has been just over 1.5 per cent. of gross domestic product, down from 2 per cent. in 1993. Between 1974 and 1978 the deficit averaged 3 per cent. of gross domestic product.

31. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's overall deficit on trade in goods for the years 1993, 1994 and 1995. [19475]

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) earlier today.

32. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's overall deficit on trade in goods in recent years. [19476]

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) earlier today.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the deficit in trade in goods in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996. [19461]

Mr. Nelson: The deficit in trade in goods in both 1995 and 1996 was 1.7 per cent. of gross domestic product. Overall, the balance of payments current account is close to balance and at its strongest for a decade.

Trade Balance (Electrical Products)

22. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's balance of trade with EU countries, with special reference to heavy electrical products. [19464]

Mr. Nelson: British exports of goods to the EU doubled between 1988 and 1995. During the same period exports of heavy electrical products rose by 116 per cent.

Exports (European Union)

25. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will commission a study into the change in the level and categories of United Kingdom-manufactured and semi-manufactured exports to other EU countries since the single market commenced. [19467]

Mr. Nelson: Figures for these exports are already available. They show that since the single market commenced in 1993, the value of UK exports of finished manufacturers to the EU has risen by 47 per cent. and of semi-manufactures by 27 per cent.

Synex Ltd.

26. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the decision of the South West industrial development board not to award a regional selective assistance grant to Synex Ltd. in July 1995. [19469]

Mr. Greg Knight: The role of regional industrial development boards, such as the SWIDB, is to provide independent advice on applications for RSA. The decision whether or not to award a grant rests solely with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who in the south-west is represented by officials at the Government office for the south-west. Each application for regional selective assistance is determined on its merits against the common criteria for the scheme. The project as presented to GOSW was judged not to have satisfied the criteria and therefore the GOSW properly decided in May 1995 not to award a grant to Synex. This decision was confirmed in July 1995 following an appeal by the applicant.

Inward Investment

27. **Mr. Atkins:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the main reasons cited to his Department by inward investors for locating in Britain. [19471]

Mr. Greg Knight: I refer to the reply previously given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the number of jobs created through inward investment by overseas companies in *(a)* North Yorkshire, *(b)* west Yorkshire and *(c)* the north of England during the last five years. [20684]

Mr. Knight: We expect 11,671 new jobs to arise from inward investment projects in the north of England notified to the Invest In Britain Bureau where decisions were taken during the financial year 1995–96. These figures are a combination of returns from north-east England, north-west England and Yorkshire and the Humber.

The Yorkshire and Humberside development agency has estimated that the number of jobs created through inward investment was 80 in north Yorkshire and 1,619 in west Yorkshire.

Semi-conductor Industry

28. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to provide further assistance to the British semi-conductor industry. [19472]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government are already providing assistance to the British semi-conductor industry. It is supporting the National Microelectronics Institute under the information society initiative programme for business. The institute, a partnership between the industry and Government, aims to promote the growth of the microelectronics industry in the UK, in particular by stimulating the manufacture of semi-conductors in the UK. Another part of the information society initiative, the microelectronics in business programme, introduces UK companies to semi-conductor technology, and encourages best practice in its use in products. In addition, a number of individual semi-conductor manufacturers, and their suppliers, have received assistance in respect of new investment.

Human Genetics Advisory Commission

29. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the work of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission. [19473]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Human Genetics Advisory Commission held its first meeting on 27 February, where it discussed its work plan and agreed initial priorities. Members identified the implications of genetic testing for insurance as an immediate priority and the chairman has written to his counterpart in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to confirm the adequacy of the existing law on human cloning. The HGAC also confirmed its commitment to listening and making itself open to wider public views on the issues at stake. I refer the hon. Member to the advisory commission's press statement on 27 February and to my statements of 27 February and 10 March on the implications of the cloning of an adult sheep at the Roslin Institute. Copies of all three have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

35. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the work of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission. [19479]

Mr. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) earlier today.

Export Trade

30. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact of the rise in the value of the pound upon the United Kingdom export trade; and if he will make a statement. [19474]

Mr. Nelson: Exports are still expanding despite the rise in the value of the pound. Export volumes grew at an annualised rate of 7 per cent. during the final quarter of 1996 and manufacturers expect orders and deliveries to continue to grow.

UK Trade

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what response he has made to representations from the Confederation of British Industry regarding the relative strength of the United Kingdom's trading position in Europe. [19463]

Mr. Nelson: The UK's trade with Europe has climbed to record levels. At a recent meeting with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, the CBI welcomed the very low level of output price inflation that was contributing to this performance.

Social Chapter

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what legislation under the social chapter is currently being *(a)* prepared and *(b)* considered; and if he will make a statement. [19466]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Issues under discussion include rights for part-time and temporary workers, information and consultation at national level and the reversal of the burden of proof in sex discrimination cases. The Commission is considering future action in many other areas, including individual dismissals and sick pay. All these measures would be likely to impose damaging, job-destroying burdens on business if we gave up our opt-out from the social chapter.

Privatisation

Mr. Grocott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations he has received on his recent publication, "Privatisation". [19478]

Mr. Lang: My Department has received numerous requests, principally from delegates to the conference and from UK diplomatic posts overseas, for additional copies of the booklet "Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free".

The publication has also prompted six written parliamentary questions. Five of these have been from the hon. Member. The sixth was tabled by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson).

Computers (Millennium)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment has been made by the World Trade Organisation of infrastructure risk to computer systems of millennium compliance; what plans he has to pursue the issue; and if he will make a statement. [20188]

Mr. Ian Taylor: There has been no assessment to date by the World Trade Organisation of this issue. The Government are very aware of the significance of the problem and its implications for world trade and have been working hard to address it within the UK and the European Union. We are looking at how best to bring the issue to international attention in close consultation with UK industry. We have suggested to the Commission that the matter should be raised with the ISO.

Coal Mine Closure Programme

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact of the coal mine closure programme on related industries. [19459]

Mr. Page: The hon. Member may recall that the Employment Select Committee published a report in January 1993 which, among other things, considered the consequences of British Coal's proposed pit closures for related industries. The Government provided a full response to that report.

Small Companies (Audit Exemptions)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the results of the recent consultation on proposed amendments to the small companies audit exemptions; and what actions he plans to take. [21459]

Mr. Lang: I am pleased to announce that all three of our deregulatory proposals were endorsed by the public consultation, and I propose to implement them at once, in order to bring the benefits to small companies as soon as possible.

Our main proposal, to raise the audit exemption threshold to £350,000 annual turnover and so to abolish the statutory requirement for the "audit exemption report" which has been required since 1994 in the turnover band from £90,000 to £350,000, was supported by two thirds of the 272 respondents to the consultation.

This change will bring the deregulatory benefits of total audit exemption to an estimated further 200,000 small companies.

The current arrangements will be retained for those charities which have chosen to incorporate, pending an early consultation on options for harmonisation of the financial reporting requirements under charities legislation on the one hand and companies legislation on the other.

The two technical amendments on which we also sought views, relating to the treatment of companies which form part of groups and of dormant companies, enjoyed the overwhelming support of respondents. Companies which form part of groups will not be required to file audited individual accounts, provided that they are not otherwise excluded and that the turnover of the group does not exceed the threshold. The regulations clarify that dormant companies are automatically entitled to audit exemption on the same terms as qualifying non-dormant companies.

A summary of the responses to the consultation will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Public Encryption Services

Mr. Lidington : To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to issue a public consultation document on the Government's proposals on the provision of public encryption services. [21461]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I am pleased to announce that, further to my reply to the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) on 10 June 1996, *Official Report*, columns *13–14*, I am today publishing a consultation paper outlining the Government's detailed policy proposals for the licensing of trusted third parties (TTPs) for the provision of encryption services. The proposals involve licensing TTPs who offer encryption services to the public in order to facilitate the development of electronic commerce; to protect consumers; and to preserve the ability of the intelligence and law enforcement agencies to fight serious crime and terrorism, and protect economic well-being and national security, by requiring disclosure of encryption keys under safeguards similar to those which already exist for warranted interception.

This initiative is part of the Government's overall policy on promoting electronic commerce for the benefit of both business and the public. It forms an integral part of the Government's strategy for building the information society in the UK—the information society initiative.

The consultation paper seeks comments from industry and the public on the broad outline of the proposed legislation. Copies are available in the Library of the both Houses. I expect to make a further statement on the future direction of the Government's proposals once the outcome of the consultation exercise is known.

Telecommunications

Mr. Lidington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has received a report by the Director General of Telecommunications for the year 1996, under section 55 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. [21458]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Yes. The 13th report by the Director General of Telecommunications is being published today. it covers the period 1 January to 31 December 1996. Copies of the report have been laid before each House of Parliament and placed in the Libraries.

Channel 5

Mr. Lidington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the international clearance of frequency 35 for use by Channel 5. [21455]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Frequency channel 35 will be used from nine major transmission sites and, because of the potential of such transmissions to create interference problems with neighbouring countries, it is necessary to co-ordinate their use with other countries. The Radiocommunications Agency has obtained agreement to transmission from five of the sites—Fenton, Sudbury, the Wrekin, Hannington, and Ridge Hill. It is anticipated that the outstanding issues concerning the other sites—Kilvey Hill, Waltham, Bilsdale and Darvel—will be resolved by the end of April.

According to Channel 5 Broadcasting, the use of frequency channel 35 could mean that an extra 4 million people will be able to receive the service, increasing coverage to over 80 per cent. of the population. The Government announced on 16 September 1996 that Channel 5 will have access to this frequency for a period of five years. Towards the end of this period, the Government will review the position on the development of the market for advance digital services and will make a judgment whether, and if so for what period of time, Channel 5 may continue to use the channel. In due course, the channel will be redeployed to facilitate the new digital broadcasting opportunities. We have agreed with Channel 5 that it is responsible for developing a sensible transition plan to enable the channel to be retrieved and for warning those customers affected that they may need to migrate in due course to alternative delivery mechanisms such as cable, satellite or digital terrestrial television.

Overseas Investment

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, columns *59–60*, on overseas investment, if he will list for each percentage the value of outward direct investment at 1995 prices. [20047]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* The value of UK direct investment to the European Union, the United States and the rest of the world, in current prices, is given in the table. Information in constant prices is not available.

UK foreign direct investment overseas

£ million, current prices

	EU15	*USA*	*Rest of the world*	*Total*
1984	–279	2,767	3,326	5,814
1985	2,492	3,230	2,903	8,625
1986	2,238	7,559	2,001	11,798
1987	2,240	12,591	4,328	19,159
1988	5,358	10,472	5,086	20,916
1989	5,940	11,676	3,875	21,491
1990	5,103	47	4,958	10,108
1991	3,916	2,235	3,153	9,304
1992	4,621	1,321	4,165	10,107
1993	6,146	7,476	3,237	16,859
1994	8,274	4,905	6,161	19,340
1995	9,613	10,364	6,047	26,024

Source:

Business Monitor MA4, Overseas Transactions, ONS.

Notes:

1. Negative investment flows indicate net disinvestment overseas. Such disinvestment occurred in the Netherlands in 1984.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19383]

Mr. John M. Taylor: For the agencies, responsibility for expenditure in this area lies with the chief executives. I have asked them to reply direct.

Two service providers in the main Department have citizens charter commitments. These are the redundancy payments service, which has a charter, and the overseas trade services, which has a charter standard statement.

For the RPS, approximately 1.6 million charter leaflets were produced between 1991 and 1996 at a cost of around £37,000. This figure does not include drafting and distribution costs which are not separately identifiable.

OTS has included its charter standard statement in a number of publications including "A guide to export services". Around 80,000 copies of this document were issued in 1996. Costs for the charter standard statement are not separately identifiable in the costs of producing and distributing these publications. Figures are not available for the cost of drafting the charter standard statement.

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 March 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about expenditure associated with the production of customer charters and Customer Standard documents.

One thousand copies of NWML's Code of Practice were printed at a cost of £870 in December 1993. This figure does not include the costs of drafting and distribution, which are not separately identifiable.

Letter from J. C. Octon to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 March 1997:

In the absence of the Chief Executive I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about the cost of publishing and circulating customer charters and customer standard documents.

The Patent Office produces a single leaflet which serves as its charter statement and customer service standards. We have no estimate for staff time spent in drawing up and consulting over its content but during the past financial year 36,000 copies have been printed and circulated at a cost of £3,150. This includes the cost of printing 200 customer service standard posters for display within the office.

Letter from John S. Holden to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 March 1997:

You recently asked the President of the Board of Trade for information about expenditure related to customer charters and customer standard documents. As Chief Executive I have been asked to reply to you direct.

As an Agency responsible for aspects of law enforcement, we also publish a Code for Enforcement which is combined with our Charter Standard Statement as a single document. The costs about which you have asked, and which apply to the document as a whole, are as follows:

Drafting: £2,000 Approximately one man month

Publishing: £5,547

Circulation: £750 Approximately for postage costs incurred

Copies issued: 6,200.

Letter from Desmond Flynn to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 March 1997:

You asked the President of the Board of Trade a question about the Department of Trade and Industry expenditure in drafting, publishing and circulating each of their Customer Charters and Customer Standard documents: and how many copies of each document have been issued. I am replying in the absence of Peter Joyce, the Chief Executive, from the office.

The Insolvency Service first issued its Published Standard during the financial year 1992/93. Between February 1993 and November 1995 a total of 147,900 leaflets and 886 Published Standard posters and charts of performance against standard were produced at a total cost of £26,024. This included both design and print work.

The Published Standard was recently revised and a further 280,000 leaflets and 50 posters have been produced for use in the coming 12–18 months at a total cost of £7,967.

It is not possible to quantify the cost of drafting the revised Published Standard as this was work completed within The Service as part of normal staff duties. As regards distribution, the leaflets are made available to the public at the offices of Official Receivers and at the Courts.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 March 1997:

You have put down a Parliamentary Question asking for the cost of producing and issuing Charter Standard documents. I have been asked to reply direct to you on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency.

My Agency produces a number of Citizen's Charter related information sheets for the benefit of our customers. These documents set out our Charter Standard principles, details of our performance against published standards, how to complain against Agency levels of service and a Code of Practice explaining the responsibilities of our Local Offices and how they work with businesses in enforcing wireless telegraphy legislation.

Our family of Charter leaflets were introduced during 1994, since when the total numbers and costs of printing and numbers issued are as follows:

RA Complaints Procedures (RA238): 4,000 have been ordered to date at a cost of £424.00, of these 3,695 have been distributed;

RA Performance Standards (RA239): 5,000 have been ordered to date at a cost of £1,400.00, of these 4,639 have been distributed;

RA Local Offices Code of Practices (RA248): 3,000 have been ordered at a cost of £500.00, of these 2,786 have been distributed;

RA Citizen's Charter Statement (RA251): 7,000 have been ordered at a cost of £1,083, of these 6,161 have been distributed.

It is impossible to say what the cost of circulating these documents has been. Many copies are given out at exhibitions which the Agency attends, distributed along with other documents requested by customers or in multiple numbers to interested parties. The drafting of the leaflets is all done in-house by staff who are involved in these duties in any event and it is again impossible to separate out these costs. With the exception of the Performance Standards leaflet (amended and reprinted annually), none of these documents has been changed since their introduction, nevertheless, drafting of the originals is estimated to have occupied around 5 man days of effort in total.

For your information I enclose copies of each of these leaflets, (RA239 is currently under review to cover our 1997/98 targets), which I hope will be of interest to you.

Structural and Cohesion Fund Receipts

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the projected net receipts under the combined structural and cohesion funds of the EC budget of (i) Spain, (ii) Portugal, (iii) Greece and (iv) Ireland, from 1997 to 1999, expressed as an average sum per day. [20048]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* It is not possible to give figures for structural and cohesion funds receipts for the period 1997–99 by member state, since these will depend upon the rate of implementation of each of the member state's SCFs programmes. Forecasts of gross allocations by member state for the period 1994–99 are available, however. These are shown in the table, expressed as an average sum per day. These allocations will be partly offset by the contributions each member state makes to the total SCFs budget, but the size of these contributions, for 1997–99, will not be known until 1999.

Gross allocations under the structural and cohesion funds 1997–99: average per day

	Million ecu, 1996 prices
Spain	22
Portugal	10
Greece	9
Ireland	4

HEALTH

Mental Health

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the expenditure on mental health services as a proportion of total NHS spending in each year since 1988–89. [18733]

Mr. Burns: Information in the form requested is not available. Hospital and community health services expenditure on mental health services from 1988–89 is shown in the table. HCHS expenditure increased in real terms by 0.5 per cent. between 1988–89 and 1990–91 and by 2.7 per cent. between 1991–92 and 1995–96. Local authority gross expenditure on mental health services increased in real terms by 220 per cent. from £79.1 million in 1988–89 to £339.1 million in 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available.

Hospital and community health services mental health expenditure

	HCHS mental health expenditure 1995–96 prices £ million	*HCHS mental health expenditure as a proportion of total HCHS expenditure Percentage*
1988–89	2,140.8	12.50
1989–90	2,136.3	12.34
1990–91	2,125.2	12.07
1991–92	2,444.9	11,58
1992–93	2,523.3	11.56
1993–94	2,452.6	11.00
1994–95	2,437.2	10.69
1995–96	2,511.5	10.65

1. The 1995–96 figures are provisional.

2. The figures include expenditure on the purchase of the following services:

Hospital—Inpatient and outpatient expenditure—the consultant specialties of mental health, child and adolescent psychiatry, forensic psychiatry, psychotherapy and old age psychiatry. Day patient expenditure—in the categories mental health (alcoholism, drug abuse, psychogeriatrics and general), child and adolescent psychiatry and forensic psychiatry.

Community—Community mental health nursing.

3. Figures for 1991–92 onwards cannot be compared with those for earlier years due to changes in accounting practices following the NHS reforms.

Lung Cancer

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average annual cost to the NHS for treating people suffering from *(a)* lung cancer and *(b)* mesothelioma over the last five years. [19377]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Hospital Buildings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has the cost of maintaining redundant and empty hospital buildings in each region in the last year for which figures were available. [19416]

Mr. Horam: Estimated costs of maintaining redundant and empty hospital buildings for 1995–96 in each region are in the table.

Region	Cost £000s
Northern and Yorkshire	1,500
Trent	1,584
Anglia and Oxford	590
North Thames	1,800
South Thames	1,100
South and West	1,300
West Midlands	442
North West	1,500

GPs (Malpractice or Incompetence)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners *(a)* were accused by patients of malpractice or incompetence, *(b)* were disciplined following such accusations and *(c)* successfully appealed to industrial tribunals, in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [21021]

Mr. Malone: The hon. Member may wish to refer to "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for England, 1996 Edition" by the Department of Health, copies of which are available in the Library.

Psychiatric Readmissions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients aged 16 to 64 years have been readmitted to the care of a psychiatric specialist within 90 days of discharge in each of the last five years *(a)* nationally, *(b)* by regional health authority and *(c)* by health authority. [20120]

Mr. Burns: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. Information on the number of patients aged 16 to 64 who were readmitted as emergencies to the care of a psychiatric specialist within 90 days of previous discharge has been collected by health authorities since 1 April 1996. The first annual estimates for 1996–97 will be available later this year.

Carcinogens

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 10 human carcinogens his Department assesses to be most dangerous, giving in each case estimates of the number of the *(a)* deaths and *(b)* illnesses they cause. [20024]

Mr. Horam: There are many types of human cancer and for most the causes are not fully understood. Genetic, behavioural and environmental factors all have a role, but it is difficult to accurately quantify the mortality and morbidity caused by each specific factor.

Smoking has been associated with lung cancer and several other cancer sites and has been shown to contribute to approximately 30 per cent. of all cancer deaths. Smoking is responsible for at least 80 per cent. of deaths from lung cancer which represents over 25,000 deaths per annum in England and Wales.

It has been estimated that geophysical factors, ultraviolet light and background ionising radiation, may account for about 3 per cent. of all cancer deaths. Of lung cancer deaths it is estimated that around 5 per cent., some 1,600 a year in England, might be partially attributed to exposure to radon.

The available medical and scientific data have also identified alcoholic beverages, life style factors, certain chemical processes and a number of individual chemicals that may pose a carcinogenic risk to humans. Readily available data do not enable the presentation of comprehensive, robust and comparable estimates of numbers of deaths or illnesses which can be attributed to each of these agents.

Health Service Administration

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the budget for hospital and community health services of *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* fundholding general practitioner practices was spent on administrative costs in the last year for which figures are available. [20045]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* The information requested, for 1995–96, is in the table:

£ millions

	District Health Authorities, Regional Health Authorities and Special Health Authorities	Fundholding GP practices (excluding preparatory year)
Hospital and Community Health Services expenditure	21,957	1,847
Health Authority Head Quarters administration	1,002	—
Management allowances allocated (Practice Fund Management Allowance)	—	90
Administration as percentage HCHS	4.6	4.9

1. Figures for HAs and GP fundholders are not directly comparable for a number of reasons. For example:

—GPFH management allowances support fund expenditure on drugs and staff, as well as on HCHS.

—HA HQ administration figures include expenditure on medical negligence, capital charges, grants to voluntary bodies and some healthcare services (e.g. health promotion).

—HA HQ administration is included within HA HCHS expenditure, whilst GPFH management allowances are not included within the HCHS expenditure of GPFHs.

2. All figures remain provisional. HCHS expenditure figures are sourced from summarised national accounts. The HQ administration figure is sourced from the annual accounts of health authorities. GPFH management allowances are as allocated to regional health authorities.

Mr Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount spent on NHS management and administration in each region in England in the last year for which figures are available. [20544]

Mr. Horam: For figures for 1995–96 trust management costs, I refer the hon. Member to the booklet "Health Authority Costs and Management Costs in NHS Trusts" which was published on 13 March 1997. Figures for health authority costs, by region, for 1995–96 are shown in the table.

1995–96 HA costs by region

Region	HA costs (£000s)
Anglia and Oxford	48,881
North Thames	78,553
North West	64,580
Northern and Yorkshire	64,280
South and West	63,720
South Thames	77,053
Trent	47,679
West Midlands	52,637
England	497,383

Figures are sourced from the annual accounts of district health authorities and family health services authorities, and remain provisional.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which member of the Committee on Safety of Medicines was paid to travel to the United Kingdom in 1995, as indicated in his answer of 25 April 1996 *Official Report*, column *281*; what was the cost of the visit to public funds; and from where this individual travelled. [20484]

Mr. Malone: Proceedings of the committee are confidential, and this includes the identity of particular members attending particular meetings.

Alcoholic Soft Drinks

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has held with *(a)* the Portman Group, *(b)* other organisations representing the alcohol industry and *(c)* health organisations, on the marketing of alcoholic soft drinks; and if he will make a statement. [20870]

Mr. Burns: Officials have regular meetings with the Portman Group and health organisations. Alcoholic soft drinks are often discussed. We welcomed the industry's efforts to self-regulate through the Portman Group's code of practice for the packaging, marketing and sale of alcoholic drinks.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department intend to take to regulate the marketing of alcoholic soft drinks. [20925]

Mr. Burns: The Government share the concern expressed about the potential appeal of such drinks to young people. We believe the alcoholic drinks industry must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the public that it can regulate itself satisfactorily. We warmly welcome the Portman Group's code of practice for the packaging and marketing of these drinks. However, we will continue to monitor how the code works in practice.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to take action to restrict the sale to minors of kits which can convert soft drinks into alcoholic soft drinks. [20924]

Mr. Burns: These products are covered by the provisions of the food labelling regulations and must be clearly labelled so as not to mislead consumers about their nature. We are not convinced that restrictions on the sale of these kits to children is the right approach. Use of such kits involves a number of detailed processes which would in practice need to take place in the home. As with other potential risks of this sort, it is up to parents to exercise supervision over their children to avoid them getting into danger.

Hospital Waiting Lists (Wakefield)

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average length of hospital waiting lists for non-urgent operations in the Wakefield district in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1996. [20721]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available. Waiting list information collected centrally does not distinguish between urgent and non-urgent cases.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging Scanner

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those NHS trusts which do not have an MRI scanner. [20757]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Electricity Transmission Lines (Health Implications)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 March, *Official Report*, columns *102–4*, concerning the incidence of cancer or other abnormalities in adults and children if he will *(a)* ensure that the two pilot studies relating to cancer incidence incorporate maps showing high tension power lines and the places of domicile and work of those affected and *(b)* consult the appropriate medical and health bodies concerning (i) the practicality and (ii) the desirability of mapping such transmission lines and the incidence of other abnormalities in their vicinity. [20153]

Mr. Horam: The two pilot studies will explore the feasibility of investigating the possible relationship between the incidence of cancers and residential distance from electricity transmission and distribution systems. Neither of these studies is designed to investigate other abnormalities. However, the National Radiological Protection Board's advisory group on non-ionising radiation reviews work related to possible effects of electromagnetic fields on human health. It has been principally concerned with the risk of cancer but also keeps under review possible effects on other diseases and abnormalities as well as on developmental effects in utero.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20905]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is in the table.

Name of body	Annual report	Annual accounts	Minutes of meetings	Agendas of meetings	Register of member's interests[1]
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	Yes (statutory)	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No
Central Council for Education and Training in Social Workers	Yes (voluntary)	Yes (voluntary	Yes (voluntary)	Yes (voluntary)	No
National Biological Standards Board	Yes (voluntary)	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No
National Radiological Protection Board	Yes (voluntary)	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No
Public Health Laboratory Service	Yes (voluntary)	Yes (statutory)	No	No	No
English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	Yes (statutory)	Yes (statutory)	Yes (voluntary)	Yes (voluntary)	No
Medical Practices Committee	Yes (voluntary)	Yes (voluntary)	Yes (voluntary)	No	No

[1] From 1 June, all executive NDPBs will be required to make their registers of members' interests open to the public.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20941]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 14 March 1996, at columns *754–56*.

Silicone Implants

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *739*, if he will assess the advantages of classifying silicone implants as human prostheses. [20978]

Mr. Horam: Implanted human prostheses, such as breast implants, come within the scope of the Medical Devices Regulations (SI 1994 No 3017). Under the regulations medical devices fall into four different risk categories which dictate the severity of controls that are applied before the device may be sold; implanted human prostheses such as silicone implants fall into the second highest category. This means that before a manufacturer can place his device on the market with a "Conformity European" marking of conformity under the regulations he must have his design and manufacturing process verified by an independent certification organisation to ensure that the devices produced meet the relevant essential requirements relating to safety, quality and performance.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale community health council in respect of the award of the contract by East Lancashire health authority for provision of drug misuse services; and if he will make a statement. [21010]

Mr. Horam: We have received four letters; two from the chairman of the CHC and two from hon. Members enclosing copies of the chairman's letter. A full response will be sent as soon as possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Irish Medium Courses

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what factors preclude the curriculum studies and the education studies modules of the Irish-medium BEd course from being taught entirely through the medium of Irish; and what measures *(a)* St. Mary's college, Belfast and *(b)* the Department of Education for Northern Ireland are taking to increase the amount of teaching through the medium of Irish. [19697]

Mr. Ancram: Students are equipped to teach in both Irish and English medium schools with St. Mary's college building on the skills of its existing staff to increase the amount of teaching through the medium of Irish. The extent of such teaching is a matter for the college to determine within the resources available.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the role of the Irish-medium development officer in relation to each of the stage 1 modules of the Irish-medium BEd course and the PGCE course at St. Mary's college, Belfast, with particular reference to staff at the college. [19692]

Mr. Ancram: It is to develop the BEd modules and the PGCE course for Irish medium education in liaison with the relevant college staff.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the stage 1 main subject modules of the Irish-medium BEd course at the St. Mary's college, Belfast were last redesigned. [19693]

Mr. Ancram: In 1996.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the new Irish-medium PGCE course at St. Mary's college, Belfast is designed to cater for the specific needs of Irish-medium schools; and for what reasons the whole course will not be taught entirely through the medium of Irish. [19696]

Mr. Ancram: The figure is 100 per cent.

Students are being equipped to teach in both Irish medium and English medium schools.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of each of the stage 1 modules of the new Irish-medium BED course at St. Mary's college, Belfast caters for the needs of Irish-medium schools; and if he will make a statement. [19698]

Mr. Ancram: The figure is 100 per cent. of each.

The course is being developed to provide teachers for Irish medium schools.

Examination Results

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one and (ii) two or more science GCSEs in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19874]

Mr. Ancram: Information is not available in the form requested. The number of candidates entered for science GCSEs conducted by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in 1996 and the proportion who achieved grades A*–C is as follows:

	Number entered	*Percentage grades A*–C*
Biology	2,526	87.9
Biology (Human)	193	48.7
Chemistry	2,471	89.5
Double Award (Modular)	3,994	66.7
Double Award (Non-modular)	5,379	92.4
Physics	2,460	88.0
Single Award (Modular)	5,624	34.1
Single Award (Non-modular)	1,117	59.4

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) history, (ii) geography and (iii) Latin, in (1) GCSEs and (2) A-levels in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19878]

Mr. Ancram: Information is not available in the form requested. The number of candidates entered for history, geography and Latin GCSEs and A-levels conducted by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in 1996 and the proportion who achieved grades A* to C (GCSE) and grades A–C (A level) is as follows:

	Number entered	*Percentage grades A*–C*
GCSE		
History	6,419	68.9
Geography	11,296	64.9
Latin	214	90.7
A level		
History	2,166	65.6
Geography	2,296	58.7
Latin	46	78.3

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A* to C in (i) one and (ii) two or more live foreign language GCSEs in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19876]

Mr. Ancram: Information is not available in the form requested. The number of candidates entered for French, German, Irish, Italian, and Spanish GCSEs conducted by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in 1996 and the proportion who achieved grades A* to C is as follows:

	Number entered	*Percentage grades A*–C*
French	9,842	62.3
German	993	75.9
Irish	2,213	59.3
Italian	178	62.4
Spanish	1,123	70.6

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three or more science A-levels in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19875]

Mr. Ancram: Information is not available in the form requested. The number of candidates entered for science A-levels conducted by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in 1996 and the proportion who achieved grades A to C is as follows:

	Number entered	*Percentage grades A–C*
Biology	1,427	57.7
Chemistry	1,534	65.7
Physics	1,262	59.2

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of children *(a)* sat and *(b)* achieved a grade A to C in (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three or more live foreign language A-levels in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [19877]

Mr. Ancram: Information is not available in the form requested. The number of candidates entered for foreign language A-levels conducted by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in 1996 and the proportion who achieved grades A to C is as follows:

	Number entered	*Percentage Grades A–C*
French	1,149	62.2
German	170	63.5
Irish	296	67.9
Italian	38	73.7
Spanish	255	71.4

Latin and Ancient Greek

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of *(a)* comprehensive and *(b)* grant-maintained schools in Northern Ireland currently offer (i) Latin and (ii) ancient Greek as *(a)* a GCSE and *(b)* an A-level option; and if he will make a statement. [19879]

Mr. Ancram: The information is not available in the form requested. The number and percentage of grammar schools in Northern Ireland in which pupils took GCSE and A-level examinations in Latin and in Greek in 1995–96 are as follows:

	Number	*Percentage*
GCSE		
Latin	29	40.8
Greek	4	5.6
A level		
Latin	13	18.3
Greek	1	1.4

No non-grammar schools had pupils taking these examinations.

Petrol and Diesel

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to set up an inquiry into the sale and price of petrol and diesel in Northern Ireland on the same basis as the inquiry in Scotland. [20316]

Mr. Ancram: I have no such plans.

Retail Outlets

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which new retail outlets resulting from inward investments, have been given relief or assistance towards their annual rates demand in the past three years; and if he will make a statement. [20373]

Sir John Wheeler: No special rate reductions have been granted in Northern Ireland in the past three years to any part of the retail sector.

Department of Education

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the annual running costs of DENI headquarters, Bangor, for the past financial year; and what are the budgeted total running costs at this departmental headquarters for this financial year and for the next financial year. [20372]

Mr. Ancram: The departmental running cost baselines allocated to DENI for the specific years are as follows:

1995–96: £15.670 million

1996–97: £15.695 million

1997–98: £15.450 million

The figures are at 1995–96 prices.

Martin McGartland

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been paid to Martin McGartland in criminal injuries compensation in relation to the events surrounding his abduction by the IRA. [20750]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Compensation Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Denis Stanley. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. A. Stanley to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 19 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply on behalf of the Compensation Agency to your Question concerning the amount of money paid to Martin McGartland in criminal injuries compensation.

Mr McGartland's 1992 claim under the Criminal Injuries (Compensation)(Northern Ireland) Order 1988 had to be refused because it failed to satisfy a number of requirements of the legislation. His subsequent appeal to the County Court was also refused and as a result no money has been paid to him under the 1988 Order.

I trust this explains the position.

Statutory Rules

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Northern Ireland statutory rules were made in 1996, by Department; and what *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage replicated rules and regulations for Great Britain. [21003]

Sir John Wheeler: The number of statutory rules made, by Department, in 1996 was:

Department	*Number in 1996*
Department of Agriculture	93
Department of Economic Development	53
Department of Education for NI	30
Department of the Environment for NI	186
Department of Finance and Personnel	10
Department of Health and Social Services for NI	231

Although NI statutory rules and orders may follow a general policy set by GB legislation they do not replicate those made for Great Britain. The drafting will take into account for the NI institutions and entablements and apply the policies to the local/central government structures.

Licensing Law

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the policy appraisal and fair treatment guidelines were applied to the recent licensing law changes; and if he will make a statement. [21006]

Mr. Moss: As is the standard practice, the new licensing laws were assessed against the policy appraisal and fair treatment principles and there did not appear to be any aspect of the laws which would give rise to direct or indirect discrimination.

Ulster Museum

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the attendance figures for 1996 reported by the Ulster museum, including its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1995. [20111]

Mr. Ancram: In 1996 a total of 256,064 people visited the Ulster museum and the Armagh County museum—a decrease of 24.20 per cent. on the attendance figure for 1995.

Water Fluoridation

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Basingstoke, what is his scientific evidence for his statement that there is no difference between naturally found calcium fluoride and adding hexafluorosilicic acid or disodium hexafluorosilicate. [21136]

Mr. Moss: There is no evidence to suggest that there is any difference in effect between flouride which occurs naturally in water and that produced by adding either hexaflourosilicic acid or disodium hexaflourosilicate to water.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which *(a)* health and social services boards, *(b)* district councils, *(c)* political parties and *(d)* other organisations in Northern Ireland have sent representations to his Department (i) recommending and (ii) otherwise supporting, the fluoridation of water in Northern Ireland. [21135]

Mr. Moss: All four health and social services boards in Northern Ireland have recommended the fluoridation of water supplies for their resident populations. Antrim borough council is the only district council in Northern Ireland to have indicated support for the boards' recommendations.

Information on the views of Northern Ireland political parties and other organisations on fluoridation is not held centrally.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will announce his decision on whether or not to proceed with the fluoridation of water in Northern Ireland. [21137]

Mr. Moss: On 13 March I announced my decision to turn down requests from health and social services boards for approval to proceed with fluoridation proposals. However, health and social services boards may submit fresh applications in the future.

Ulster Savings

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of Ulster Savings. [21393]

Sir John Wheeler: All new investments in Ulster Savings ceased with effect from 1 June 1991, although arrangements for reinvestment were retained. Having given careful consideration to the findings of a further policy review, I have decided that the facility to reinvest in Ulster Savings should be withdrawn. However, It has been agreed that the proceeds of matured Ulster savings certificates may be reinvested instead in National Savings with effect from 1 April 1997.

Holdings Centre

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make an announcement about the posts of independent commissioner and deputy commissioner for the holdings centres which fall vacant on 31 March. [21426]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am happy to announce that Sir Louis Blom-Cooper and Dr. Bill Norris have accepted reappointment to the posts of independent commissioner and deputy commissioner respectively.

I am grateful to them both for accepting reappointment and I am confident that they will continue to monitor the care and treatment of detainees held in custody and to produce well-informed annual reports.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Consultants

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department has spent on contracts with external consultants in each of the last five financial years. [20907]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is as follows:

Actual figures

1992–93: £1,200,000

1993–94: £1,547,360

1994–95: £467,497

1995–96: £304,632

1996–97: £209,092

Sports Medicine (Lottery Awards)

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the awards from national lottery proceeds made to sports medicine organisations, indicating the amount of the awards and *(a)* when they were agreed, *(b)* when they were made and *(c)* who were the recipients. [19104]

Mr. Sproat: By the end of February 1997 four awards had been announced for sports medicine organisations. The details are as follows:

Distributing body	*Agreement date*	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Award amount* £
Scottish Sports Council	20 March 1996	21 March 1996	University of Strathclyde	474,500
Sports Council	22 April 1996	1 May 1996	University of Birmingham	131,300
Scottish Sports Council	26 June 1996	3 July 1996	Gordon Sports Medicine Centre	5,900
Sports Council	21 October 1996	6 November 1996	National Sports Medicine Institute	2,702,738
Total				3,314,438

Works of Art (Export Licences)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the items for which the issuing of export licences was withheld on the recommendation of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art during the half-year ended 31 December 1996, specifying in each case the valuation and whether an item was exported or retained, with

particulars in the latter event of the acquiring institution; and if she will list any items for which licences have been withheld but the final disposal of which is not yet decided, specifying in each case *(a)* the valuation and *(b)* the relevant time limit. [20110]

Mr. Sproat: The information is as follows:

Description of item	*Valuation* £	*Outcome*
A painting Erminia finding the wounded Tancred by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called "Il Guercino" (1591–1666)	3,500,000	Acquired by the National Galleries of Scotland
A pair of French Empire mahogany armchairs by the Parisian firm Jacob-Desmalter, c. 1803–13	249,904.50	Acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum and Galleries on Merseyside
An "ideal" female bust by Antonio Canova, 1817	695,000	Acquired by the Ashmolean Museum
A London delft "clapmash" charger inscribed "John Ayres 1637"	280,000	Export licence granted
A silver-gilt and mother-of-pearl casket by Pierre Mangot, 1532	3,000,000	Export licence granted
A pair of George II open armchairs by William and John Linnell, c. 1753	192,307.69	Export licence granted
A marble bust of Henry Fuseli by Edward Hodges Baily, 1824	128,000	Acquired by the National Portrait Gallery
A daguerreotype portrait of Sir John Herschel, c. 1848	27,053.75	Acquired by the National Portrait Gallery
A negative and three prints by William Henry Fox Talbot, 1839	7,000 each	Acquired by the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television
Five Roman coins, 41–54 AD	495 each	Export licence granted
Three Roman coins, 41–54 AD	825	Export licence granted
A library desk by Giuseppe Maggiolini, c. 1784	1,683,012.50	Export licence granted
A Venetian bronze andiron attributed to Niccolò Roccatagliata, c. 1600	77,752.50	Acquired by the National Galleries of Scotland
A pair of late eighteenth—or early nineteenth—century Anglo-Indian ivory armchairs	138,275	Decision deferred until after 4 April 1997
A gold box by G. M. Moser, c. 1760	314,171.15	Acquired by the Royal Museum of Scotland
A neolithic stone ball	8,000	Decision deferred until after 8 April 1997
A painting A Cup of Water and a Rose on a Silver Plate by Francisco de Zurbarán, c. 1627–30	305,997.10	Acquired by the National Gallery
A painting Madonna and Child with Saints with a Distant Landscape by Annibale Carracci (1560–1609)	197,325	Decision deferred until after 8 May 1997

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20899]

Mr. Sproat: The information is as follows:

(a) Annual reports

Arts Council of England
British Film Institute[1]
British Library[1]
British Tourist Authority[1]
Broadcasting Complaints Commission[1]
Broadcasting Standards Council[1]
Community Development Foundation
Crafts Council
English Heritage[1]
English Sports Council
English Tourist Board[1]
Football Licensing Authority[1]
GB Sports Council
Geffrye Museum[1]
Horniman Museum[1]
Library and Information Commission[1]
Millennium Central
Millennium and Galleries Commission
Museum of London[2]
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester[1]
National Gallery[2]
National Heritage Memorial Fund[1]
National Lottery Charities Board[1]
National Portrait Gallery[2]
Public Lending Right[1]
Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts
Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England)
UK Sports Council

The following bodies produce a triennial report:

British Museum[1]
Imperial War Museum
Natural History Museum[1]
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside[1]
National Museum of Science and Industry[1]
Tate Gallery[1]
Victoria and Albert Museum[1]
Wallace Collection[1]

(b) Annual Accounts

Arts Council of England
British Film Institute[1]
British Library[1]
British Museum[1]
British Tourist Authority[1]
Broadcasting Complaints Commission[1]
Broadcasting Standards Council[1]
Community Development Foundation
Crafts Council
English Heritage
English Sports Council
English Tourist Board[1]
Football Licensing Authority[1]
GB Sports Council

Geffrye Museum'
Horniman Museum'
Imperial War Museum'
Library and Information Commission'
Millennium Central
Millennium Commission'
Museum and Galleries Commission
Museum of London'
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester'
National Film and Television School'
National Gallery'
National Heritage Memorial Fund'
National Lottery Charities Board'
National Maritime Museum'
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside'
National Museum of Science and Industry'
National Portrait Gallery'
Natural History Museum'
Public Lending Right'
Royal Armouries
Sir John Soane's Museum'
Tate Gallery'
UK Sports Council
Victoria and Albert Museum'
Wallace Collection'

(c) Minutes of Meetings

British Film Institute
English Sports Council'
GB Sports Council'
UK Sports Council'

(d) Agendas of Meetings

British Film Institute
English Sports Council'
GB Sports Council'
UK Sports Council'

(e) Register of Members Interests

Arts Council of England'
British Film Institute'
British Library'
Crafts Council'
English Sports Council'
Library and Information Commission'
Museum of London'
National Heritage Memorial Fund'
National Lottery Charities Board'
National Gallery'
National Maritime Museum'
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside'
National Museum of Science and Industry'
Natural History Museum'
Sir John Soane's Museum'
Royal Armouries'
Wallace Collection'

All of DNH's executive NDPBs are currently developing registers of members' interests. Many of these are already in place and are open to the public on request.

' Indicates where this is a statutory requirement.

' Indicates where an annual report is published by the organisation is only statutorily obliged to publish a triennial report.

' Indicates are available upon request.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open Government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20938]

Mr. Sproat: The information is as follows:

(a) Bodies subject to the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration are listed in schedule 2 of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 as amended. This includes:

Arts Council of England
British Film Institute
British Library
Crafts Council
English Sports Council
English Tourist Board
English Heritage
Museums and Galleries Commission
National Heritage Memorial Fund
Registrar of Public Lending Right
Royal Commission on Historic Manuscripts
UK Sports Council

(b) None.

(c) All of the Department's executive NDPBs are subject to scrutiny by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

(d) All bodies falling within the jurisdiction of the PCA are subject to the Code of Practice on Open Government. Lord Nolan's report on Standards in Public Life recommended that all executive NDPBs should develop their own codes of openness.

(e) The Department monitors the performance of its NDPBs through the Corporate Planning process and through annual Funding Agreements, in which targets and performance indicators are set.

(f) The principles of the Citizen's Charter apply to all the Department's NDPBs.

London Marathon

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what were the total costs incurred by the Royal Parks in staging the 1996 London marathon. [18973]

Mr. Sproat: Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Royal Parks agency under its chief executive, Mr. David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Welch to Mr. Tom Pendry, dated 19 March 1997:

I have been asked by Mr. Iain Sproat to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the costs incurred by the Royal Parks by the 1996 London Marathon because I am responsible for the management of the Royal Parks.

The costs, which include the involvement of the Agency's staff in planning for the race, additional Royal Parks Constabulary manpower in the Parks on the day, supervision of the arrangements for the race, and employing contractors to clear up after the event, total £22,750.

Academy of Sport

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what evaluation procedure was used to select the shortlist of applications for the British Academy of Sport. [18336]

Mr. Sproat: The evaluation was carried out in an objective and non-political way by an experienced joint Department of National Heritage United Kingdom Sports Council evaluation panel. The evaluation panel was chaired by the chief executive of the UKSC and included two officers from the UKSC and two officials from DNH. In addition, the evaluation panel was advised by four outside consultants.

There was two stages to the evaluation process. At the first stage, all 26 bids were evaluated by the evaluation panel against pre-defined criteria drawn up to assess compliance with the bid prospectus. At that stage, a list of 13 bids which should proceed to a detailed technical evaluation in stage two was determined. At stage two, there was a detailed technical evaluation of each of the 13 bids by the evaluation panel and its outside advisers. Each bidder was also given an opportunity to present their bid at an interview with the evaluation panel and advisers.

Based on the advice of the evaluation panel, the Government and the UKSC announced on 25 February that the academy would be chosen from three contenders: the Central consortium, the Heyford Consortium and the Sheffield Consortium. These proposals are now being considered in more detail by the UKSC and DNH.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State or National Heritage if she will make a statement on the current position regarding the establishment of the Academy of Sport and on the sites under consideration. [20682]

Mr. Sproat: The United Kingdom Sports Council and the Department of National Heritage completed the second stage of the evaluation process on 25 February when it was announced that the British Academy of Sport will be chosen from three contenders: the Central Consortium, the Heyford Consortium and the Sheffield Consortium. These proposals are now being considered in greater detail with a view to identifying the preferred site. An announcement on the preferred site and organisation or organisations will not be made until after the general election.

Bletchley Park

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received regarding the future of Bletchley Park; and what action she proposes to take. [20673]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has so far received around 120 letters on Bletchley Park. The Bletchley Park trust applied to the Heritage lottery fund in 1995 for funding towards the preservation of the park but was turned down. Decisions on applications to the Heritage lottery fund are made by the trustees of the National Heritage memorial fund and Ministers cannot intervene. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the chairman and chief executive of the Bletchley Park trust on 3 March to hear about their proposals for the site. She wished them well with any new application they chose to submit.

Inheritance Tax (Items in Lieu)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the allocations made to public institutions in the United Kingdom during the half-year ended 31 December 1996 of individual works of art and museum objects pre-eminent for national, scientific, historic or artistic interest which have been accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax, together with information, where applicable, as to conditions or wishes expressed by testators or executors in the matter of allocations; and if she will list the works of art and museum objects which are still awaiting allocation, with the respective dates of their acceptance, in satisfaction of inheritance tax. [20109]

Mr. Sproat: The information which the hon. Member requests is as follows:

Item(s)	*To whom allocated*	*Conditions/ wishes expressed*
An archive of papers relating to Cheshire	Council of the University of Manchester (for retention at the John Rylands University Library)	[1]—
Ten acres of woodland at Tadworth, Surrey	Surrey County Council	[2]—
Eddison Theatre Collection	Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum (for display at the Theatre Museum)	[1]—
Les Andelys (painting) by Maurice de Vlaminck	Norfolk County Council (for display at the Castle Museum, Norwich)	[3]—
Aboriginal Bark Paintings	Board of Trustees of the British Museum (for display at the Museum of Mankind)	[2]—
Two wings of a 13th-century ivory tripiych	Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum	[1]—
A collection of prints by Picasso, Dubuffet, Kokoschka and others	The Council of the University of Manchester (for display at the Whitworth Art Gallery)	[2]—
A collection of German stoneware	Board of Trustees of the British Museum and the Trustees of the National Museum of Wales	[2]—
A Böttger Teapot and Böttger tankard	Chancellors, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford (for display at the Ashmolean Museum)	[2]—
The Stoke Edith Hangings	Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum	[4]Not known
The Old Man and his Grandson (drawing) by Arthur Rackham	Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum	[3]—
An archive of family papers	Derbyshire County Council (for retention at the Derbyshire Record Office) and Northamptonshire County Council (for retention at the Northamptonshire Record Office)	[1]—
Furniture and lamps by Giacometti	Council of the University of East Anglia (custodianship by the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich)	[1]—
St. Vincent's Rocks, Clifton by Thomas Girtin and Protrait of Thomas Girtin by John Opie (both paintings)	Council of the University of Manchester for display at the Whitworth Art Gallery	[1]—

Item(s)	To whom allocated	Conditions/ wishes expressed
Storith Heights (painting) by Thomas Girtin	Chancellor, Master and Scholars of the University of Cambridge for display at the Fitzwilliam Museum	[1]—

[1] Wish as to allocation.
[2] Conditional offer.
[3] Unconditional offer.
[4] The Stoke Edith hangings were accepted in lieu of estate duty in 1961 and ownership passed to HM Government. Following their acceptance the hangings remained on loan for display at Montacute House (a National Trust property) until as mutually agreed between the Victoria and Albert museum and the National Trust, the hangings were moved to the V and A in parts (in 1980 and 1994). In 1996 the V and A asked the Secretary of State to arrange for ownership of the hangings to pass to them on a permanent basis and Lord Inglewood agreed, making a section 9 direction on 9 November 1996.

Items awaiting allocation	Date of acceptance
Musical automation clock by Thomas Weekes	21 February 1995
Landscape with Lord Coventry on a Blue Roan Horse and Deer, Hounds and Attendants and Dead Stag (painting) by John Wootton	13 March 1997

Exercise

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health regarding a campaign to encourage people to take up exercise. [17415]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 26 February 1997]:* Both our Departments were members of the Government's physical activity task force, whose recommendations led to the launch of the Active for Life Campaign, which encourages people to take up exercise. I am particularly keen to ensure good exercise habits are instilled from an early age, through our initiatives to promote sport in schools.

National Lottery

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 15 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *365*, on feasibility studies funded by the national lottery, when the information on feasibility studies will be available. [17650]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer March 1997]:* I apologise for the delay in providing the hon. Member with this information. To date, the national lottery distributing bodies have announced 320 awards for feasibility studies representing an investment of £30.4 million. So far, 79 of these studies have produced full applications and of these, six have resulted in lottery awards. Many studies have yet to be completed, while others have resulted in full applications which are being considered by the distributing bodies in the normal way. Awards to feasibility studies represent less than 1 per cent. of the total value of awards announced to the end of February 1997.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *272*, if she will list the total amount of national lottery grants for each borough of *(a)* London and *(b)* the West Midland county expressed as an amount per head of population. [19595]

Mr. Sproat: National lottery awards announced up to the end of February 1997 for London and the west midlands are as follows:

London and West Midlands

Borough	Population[1]	Amount (£)	Amount per head (£)
London			
Barking and Dagenham	143,681	1,071,055	7.45
Barnet	293,564	2,461,559	8.39
Bexley	215,615	956,958	4.44
Brent	243,025	1,832,794	7.54
Bromley	290,609	7,476,404	25.73
Camden	170,444	86,335,870	506.54
City of London	4,142	11,841,599	2,858.91
Croydon	313,510	3,366,060	10.74
Ealing	275,257	2,986,024	10.85
Enfield	257,417	1,541,826	5.99
Greenwich	207,650	16,564,058	79.77
Hackney	181,248	17,753,247	97.95
Hammersmith and Fulham	148,502	6,703,809	45.14
Haringey	202,204	6,381,305	31.56
Harrow	200,100	3,590,502	17.94
Havering	229,492	589,690	2.57
Hillingdon	231,602	892,617	3.85
Hounslow	204,397	5,473,625	26.78
Islington	164,686	44,965,514	273.04
Kensington and Chelsea	138,394	63,524,583	459.01
Kingston upon Thames	132,996	3,758,458	28.26
Lambeth	244,834	44,198,769	180.53
Lewisham	230,983	5,704,069	24.69
Merton	168,470	2,713,004	16.10
Newham	212,170	27,820,385	131.12
Redbridge	226,218	2,215,329	9.79
Richmond upon Thames	160,732	34,168,089	212.58
Southwark	218,541	34,152,431	156.27
Sutton	168,880	996,636	5.90
Tower Hamlets	161,064	27,783,515	172.50
Waltham Forest	212,033	5,775,850	27.24
Wandsworth	252,425	5,224,201	20.70
Westminster, City of	174,814	267,633,730	1,530.96
Grand total	6,679,699	748,453,565	112.05
West Midlands			
Birmingham	961,041	110,414,076	114.89
Coventry	294,387	7,929,987	26.94
Dudley	304,615	7,153,841	23.48
Sandwell	290,091	10,734,464	37.00
Solihull	199,859	1,118,716	5.60
Walsall	259,488	17,838,162	68.74
Wolverhampton	242,190	7,573,169	31.27
Grand total	2,551,671	162,762,415	63.79

[1] *Source:* Office of Population Censuses and Surveys 1993.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19385]

Mr. Sproat: The only document my Department has issued is the "Export Licensing Unit Code of Practice." This was issued in 1994 at a cost of £1,360.38 and approximately 1,000 have been issued. The Royal Parks agency has published and circulated a visitor's charter. This was first produced in 1994 at a total cost of £2,072.61 and has recently been revised at a total cost of £2,222.61. To date approximately 5,000 copies have been issued. Whilst the Historic Royal Palaces agency has its own visitor's charter it has not been published. It is prominently displayed at all ticketing offices at the palaces.

Football Clubs

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list for each of the last five years, the football clubs which have received grant aid from the Football Trust indicating in each case *(a)* the amount of money awarded and *(b)* if the money was awarded in respect of (i) safety and (ii) community. [19906]

Mr. Sproat: Over the past five years, the Football Trust has provided £140 million for Taylor-related redevelopment work, £20 million for ongoing safety work and £5.5 million for community work at professional clubs in England, Wales and Scotland, as well as £12.4 million for non-professional and grass roots football. I am today placing in the Libraries of both Houses a schedule, provided by the Football Trust, setting out information on the grants awarded to individual clubs.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many questions were tabled from reply by her Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16793]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage was established in April 1992.

The available figures for the number of questions answered by my Department in each parliamentary Session are as follows:

Session	*Number of questions answered*
1992–93	1,281
1993–94	1,099
1994–95	1,226
1995–96	1,124

Source:
POLIS.

The rest of the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many Bills her Department has sponsored in each year since it was formed; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19769]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The Department of National Heritage was formed in April 1992.

The following Bills have been sponsored by my Department:

National Lottery etc. Act 1993

Broadcasting Act 1996

National Heritage Act 1997

They have all been passed by Parliament.

S4C

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much S4C will receive from her Department in the current year; and how much it received in the previous year. [20718]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* S4C received £68,416,000 from my Department in 1996 and there is provision of £73,300,00 for the current year.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what restrictions and requirements are placed on S4C as regards the language of programmes made using public funding provided by her Department. [20717]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The Welsh Fourth Channel Authority receives public funding to fulfil its function which is set out in section 57 of the Broadcasting Act 1990: to provide a television broadcasting service of high quality for reception wholly or mainly in Wales. Under that Act, S4C is required to ensure that a substantial proportion of its programmes broadcast between 6.30 pm and 10 pm are in Welsh.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many of the new digital channels available to S4C will be used for broadcasting in *(a)* English and *(b)* Welsh. [20547]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The Government have offered S4C guaranteed capacity of half of the third multiplex in Wales. S4C is required to simulcast the Welsh language programmes in its peak analogue service as part of its digital service, but is not otherwise constrained as to the language in which its digital services are broadcast.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if the chairman or any of the members of S4C have declared interests or shareholdings in any independent production company. [20715]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The chairman and members of the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority are required under the Broadcasting Act 1990 to declare any interests or shareholdings they may have in any independent production company. None has declared such an interest.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what monitoring her Department carries out of the use of the public funds provided to S4C; and what assessment it has made of the use of those funds in the past year. [20719]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* It is a long standing policy that broadcasting services are independent of Government editorially and, to the greatest

extent possible, in economic and regulatory terms. It is for the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority to regulate S4C and for S4C's management to supervise the efficiency of the broadcaster. There is a memorandum of understanding between my Department and S4C, the primary purpose of which is to ensure that S4C's systems of financial management are sufficient to safeguard public funds. The actual management of those funds is a matter for the authority.

Sport (Broadcasting)

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what restrictions exist on television companies in receipt of public funds bidding against each other to broadcast sports events. [20716]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The obligations placed on the BBC and the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority in respect of their broadcasting services, which are set out in the royal charter and agreement and the 1990 Broadcasting Act respectively, do not impinge on the freedom of these broadcasters to negotiate for programme rights to sports events.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will provide figures for her Department's private finance initiative projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93;* and if she will list her latest estimates of annual totals for PFI projects, on the same basis as those given in table 5.5 of the Red Book. [20394]

Mr. Sproat: For the first part of the hon. Member's question, I refer him to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington on 13 March, *Official Report*, columns *281–82.*

The current estimates of annual totals for PFI projects, are shown in the following table:

PFI capital expenditure—current revised figures

£ million

PFI capital expenditure	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*Total*
Signed contracts	1.4	1.4	1.4	4.2
British Museum Study Centre	6.0	15.8	6.0	27.8
British Museum Great Court	—	—	1.0	1.0
Science Museum Wellcome Wing	—	—	1.0	1.0
Tate Bankside Roof Observatory	—	—	4.0	4.0
Tate Millbank Queen Alexander site	—	—	15.0	15.0
Tate Millbank electric sub-station	—	0.3	—	0.3
Natural History Museum combined heat and power	—	1.0	2.0	3.0
British Library bibliographic cataloguing	4.0	—	—	4.0
British Library catering and conference	1.5	—	—	1.5
British Library digitisation	—	35.0	40.0	75.0
Sports Council IT	—	2.0	—	2.0
English Heritage—Stonehenge	—	5.5	20.5	26.0
English Heritage—GIS	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.9
Total	13.2	61.3	91.2	165.7

SCOTLAND

BSE

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been the costs of the BSE crisis in Scotland to public funds; and if he will make a statement. [18005]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 28 February 1997]:* The Government's concern has been to provide support in a way which benefits all parts of the beef chain and enables a recovery of market confidence. The current estimates of the extra amounts paid out as a result of the BSE crisis in Scotland to the industry under the following schemes to 31 December 1996 are as follows:

	£ million
Beef special premium and suckler cow premium schemes:	
top-ups	16.6
Beef marketing payment scheme	7.0
Over-30-months scheme:	
producers payments	65.9
slaughter and rendering fees	13.5
Calf processing scheme	2.6
Slaughtering industry (emergency aid) scheme 1996	10.0

Also, in the period 1 April 1996 to 31 December 1996, the EU agreed to accept 10,901 tonnes of beef into intervention from Scotland at an estimated buying-in cost of around £22 million.

Sex Offenders

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a supervised release order mandatory for all those who commit sexual offences which result in custody, irrespective of whether the case is heard on indictment. [19075]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* Amendments to clause 3 of the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill were tabled at Lords Committee stage. These raised a similar point to the hon. Member's question. No further Government amendments are proposed.

Organic Farming

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of farms in Scotland are currently classified as organic; and if he will make a statement. [19859]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 11 March 1997]:* There were 99 registered organic units in Scotland as at February 1997. This represents approximately 0.2 per cent. of the 50,817 farms and crofts which submitted a separate census return in June 1996, although the two figures are calculated on a different basis.

Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made towards implementing Lord Cullen's recommendation for the

development of a Scottish vocational qualification in respect of work with children; and if he will make a statement. [20095]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* Following receipt of Lord Cullen's report, Scottish Office officials met with representatives of the Scottish Vocational Education Council. SCOTVEC has now submitted a paper to the Scottish Office to facilitate consideration of the options for the development of vocational qualifications for adults working with young children.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by constituency, based on home addresses, the number of pupils currently supported under the assisted places scheme. [20216]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* Information on the home addresses of assisted place pupils is at present not held centrally. Following the commitment made by my right hon. Friend on 10 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *40*, this information is being sought, and will be collated in the manner requested. I will respond in full as soon as possible.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total cost to public funds of the assisted places scheme for each year since 1987. [20977]

Mr. Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) on 29 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *244*.

Regeneration Programmes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been paid, from the priority partnership areas and regeneration programmes, to the districts of *(a)* Kelburn, *(b)* Woodhall, *(c)* Broadfield, *(d)* Bowfarm, *(e)* Greenock Central, *(f)* Gibshill, *(g)* Larkfield and *(h)* Brachturn in Greenock and Port Glasgow; and if he will make a statement. [20648]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* These districts are included within the boundaries of the Inverclyde priority partnership area, which was designated on 11 November 1996 and will receive urban programme funding in the order of £3.87 million over the first three years. Urban programme resources are defrayed in the first instance by local authorities who then claim 75 per cent. grant annually in arrears from the Scottish Office development department. At this stage, therefore, expenditure incurred in 1996–97 is a matter for Inverclyde council.

Banner Committee

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what actions he has taken on the recommendations of the Banner committee. [20422]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The Government have made significant progress in taking forward the various recommendations in the Banner report.

In particular, the Farm Animal Welfare Council has already agreed to adopt the general principles set out in the report and has established arrangements for liaison with the animal procedures committee.

A working party has also been set up to look into the role of non-veterinarians in relation to the artificial insemination of cattle and horses. We continue to support internationally harmonised controls on genetically modified organisms and efforts to achieve an acceptable EU patents directive.

Animal Geno-mapping

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on animal geno-mapping. [20423]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The Scottish Office does not fund any research on animal geno-mapping.

Under existing co-ordination arrangements for UK agricultural research, responsibility for animal geno-mapping research lies with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and with the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy towards patents established with the Roslin Institute during its motherhood of work leading to the cloning of sheep. [20424]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The Scottish Office holds no such patents with the Roslin Institute. This is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who co-funded the work leading to the cloning of sheep.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of work at the Roslin Institute for addressing *(a)* cystic fibrosis, *(b)* haemophilia B, *(c)* blood-clotting and *(d)* the mathematics of the in-breeding of animals. [20425]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The work at the Roslin Institute has been funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Research Council, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the European Union and the private sector.

No detailed assessment of the impact of this research on specific medical conditions in humans has been made at this stage. The Scottish agricultural college has, however, been able to use the information on the mathematical theory of animal breeding in its advice to the farming industry.

Fishermen's Organisations

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the fishermen's organisations which *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have met since 1 July 1996. [20493]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Since 1 July 1996 I have met with:

Fife Fishermen's Association
Pittenweem Fishermen's Mutual Association
Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Shetland Fishermen's Association
Mallaig and North West Fishermen's Association
National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations

In the same period, officials have met the following fishermen's organisations:

Aberdeen Fish Producers Organisation
Clyde Fishermen's Association
East Coast Licensed Small Boat Association
Fife Fishermen's Association
Fife Fish Producer's Organisation
Fishermen's Association Limited
Firth of Forth Fishermen's Association
Highlands and Islands Fishermen's Association
Mallaig and North West Fishermen's Association
North East Scotland Fish Producers Organisation
Orkney Fishermen's Association
Pittenweem Fishermen's Mutual Association
Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Scottish Fishermen's Organisation
Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association
Scottish Whitefish Producers Organisation
Shetland Fishermen's Association
Shetland Fish Producers Organisation
West of Scotland Fish Producers Organisation

In addition, there have been a number of joint meetings involving Ministers, officials and industry representatives from throughout the United Kingdom.

Fishermen's Association Ltd.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's policy in respect of meetings between *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials and the Fishermen's Association Ltd. [20494]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Department arranges meetings with representatives of fishermen's organisations as and when appropriate.

Meat Hygiene

Sir Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence Professor Pennington asked for from the Meat Hygiene Service in Scotland in respect of standards of hygiene in slaughterhouses as part of his inquiry. [20736]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for Professor Pennington and the expert group. Information from the Meat Hygiene Service has been made available through one of the group's members and the MHS is preparing further material to supply to the group. I understand that group members have also visited slaughterhouses to observe the position at first hand.

Salmon Strategy Task Force

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to implement recommendation No. 33 of the report of the Scottish Salmon strategy task force. [20815]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I have sent a copy of the report to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. No decisions on the report's recommendations will be taken until the consultation process now under way is complete.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the attendance figures for 1996 reported by the national museums and galleries in Scotland, broken down to the individual institutions but including their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1995. [20113]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

	1996	*Percentage change since 1995*
National Museums of Scotland	1,178,944	+5.8
National Galleries of Scotland	990,888	+9.9

Figures for the national museums of Scotland relate to the royal museum of Scotland, the museum of antiquities, the Scottish agricultural museum, the Scottish united services museum, the museum of flight, the museum of costume and the gasworks museum. The national galleries of Scotland figures relate to the national gallery of Scotland, the Scottish national portrait gallery, the Scottish national gallery of modern art, national galleries of Scotland exhibitions held in the royal scottish academy, Duff house in Banff and, for the first time, Paxton house, Berwick.

Forestry Sales (Wales)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 12 November, *Official Report,* columns *151–52,* if he will list the woods that have been placed on the market by Forest Enterprise in Wales since 12 November 1996, to the latest available date, indicating in each cause *(a)* the name of the wood, *(b)* the unitary authority it lies in, *(c)* the number of hectares it covers, *(d)* the date on which it was put up for sale and *(e)* if a public access agreement (i) has been agreed and (ii) is being negotiated. [20979]

Mr. Kynoch: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 19 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your Question about the sale of Forestry Commission woodlands in Wales.

There have only been three properties placed on the open market, since 12 November 1996, as follows:

Unitary authority/name of property	Area (ha)	Date placed on market	Access agreement
Rhondda Cynon Taff			
Hendre Rhys	18.3	17 January 1997	No
Powys			
New Forest Plantation	9.0	27 November 1996	Yes
Tack Wood	63.0	27 November 1996	Yes

Forestry Authority Schemes

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total payments to private landowners under forest authority schemes in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland; and if he will list the 20 largest recipients in Scotland, indicating in each case the purpose of the award and the amount for each year since 1993. [20976]

Mr. Kynoch: The total payments to woodland owners by the Forestry Commission are set out in the table.

£ million

Year ending 31 March	GB	Scotland
1993	21.8	10.3
1994	29.8	13.4
1995	32.8	17.3
1996	32.1	16.3
1997[1]	27.5	14.5

[1] To end of February.

The Forestry Commission does not keep a record of cumulative payments made to each owner. To list the 20 largest recipients would require a manual search through a very large number of individual grant scheme files. This could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Health Budget

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated planned reduction in administrative costs projected for the Scottish health budget in each year for which a projection has been made in 1996–97 prices. [20972]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Health boards' management costs reduced by £3 million in 1995–96. NHS trusts and health boards will achieve savings of £14 million in 1996–97 and health boards will achieve savings in 1997–98 of £17 million.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of the costs to public funds of the nursery voucher scheme for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [20975]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Government plan to spend some £3.8 million, £47.4 million and £70 million on the pre-school education voucher initiative in Scotland in the three years 1996–97, 1997–98, and 1998–99 respectively.

Crime

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of crimes were carried out in each police authority in Scotland by people under the age of *(a)* 20 and *(b)* 16 years in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [21275]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information is not collected centrally on the estimated age of offenders responsible for recorded crimes. Information is collected on the age of offenders convicted in the criminal courts. This could not, however, be relied on to provide an answer to the question, as not all recorded crimes are cleared up by the police and most persons under 16, and some persons aged 16 and 17, suspected of offending are not prosecuted but are referred to the reporter to the children's panel.

WALES

Assisted Businesses (Political Objectives)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if businesses or organisations with declared political objectives can, or could obtain, financial support from *(a)* the Welsh Development Agency and *(b)* the Development Board for Rural Wales. [20611]

Mr. Hague: Support cannot be given for political purposes. Any business or organisation can apply for financial support from the WDA and/or DBRW provided the application relates to a specific project or initiative which matches the economic or environmental criteria and objectives of an appropriate WDA or DBRW scheme. Aid to some sectors is restricted or prohibited by the rules of some schemes and by EU state aid rules.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will undertake a review into the establishment of an education standard spending assessment in Wales equivalent to that which exists in England. [20526]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: With the agreement of the Welsh Local Government Association, standard spending assessments for local authorities in Wales are unhypothecated. It is for each authority to decide its spending priorities taking account of its statutory responsibilities and its own view of needs and priorities. The current system should encourage local accountability.

National Museum and Gallery of Wales

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the attendance figures for 1996 reported by the national museum and gallery of Wales, including its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1995. [20112]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A total of 819,605 persons visited the national museum and galleries of Wales during 1996, an increase of 5 per cent. compared with the number of 780,344 in 1995.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject

to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20932]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows:

(a) the Arts Council of Wales (ACW), the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (CBDC), the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), the Development Board for Rural Wales (DBRW), Housing for Wales (HfW), the Residuary Body for Wales (RBW), the Sports Council for Wales (SCW), the Wales Tourist Board (WTB), the Welsh Language Board (WLB) and the Agricultural Wages Committees are all open to the scrutiny of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration;

(b) the Audit Commissioner is the external auditor of the Residuary Body for Wales;

(c) the Comptroller and the Auditor General is the external auditor of all Welsh executive NDPBs except the RBW, Wales Youth Agency (WYA), HfW, and CBDC, to whose books and papers he nevertheless has access a) under the National Audit Act 1983 for the purpose of carrying out examinations on value for money, and b) by agreement, for the purpose of examining questions of regularity and propriety;

(d) all are encouraged to adopt procedures under the code of access to Government Information;

(e) all identify, publish and report against key performance measures in their annual reports other than the Higher and Further Education Funding Councils for Wales (HFEFCW), who give details in their corporate plan, which is also published.

(f) all are subject to the provisions of the citizens charter.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20893]

Mr. Hague: This information requested is as follows.

(a) All—under statute, charter or other controlling documents. The report of work by the Agricultural Wages Committee is included in the annual report of the Agricultural Wages Board;

(b) all except the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales and the Agricultural Wages Committee—under statute or charter;

(c) none;

(d) none;

(e) all have adopted or are in the process of adopting a code of practice based on the "Code of Best Practice for Board Members of Public Bodies" published by HM Treasury in June 1994 and further guidance issued by HM Treasury in January 1997. They publish or will then publish or make available such a register for inspection.

Forest Enterprise (Sales)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each unitary authority in Wales the number of woods which Forest Enterprise intends to put up for sale by the end of the financial year 1996–97. [20980]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive. Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 19 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Wales has asked me to reply to your Question about the sale of Forestry Commission woodlands in the period up to the end of the current financial year.

We have no plans to market any new woodlands in Wales before 31 March 1997.

Glaucoma

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients suffering from glaucoma were treated by general practitioners during *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96. [21084]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Departmental Cash Limits

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he is proposing to make to the cash limits for his Department for the current financial year. [21427]

Mr. Hague: The local authority capital cash limit—WO/LACAP—will be reduced by £6,465,000 from £518,206,000 to £511,741,000; the Housing for Wales cash limit—WO/HFW—will be increased by £6,465,000 from £96,137,000 to £102,602,000.

The transfer of £6,465,000 from the local authority capital cash limit to the Housing for Wales cash limit is in respect of work undertaken by housing associations on behalf of local authorities.

Housing

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what progress has been made with the sale of Housing for Wales's loan portfolio. [19567]

Mr. Hague *[pursuant to his reply 6 March 1997]:* The purchase price will be subject to changes in the underlying portfolio and to movements in the gilt rate until completion on 26 March. I cannot therefore, give a figure for the final sale receipt until after Parliament has risen. However, I shall write to my hon. Friend when the final figure is available, and place copies of the letter in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

Army Training Land

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current requirement for Army training land in the United Kingdom; and what arrangements there are for the stewardship of such land. [21457]

Mr. Soames: I have today published a document, "Striking a Balance '97", the second report on the management of the major Army training areas, following the original "Striking a Balance", published in October 1995. The new document describes the work going on in

a number of areas to ensure that the land on which the Army trains is managed with as much sensitivity as possible to the requirements of local people.

The document also reports on the work we have done to analyse the Army's requirement for training land in the United Kingdom. This work shows that, following the return to this country of many units from Germany, and the introduction of new systems, the Army has a significant shortfall in training land in the UK. The report also shows a number of ways in which this shortfall can be reduced including by development of existing facilities and, in particular, the proposed development of Otterburn.

A copy of "Striking a Balance '97" has been placed in the Library of the House.

Army Sales Teams

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which countries Army sales teams were deployed in 1991. [20106]

Mr. Arbuthnot: According to our records, Army sales teams—now called export support teams—were deployed in the following countries during 1991: Brunei, France, Morocco, The Netherlands, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Loan Service Personnel

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those countries where loan service personnel were deployed in 1991. [20174]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 18 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns *507–10*.

Gulf War (Organophosphate Pesticides)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what quantities of Fenitrothion were taken to the Gulf for use at British military establishments as part of Operation Granby in 1990–91; up to what date it was used; and what additional stocks were *(a)* obtained locally and *(b)* used; [19086]

(2) what quantities of Neocydal 60 EC were obtained in the Gulf by British forces in 1990 and 1991 in Operation Granby; what languages were printed on the use instructions for this insecticide; what translation facilities were available for interpreting these instructions; and what use in action was made of Neocydal. [19093]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 4 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns *587–88*.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of his annual departmental budget was spent in Wales in each of the past five years; what *(a)* non-departmental Government bodies and *(b)* executive agencies responsible for his Department operate in Wales; and what land his Department currently (i) owns and (ii) leases in Wales, indicating the area of each site. [20707]

Mr. Soames: It is not possible to split the total defence budget by geographical area. Defence expenditure on equipment and associated direct employment in Wales for the most recent five years for which analysis is available is in table 1.9 of "UK Defence Statistics 1996", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. For each financial year from 1990–91 to 1993–94 inclusive the estimated proportion of the total equipment expenditure spent in Wales was about 1 per cent. In the financial year 1994–95 the proportion is estimated to have been about 1.5 per cent.

The National Employer's Liaison Committee is my Department's only non-departmental Government body to operate in Wales.

Five Ministry of Defence agencies maintain operational establishments in Wales: the Army Initial Training Organisation; the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency; the RAF maintenance group; the RAF training group; and the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency. In addition the Army base Repair Organisation has a contracts office in Cardiff.

The Defence Estate Organisation, which is scheduled to launch as an agency on 18 March, maintains a deputy defence land agent office at Brecon, and is responsible for the management of the defence estate throughout Wales.

The following agencies maintain a presence or from time-to-time conduct operations or training in Wales: the Ministry of Defence police; the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency; the Meteorological Office; the Defence Dental Agency; and Military Survey Defence Agency.

I am placing the information requested regarding Department owned and leased land in Wales in the Library of the House of Commons.

Scott Inquiry

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's implementation of the recommendation of Sir Richard Scott on accountability to Parliament on trade in arms. [19460]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) on 22 January 1997, *Official Report*, columns 600–01, about action to implement the recommendations of Sir Richard Scott's report.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent defence contracts or subcontracts have been awarded to companies based in and around Colchester; and what is the value of each contract or subcontract. [20279]

Mr. Arbuthnot: During the current financial year, over 200 prime contracts have been placed by MoD contracts branches on approximately 100 companies either based in the area or where the major element of the work is being performed or sub-contracted in and around Colchester. Because of the number of contracts it is impractical to list them individually, but values range from several hundred to several million pounds.

The above does not include any minor sub-contract work, or local purchase orders placed locally by MoD units as this information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Army Apprentices College

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has made a decision on the future use of the former Army apprentices college near Harrogate; and if he will make a statement. [20681]

Mr. Soames: No firm decision has yet been made on the future of the Harrogate site. It will be drawn to the attention of bidders for the Army Foundation college, for which we intend to seek private finance, but we are not in a position to reach final conclusions at this stage.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20931]

Mr. Arbuthnot: None of my Department's executive non-departmental public bodies are subject to investigation by the Audit Commission. While none of them are listed as subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner they are all subject to the code of practice on access to Government information—under which complaints may ultimately be investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner. The Submarine museum has been incorporated as a charitable limited company and is not currently subject to audit by the National Audit Office. All other of my Department's executive non-departmental public bodies are subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office and all of my Department's executive non-departmental public bodies are subject to performance indicators and citizens charter provisions.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20900]

Mr. Arbutnot: There is a statutory right for the public to inspect the annual accounts of all the service museums, held by the Charities Commission; the National Army museum and the RAF museum publish their annual reports voluntarily. The Oil and Pipelines agency's annual report and accounts are laid before Parliament.

None of the MOD's executive non-departmental public bodies publishes the agendas or minutes of meetings; and there is no statutory requirement to do so.

Appointees to the Oil and Pipelines agency are required to declare any personal interests and records are maintained.

Low Flying

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on low flying by the RAF in the vicinity of Seaham on Monday 3 and Tuesday 4 March between 12 noon and 5 p.m; [19941]

(2) if the flight paths of low-flying exercises by the RAF now incorporate the vicinity of Seaham. [19944]

Mr. Soames: The RAF police have been tasked to investigate the activity of 3 and 4 March. My noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, will write to the hon. Member when these inquiries are complete. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the number of family credit claims and *(b)* the average payment of family credit by benefits offices made each year since 1992. [20296]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Riggs to Mr. Stephen Timms, dated 18 March 1997:

As Peter Mathison is away from the office on annual leave, the Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the number of Family Credit (FC) claims and the average payment of FC by benefits offices made each year since 1992.

The information is not available in the format requested. It may be helpful if I explain that FC is administered centrally by the Family Credit Unit. Statistics are produced on a national basis and provide the number of families in receipt of FC within a particular Benefits Agency (BA) office area at a given date. However, this only serves as a "snap-shot" of the position at that given date and does not provide details of the number of families in receipt of FC annually.

The scan was introduced in 1989 and details are normally held for 18 months. However, details have been retained which indicate the number of families in receipt at April 1993 and each successive year.

Details of the number of FC claims by BA offices will be placed in the Library.

Details of the average award of FC are only available on a national basis and are not broken down by BA office area. Details for 1992 and each successive year shown in the attached annex.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Average awards of family credit

Date	*Average weekly entitlement (£)*
May 1992	37.69
May 1993	43.34
May 1994	47.09
May 1995	50.17
February 1996	54.97

Source:
Analytical Services Division, Family Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, February 1996.
Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Benefit Recipients

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) of 12 February, *Official Report*, columns *247–48*, if he will list the

95 per cent. confidence limits for his number of estimated recipients of council tax benefit and retirement pension, and entitled non-recipients of income support; [18677]

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) of 12 February, *Official Report*, columns *247–48*, in respect of council tax benefits, if he will list the assumptions which have been made in supplying the answers to her question. [18676]

Mr. Roger Evans: The figures in my written answer to the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) on 12 February, *Official Report*, columns *247–48*, were based on the housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample. This database consists of detailed records of approximately one in every 100 recipients of housing benefit, council tax benefit or both. This information is supplied by the local authorities responsible for the administration and payment of these benefits. The records include details of amounts of housing benefit and council tax benefit being received, eligible council tax, details of other benefits being received by the claimant or partner and details of any dependants and non-dependants.

No particular assumptions were therefore made in producing figures for the number of recipients of council tax benefit and retirement pension or the number of recipients of council tax benefit, retirement pension and income support.

To provide an estimate for recipients of council tax benefit and retirement pension eligible for but not claiming income support, information on the relevant database records was used to calculate whether council tax benefit, after adding back in any deductions for non-dependants, is equal to eligible council tax. This then indicates whether the recipient has income less than his applicable amount—the total of personal allowances and premiums—and therefore whether they would be eligible for income support. Differences in council tax benefit and income support rules relating to earnings disregards and capital amounts have been taken into account in this calculation.

The only assumptions made are that:

1. Recipients of council tax benefit and retirement pension, who are not already claiming income support, but receive either war disablement or war widow's pension and have council tax benefit equal to eligible council tax, will not be entitled to income support. This is due to the differences between how income from war disablement or war widow's pension is disregarded for council tax benefit and income support. Analysis of the cases where council tax benefit is equal to eligible council tax, which would total around 16,000, indicates that the vast majority would be unlikely to qualify for income support due to these differences and the relatively large amounts of war disablement or war widow's pension paid in addition to retirement pension. The effect of this assumption, if any, would be slightly to underestimate the number of entitled non-recipients of income support.

2. The number of special cases where a non-dependant deduction would not be applied and which cannot be identified from the information on the database, is relatively small. In these cases, it has been assumed that a non-dependant deduction has been made and so this deduction has been added back in the calculation described above. The effect will be slightly to overestimate the number of entitled non-recipients of income support.

3. The effects of any other minor differences between the entitlement rules of council tax benefit and income support are small.

Due to the possible effects of these assumptions, the estimated figure was rounded to the nearest 10,000.

The 95 per cent. confidence limits are as follows, and do not take into account the effect of the assumptions described above:

	Number (000s)	*Approximate 95 per cent. confidence interval*
Recipients of council tax benefit and retirement pension	2,431	2,411 to 2,451
Estimated recipients of council tax benefit and retirement pension, eligible for but not claiming income support	260	250 to 270

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary; [20896]

(2) if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [20935]

Mr. Burt: The information is as follows:

The Occupational Pensions Board does not publish annual reports or accounts, minutes and agendas of meetings. It has compiled, voluntarily, a register of members' interests which is available for public inspection. On 5 March the board published a final report which contained a detailed history of the board's work and achievements. It is subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, scrutiny by the National Audit Office, the statutory provisions for open government and provisions under the citizens charter. It is not subject to performance indicators. The board will cease to exist from 6 April.

The Pensions Compensation Board was established in August 1996 and commences full operation on 6 April. It will publish an annual report and accounts. It is compiling voluntarily a register of members interests which will be available for public inspection. It is subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, scrutiny by the National Audit Office, the statutory provisions for open government and provisions under the citizens charter. It will also be subject to performance indicators.

The Occupational Regulatory Authority was established in April 1996 and commences full operation on 6 april 1997. It will publish an annual report and accounts. It has compiled voluntarily a register of members interests which is available for public inspection. It is subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, scrutiny by the National Audit Office, the statutory provisions for open government and provisions under the citizens charter. It will also be subject to performance indicators.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *342*, to the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner), what is his estimate of the numbers of *(a)* women and *(b)* men who could gain if new claims for invalid care allowance were allowed for people over retirement age. [18982]

Mr. Burt: The estimated number of women and men who would gain if new claims for invalid care allowance were allowed for people over the age of 65 are 65,000 and 5,000 respectively. Most of these are estimated to gain by only a small proportion of the basic invalid care allowance rate, because of the rules on contributory benefits. Those on income-related benefits would gain entitlement to carer premium.

Note:

Estimates are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1994–95.

Tax and National Insurance (Lower Earnings Limits)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the costs and savings to individuals and employers of aligning the national insurance lower earnings limit and the personal tax allowance at *(a)* £62 and *(b)* £70 per week for the year 1997–98. [18978]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table:

Estimated increase/decrease in revenue from aligning the national insurance contribution lower earnings limit and the personal tax allowance for 1997–98 at (a) £62 and (b) £70

	(a) £62	*(b) £70*
Employee contributions[1]	Nil	–£575 million
Employer contributions[1]	Nil	+ £100 million[2]
Income Tax[3]	+ £4.7 billion[4]	+ £2.3 billion[4]

Notes:

[1] Source: Government Actuary's Department.

[2] The estimated net gain in revenue from employers' national insurance contributions arises from the counter effect of the contracted-out rebate being applied to a narrower band of earnings.

[3] Source: Inland Revenue.

[4] Estimates based on information projected from the 1994–95 survey of personal incomes and the 1994–95 family expenditure survey. Figures include the tax yield from reducing the aged personal allowances for people aged 65, whose total income is greater than the aged income limit of £15,600, or over to a minimum level equivalent to (a) £62 per week or (b) £70 per week.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *309*, what percentage of the total amount of national insurance contributions from employees was paid by *(a)* those with more than twice and *(b)* those with less than average earnings in (i) 1979–80 and (ii) 1995–96. [19681]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Figures for 1979–80 are not available and could only be provided a disproportionate cost.

Percentage of total employee national insurance contributions in each band

	1995–96
More than twice average earnings	12.8
Less than average earnings	35.3

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Personal Pensions

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the net present cost, in 1996 prices, of national insurance rebates and incentives paid to those who have joined appropriate personal pensioners since 1988–89, assuming the social discount rate used by his Department. [19950]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) on 20 February, *Official Report*, column *712*.

Housing Benefit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the additional housing benefit costs in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99 arising from the provisions under *(a)* section 167 and *(b)* section 197 of the Housing Act 1996. [21133]

Mr. Roger Evans: No estimates are available.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* single people under the age of 25 years and *(b)* single people aged 25 to 59 years living in the private rented sector made a claim for housing benefit prior to 2 January 1996 which is still continuous. [21139]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give a breakdown of the costs associated with the establishment of the jobseeker's allowance in Scotland. [20973]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested.

The overall one-off costs of implementing the jobseeker's allowance in Great Britain are estimated at £348 million.

Long-term Unemployment

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the estimated total cost of long-term unemployment in Scotland in 1996, separately identifying the costs of *(a)* the jobseeker's allowance, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* income support; and if he will indicate the number of people in receipt of such benefits. [20974]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Estimated annual cost of long-term unemployment in Scotland—1996

	Number of claimants	*Total weekly benefit* £	*Implied annual expenditure* £
Income support	83,000	4,506,000	234,000,000
Unemployment benefit	13,000	664,000	35,000,000
Housing benefit	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes:

1. The latest available information for expenditure purposes in May 1996. Since jobseeker's allowance was not introduced until October 1996 figures for unemployment benefit have been provided.
2. It has not been possible to include figures on housing benefit since data are not yet available for 1996. Once data are available, analysis is limited to claimants also in receipt of income support.
3. Long-term unemployed has been defined as those claiming unemployment benefit for more than six months and includes those who receive income support only.

Basic Pension Plus

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cumulative gross cost to public funds of implementing the basic pension plus proposals between 2001 and 2040. [20993]

Mr. Heald: It is not possible to give a precise cumulative cost since that will depend on when the scheme is introduced and what the initial age limit is. The overall cost to public funds of implementing basic pension plus, including the new rebates and reversing the timing of tax relief, will rise on average by about £160 million in each year following implementation reaching a maximum of about £7 billion by 2040 or later.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the Government Actuary's advice on which he has based his estimate that a person on average earnings paying minium contributions to basic pension plus throughout their life would receive a pension of around £150 a week. [20994]

Mr. Heald: The Government Actuary's assumptions, on which the estimated pension of £175 per week for a person on average earning was based, are shown in the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 11 March, *Official Report*, columns *195–96*.

Departmental Select Committee Report

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the Government's response to the Third report of the Social Security Committee, "Uprating of State Retirement Pensions Payable to People Resident Abroad" (HC 143 of Session 1996–97). [21424]

Mr. Lilley: The Government welcome the Committee's report, which focused on the long-standing policy of uprating UK state retirement pensions when paid abroad in specific countries. The report is an important and useful study.

The report contained one recommendation:

"That there should be a free vote at prime time to allow Members to express their opinion on the principle of whether the Government should pay upratings to some or all of those pensioners living in countries where upratings are not paid at present".

Whipping arrangements are a matter for the business managers of all parties. The Government note that the House had the opportunity to debate the uprating of pensions paid abroad during the passage of the Pensions Bill in July 1995. Over 200 hon. Members voted on amendments aimed at providing uprating increases, which were heavily defeated.

The Committee's report rightly recognises that priorities for public expenditure will inevitably be taken into account in considering the issue. Almost £1 billion a year is paid to UK pensioners abroad. It would cost another £250 million a year to bring frozen pensions up to the rate that would be paid if the pensioner were in the UK.

Pensions and Benefits (Earnings Link)

Mr Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the savings to his Department in 1995–96 of ending the link between disability benefits and annual earnings at current prices. [16782]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer Tuesday 25 February 1997]:* The information is in the table.

The link between the benefit uprating and earnings was broken in 1980 to ensure that long-term provision for the sick and disabled should be sustainable.

Expenditure savings 1995–96

	£ million
Incapacity benefit	1,495
Invalidity allowance/age addition	80
Attendance allowance/disability living allowance	1,335
NCIP/severe disablement allowance	105
Invalid care allowance	105

Notes:

1. Estimates are rounded to nearest £5 million.
2. Estimates converted to 1996–97 prices using GDP deflator.
3. Estimates take account of offsetting costs in the income related benefits.
4. Disability living allowance includes the higher and middle rate care components. The mobility components and lowest rate of care component have been excluded from the calculation as they were never linked to earnings.

Source:

Analytical Services Division.

Disability Payments

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the reasons for the corrections to his answers to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe of 11 November, *Official Report*, column *90* and of 4 December, *Official*

Report, columns *714–15* in respect of disability benefits; and if he will update his answers to include figures for the year 1995–96. [16780]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 25 February 1997]:* The estimates of the additional costs of uprating invalidity benefit, including invalidity allowance, in line with the higher of earnings or prices in my replies of 11 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *90* and 4 December 1996, columns *714–15*, did not take account of the fact that between November 1980 and November 1985, the rate of basic invalidity pension was abated by 5 per cent. in lieu of taxation and that an equivalent abatement applied to the rates of invalidity allowance between November 1980 and November 1981.

The revised estimates in my answers of 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *78–79* were based on the assumption that such an abatement would not have applied if the link with earnings had been maintained.

The estimates also incorporated refined calculations, based on information that had not been originally available, of the offsetting savings arising from fewer claims to income-related benefits.

Sickness and Social Security

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what factors underlie the expected expenditure on sickness and social security between 1996–97 and 2001–02 projected in the financial statement and Budget Report 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [17651]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 25 February 1997]:* I have been asked to reply.

Two factors account for the expected increase in social security expenditure on the sick and disabled between 1996–97 and 1990–00. First, a large increase in the number of sick and disabled claimants. Secondly, an increase in the number receiving premiums over and above the basic benefit payment.

My reply to the hon. Member on 24 February, *Official Report*, column *19*, about growth in cyclical social security expenditure, highlighted that projections beyond 1999–00 are based on simple broad assumptions. Consequently, a detailed breakdown of expenditure trends is not meaningful, which is why projections of benefit expenditure beyond 1999–00 are rounded to the nearest £1 billion.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 20 March 1997

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Child Support (Legal Aid)

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate he has made of the costs to the legal aid budget from court cases where the Child Support Agency decision has led parents without care to seek a ruling to establish contact time with their children. [20173]

Mr. Streeter: None.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21206]

Mr. Streeter: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *613–14*. Any further information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Court Fees (Exemptions)

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance has been issued to court staff on dealing with applications for exemption from court fees; and if he will publish it. [21400]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Keith Hill, dated 20 March 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the guidance issued to court staff on exemptions from court fees. Written guidance on dealing with applications for fee exemption and remission is given to court staff when any fees order includes this issue. The guidance, which is lengthy, is designed for internal use only.

Mr. Hill: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions an individual in receipt of *(a)* family credit, *(b)* disability working allowance and *(c)* housing benefit has (i) applied for exemption from payment of a court fee and (ii) been granted exemption from payment of a court fee in each of the last five years. [21401]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Keith Hill, dated 20 March 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of fee exemptions applied for, and granted, in each of the last five years. Fee exemption is granted automatically to anyone in receipt of Income Support. In family cases, it is also granted to people receiving Family Credit. Information on the number of people to whom it has been granted is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Litigants on family credit in non-family cases, as well as people in receipt of disability working allowance and housing benefit, can apply for fee remission. Information on the number of applications for fee remission is not kept centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, the table below shows the total number of court cases in which remission has been granted.

Year	*Number of cases*
1991–92	766
1992–93	953
1993–94	2,261
1994–95	4,153
1995–96	3,414

Land Registry

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the key performance targets for Her Majesty's Land Registry executive agency for 1997–98. [21623]

Mr. Streeter: The following table sets out the key performance targets that the Lord Chancellor has set for Her Majesty's Land Registry for 1997–98.

HM Land Registry
Key performance indicators and targets 1997–98

Indicator	*Target*
Financial	
Return on average capital employed[1]	2 per cent.
External financing limit	£0
Efficiency	
Cost per unit in real terms	£26.67
Cost per unit in cash terms[2]	£29.94
Charter Standards Speed	
Percentage of pre-completion applications handled within two working days and	98 per cent.
time taken to process all pre-completion applications	3 working days
Time taken to process 80 per cent. of all registrations	25 working days
Accuracy	
Percentage of registrations handled free from any error	98.50 per cent
Percentage of customers responding to the annual survey who perceived the accuracy of registrations to be excellent or good	Better than 90 per cent. (being the result of the 1996 survey)
Development of Land Registration	
Bringing into force provisions of the Land Registration Act 1997 introducing new "triggers" for compulsory first registration	1 January 1998
Number of computerised titles in the Land Register (millions)	15.10
Number of computerised title plans (millions)	1.00

HM Land Registry
Key performance indicators and targets 1997–98

Indicator	*Target*
Number of scanned filed documents (millions)	0.60
Number of account holder using the Direct Access service at the end of the year	550
National Land Information Service	
Feasibility study of the National Land Information Service	Complete initial phases of feasibility study and report to Government by 31 December 1997

Fuller details of the agency's targets are given in its business plan, which is available from Her Majesty's Land Registry.

[1] ROCHE below 6 per cent. reflects agreement with HM Treasury to apply surplus income generated in 1993–95 (when ROCHE exceeded 25 per cent. in each year) fee reductions in 1996–99.

[2] The inflation factor for the cost per unit in cash terms is derived from the GDP indices announced by HM Treasury in December 1996.

The Court Service

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the key performance targets for The Court Service executive agency for 1997–98. [21621]

Mr. Streeter: The following table sets out the key performance targets that the Lord Chancellor has set for The Court Service for 1997–98.

The Court Service
Key performance targets 1997–98

	Indicator	*Target*
Quality of service	1. Average percentage of charter standards achieved	99 per cent.
Civil courts	2. Percentage of Administrative process dealt with within target time	92 per cent.
Crown court	3. Percentage of defendants whose trial commences within target time (16 weeks) or less	75 per cent.
Unit costs (civil)	4. Unit cost of an item of originating process in the civil courts	£95
Cost recovery	5. Percentage of the cost of the civil courts recovered through fees	91 per cent.
Unit costs (Crown)	6. Unit cost of a case in the Crown court	£1,926

Public Trust Office

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the key performance targets for the Public Trust Office executive agency for 1997–98. [21622]

Mr. Streeter: The following table sets out the key performance targets that the Lord Chancellor has set for the Public Trust Office for 1997–98.

Public Trust Office
Key performance indicators and targets 1997–98

Indicator	*Target*
1. To carry out accounting transactions within target times.	To bring to account at least 98.5 per cent. of receipts and payments transactions within turnaround targets by volume weighted performance.
2. To achieve investment targets.	To pay annually not less than the rate provided by the average of a model set of comparators for special and basic rate at 75 per cent. of special rate; on an annual basis to ensure that 85 per cent. of all measured funds perform in line or better than their model based on stock market indices; on a three year rolling basis to ensure that 80 per cent. of all measured funds perform in line or better than their model based on stock market indices.
3. To achieve charter standards.	To achieve 98 per cent. of charter standards.
4. To achieve unit costs in activity areas.	The cost per unit to be £195.65.
5. Percentage of full costs recovered.	To ensure that 100 per cent. of full costs are recovered.

Fuller details of the agency's targets are given in its business plan, which is available from the Public Trust Office.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Portcullis House (Jubilee Line Extension)

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will make a statement about the progress of the Portcullis House project and the effect upon it of recent announcements concerning the delay to the Jubilee line extension. [21516]

Sir Raymond Powell: I am pleased to be able to report the progress which has been made with the design and procurement of the new parliamentary building, which Madam Speaker has agreed should be called Portcullis House. Contracts for the structure, the external envelope and all the main services have been awarded and off-site manufacture is well under way. The contractors and consultants are successfully overcoming problems which inevitably arise in such a complex building and, with good co-operation, will continue to be able to resolve them. The Committee had the opportunity recently to meet representatives of many of the firms involved. They can have no doubt of the importance that the House attaches to the building being completed on time and within budget. We were pleased to hear of the commitment and skills that they will bring to this demanding project.

As I advised my right hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) in my earlier reply, *Official Report*, 12 February 1997, columns *254–56*, London Underground's work on the construction of the new Westminster station has not proceeded according to programme so it was not able to give possession of the site on 2 February 1997, the agreed date. Instead, there was to be a phased programme starting with the erection of the first tower crane at the beginning of May and increasing site possession from mid-May until the site was

to be transferred on 29 July. Although London Underground remains confident that it will achieve the July date, the early handover has been gradually eroded. Thus, our main construction work will start at a slower pace than we had planned and this will increase the pressure on the project team to complete construction of the building in the year 2000. It will require a concerted effort by all the contractors and consultants to achieve this objective.

ENVIRONMENT

Go-karts

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to establish national guidelines in respect to the guarding of exposed rear drive shafts and disc in-running nips on go-karts; and if he will make a statement. [20538]

Sir Paul Beresford: There is no manufacturing standard or type approval for go-karts. A voluntary standard is being discussed by the European standard body CEN, committee TC 152, working group 1.

The Health and Safety Executive's national interest group for entertainment has met the go-kart manufacturers to discuss manufacturers' and suppliers' responsibilities. Further discussions are due to take place.

Cetaceans

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received with regard to the protection of whales, dolphins and porpoises in United Kingdom waters; and if he will make a statement. [20519]

Mr. Clappison: Concern about the conservation status of cetaceans continues to generate a steady stream of inquiries from the public. However, no significant representations concerning their protection in United Kingdom waters have recently been received.

The United Kingdom, as a member of the International Whaling Commission and the agreement on the conservation of small cetaceans of the Baltic and North seas, continues to be committed to the conservation of all cetaceans.

Pollution Abatement Technology

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate *(a)* the United Kingdom's current share of the world market for pollution abatement technology and *(b)* the size of that market share during (i) the next five years and (ii) the next 10 years. [20926]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Business, Industry and Energy on 11 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *136*.

Metropolitan Councils (Capital Receipts)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total current capital receipts for each of the metropolitan councils; and if he will make a statement. [20730]

Mr. Curry: The amounts of accumulated usable capital receipts at 31 March 1996 for each metropolitan council are listed in the table:

	£000
Barnsley	0
Birmingham	0
Bolton	45
Bradford	0
Bury	41
Calderdale	0
Coventry	0
Doncaster	0
Dudley	0
Gateshead	39
Kirklees	0
Knowsley	7,359
Leeds	0
Liverpool	4,104
Manchester	5,066
Newcastle upon Tyne	0
North Tyneside	1,932
Oldham	0
Rochdale	2,347
Rotherham	1,046
Salford	223
Sandwell	0
Sefton	6,043
Sheffield	0
Solihull	1,763
South Tyneside	0
St. Helens	13
Stockport	0
Sunderland	1,656
Tameside	0
Trafford	3,587
Wakefield	0
Walsall	0
Wigan	55
Wirral	86
Wolverhampton	159
Total	35,564

Source:
1995–96 capital outturn returns.
Note:
Figures for the amounts of set aside capital receipts are not available. These form part of the provision for credit liabilities, which also includes amounts set aside from revenue.

Nirex Ltd.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the advice the Nirex peer reviewers provided to Nirex in report S96-004 appendix 3 concerning the report title used in the document submitted to the review panel for initial review concerning the use of the word hydrogeological. [20996]

Mr. Clappison: I understand that the baseline report review group advised Nirex that the use of the word "hydrogeological" in the initial title proposed for the report was too general and therefore gave insufficient guidance as to the content of the report.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his review of the application by UK Nirex Ltd. to build a rock characterisation facility at Longlands farm, Cumbria; and what has been the cost of this review to his Department. [21307]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State's reasons for dismissing the planning appeal by UK Nirex Ltd. are set out fully in the decision letter which was issued on 17 March. A copy of the letter has been sent to the hon. Member. The specific cost of individual planning appeals is not available.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the names and numbers of the reports prepared by the disposal safety assessment team co-ordinated by Nirex on scientific and technical issues on *(a)* the disposal of radioactive wastes and *(b)* the development of the safety analysis of the proposed repository evaluated by (i) his Department, (ii) Nirex and (iii) the UK Atomic Energy Authority. [20997]

Mr. Gummer: This information should be requested from UK Nirex Ltd. The report produced by Nirex's disposal safety assessment team on which Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's review studies were based was Nirex report 337 "Deep Waste Repository: A Preliminary Assessment of Post-closure Performance", D. E. Billington (editor), 1992, four volumes. A number of research reports containing supporting information were also reviewed.

Local Government Finance (Devon)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much public money was provided to *(a)* Devon county council, *(b)* South Hams district council, *(c)* Teignbridge district council and *(d)* Torbay Borough Council in each of the past five years. [21346]

Mr. Curry: The local authorities have reported the following amounts of central Government grants in the past four years. In 1992–93, under the community charge system, revenue support grant was paid to the lower tier authorities to support the charge payer in respect of spending by all tiers, so comparable figures for the individual authorities are not available.

£ thousands

	Devon County Council	*South Hams District Council*	*Teignbridge District Council*	*Torbay Borough Council*
Grants supporting revenue expenditure[1]				
1993–94	[2]378,167	9,313	14,310	30,507
1994–95	[2]385,318	9,796	15,690	33,474
1995–96	324,796	10,550	16,556	34,691
1996–97[3]	324,495	10,257	16,806	35,260
Grants supporting capital expenditure[4]				
1993–94	7,234	857	993	1,093
1994–95	5,101	1,058	645	766
1995–96	4,413	1,387	806	993
1996–97[5]	3,880	340	536	866

[1] Includes revenue support grant, specific and special grants inside and outside AEF and SSA Reduction Grant.

[2] Before the setting up of separate police authorities in 1995–96, county councils had responsibility for police services, therefore these figures include expenditure funded by police specific grant.

[3] Budget estimates.

[4] Includes grants from central Government and non-departmental public bodies.

[5] Forecasts.

Irrigation (Water Abstraction)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the use of abstraction licences to control the use of water for trickle irrigation. [21148]

Mr. Clappison: No licence is currently required for the abstraction of water for irrigation, except for spray irrigation. We have announced that we shall be conducting a full review of the abstraction licencing system.

Fur

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to implement European regulation 3254/91. [21328]

Mr. Clappison: The regulation can be implemented effectively only through concerted action by all EU member states. The European Commission is negotiating with the major fur producer countries an agreement by which the principles of the regulation can be implemented. The Council of Ministers has requested the Commission to introduce a fur import ban if no satisfactory agreement can be reached.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been made to him by other Government Departments during the last three years regarding the implementation of European regulation 3254/91. [21329]

Mr. Clappison: There have been regular contacts at both official and ministerial level between all Departments concerned with UK Government policy on this matter.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21202]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *613*. Any additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Associations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was his Department's expenditure on housing associations in Devon in each of the past five years. [21345]

Mr. Curry: The Department provides funding to housing associations through grant in aid to the Housing Corporation. Capital expenditure in Devon through the Housing Corporation's approved development programme in each of the past four years was as follows:

1993–94: £30.2 million

1994–95: £28.8 million

1995–96: £18.8 million

1996–97: £16.9 million (forecast).

The 1992–93 capital expenditure figure for Devon cannot be separately identified from other approved development programme expenditure.

Hedgerow Regulations

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the protection afforded to the linnet under the draft hedgerow regulations. [21089]

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what protection the draft hedgerow regulations provide for the song thrush. [21298]

Mr. Clappison: The draft Hedgerows Regulations 1997, as laid before Parliament, protect hedgerows which are important in terms of their historic, wildlife or landscape value, as set out in the criteria listed at schedule 1. One of the criteria for determining the wildlife value of the hedgerow is the presence of species of birds, mammals, insects or plants within specified categories, which do not include the linnet or song thrush.

A costed action plan to halt the decline of the song thrush by the year 2000 was drawn up by the biodiversity steering group. The group is currently preparing an action plan for the linnet.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the average cost of implementing the draft hedgerow regulations for each local authority in England. [21295]

Mr. Clappison: Costs of implementing the draft Hedgerows Regulations, as laid in Parliament, together with costs relating to many other individual services, are included within local authorities' "All Other Services" standard spending assessments, but are not separately identified.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to enable the biodiversity value of a hedgerow to be measured within the evaluation period; and if he will make a statement. [21297]

Mr. Clappison: Schedule 1 to the draft Hedgerows Regulations, as laid in Parliament, sets out the criteria which local planning authorities must use to determine the importance of a hedgerow notified to them. The criteria include several relating to the value of the hedgerow for wildlife and for biological diversity.

Zinc

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what his plans are for reducing the input of zinc in sewage sludge which may be spread on the land. [21149]

Mr. Clappison: The Government have accepted in its response to the report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution on the sustainable use of soil that there should be continued action to reduce the concentration of zinc and other metals in sewage sludge. We intend to commission a further survey of sewage sludge quality in 1998. This will provide the opportunity to confirm the effect of trade effluent controls in considerably reducing metal concentrations over the last two decades and will provide a basis for assessing the need for any further steps, taking into account the potential costs and benefits.

Multi-occupancy Accommodation

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the provisions in the Housing Act 1996 relating to the inspection of multi-occupancy accommodation will come into effect. [21428]

Mr. Clappison: Most of the provisions of part II of the Housing Act 1996 relating to houses in multiple occupation came into effect on 3 March 1997. Section 73 of the Act, which imposes a new duty on landlords of HMOs to keep their property fit for the number of occupants will be introduced at a later date. A number of related statutory instruments also took effect from 3 March 1997. These are the Houses in Multiple Occupation (Fees for Registration Schemes) Order 1997, S.I. 1997/229, the Housing (Fire Safety in Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order 1997, S.I. 1997/230, the Housing (Enforcement Procedures for Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order 1997, S.I. 1997/227, and the Housing (Recovery of Expenses for Section 352 Notices) Order 1997, S.I. 1997/228.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the United Kingdom action plan for the phasing out and destruction of polychlorinated biphenyls and dangerous polychlorinated biphenyl substitutes. [21562]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am publishing today the action plan which forms part of our strategy for fulfilling the commitment, made by the United Kingdom at the third North Sea conference at The Hague in 1990, to phase out and destroy identifiable PCBs. It is also the first step towards meeting the requirements of EC directive 96/59/EC, which will be implemented by regulations in due course.

It has long been recognised that PCBs pose an environmental threat, particularly to marine life. That is why, in 1986, we banned their sale and most uses. There are many organisations, including factories, offices, schools and hospitals, which may have equipment containing PCBs.

A key element of the action plan is that there should be co-operation between the competent authorities, companies who destroy PCBs and those who may have equipment containing them. Our proposals are designed to ensure an orderly phase-out and the most effective use of destruction capacity, in the interests of industry and the environment.

A copy of the action plan has been sent to all local authorities, education authorities, health authorities and universities throughout the United Kingdom as well as the relevant trade associations. Copies of the action plan have also been placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an announcement about the

spending plans of the Department of the Environment, Ordnance Survey and the Office of Water Services for the years 1997–98 to 1999–2000. [21653]

Mr. Gummer: I have today published the Department of the Environment's annual report for 1997, which sets out in detail the outcome of the public expenditure survey as announced in the November 1996 Budget statement, as it affects my areas of responsibility. The report shows how my Department, Ordnance Survey and the Office of Water Services have discharged their functions over the past year. It provides background on each spending programme, and sets out our achievements to date and plans for the future.

Environment Agency

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on the award of costs at hearings held in connection with the functions of the Environment Agency or appeals against the agency. [21654]

Mr. Clappison: Subsection 250(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Secretary of State to make an order as to the costs of the parties at an inquiry and as to the parties by whom the costs are to be paid. Subsection 53(2) of the Environment Act 1995 applies subsection 250(5) of the 1972 Act to inquiries and other hearings held in connection with the functions of the Environment Agency or the Secretary of State's functions in relation to the agency. These include appeals over integrated pollution control authorisations and waste management licences under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, waste carrier licences under the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989, and abstraction licences and discharge consents under the Water Resources Act 1991.

The parties at these hearings are normally expected to meet their own expenses irrespective of the outcome. Costs are awarded only on grounds of "unreasonable" behaviour resulting in unnecessary expense. An award of costs does not therefore follow the event of the decision on merits.

In considering the award of costs, the Secretary of State will apply by analogy the guidance on award of costs in planning proceedings in DOE circular 8/93 (Welsh Office 23/93). The circular includes a summary of the criteria for unreasonable behaviour and advice on the general principles for awards of costs for unreasonable behaviour, general procedural requirements, and applications for costs.

Section 53 of the 1995 Act enables costs to be awarded only in cases where a hearing is held. Unlike planning proceedings, costs are not available where a hearing is cancelled due to a party's withdrawal.

Subsection 250(5) of the 1972 Act does not apply to proceedings in connection with local authority air pollution control decisions under part 1 of the Environment Protection Act 1990. Consideration will be given to seeking such provision in due course.

Council Tax Capping

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an announcement on the capping arrangements for 1997–98. [21655]

Mr. Gummer: All local authorities have now set their budgets for 1997–98. The next step in council tax capping is for the Secretary of State to announce capping principles for all authorities. However, in view of the announcement of the general election, I consider it more appropriate that decisions on capping should be taken by the next Administration. This is the approach which was adopted in 1992.

Cash Limits

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change the 1996–97 cash limits and external financing limits for which he is responsible. [21656]

Mr. Gummer: The DOE/HC—Housing Corporation—cash limit will be decreased by £5,916,000 from £1,037,868,000 to £1,031,952,000. This reflects a switch within city challenge expenditure from funding via the Housing Corporation to funding via other single regeneration budget schemes.

The external financing limit for urban development corporations will be increased by £764,000 from £209,817,000 to £210,581,000. This reflects a transfer of an underspend of £600,000 from city challenge to Tyne and Wear development corporation's grant in aid and a transfer of £600,000 from the city challenge and single regeneration budget challenge fund programmes to the Black Country development corporation's grant in aid, both transfers allowing regeneration projects to be brought forward. The transfers will be offset by a reduction in Plymouth development corporation's grant in aid of £436,000, transferred to the urban programme and the single regeneration budget challenge fund.

The external financing limit for the urban regeneration agency—English Partnerships—will be increased by £52,883,000 from £158,082,000 to £210,965,000. This reflects a transfer of provision from English Partnerships' derelict land grant of £2,000,000, and also amends the limit to take account of the increases in grant in aid at the winter supplementary estimates of £30,883,000, and at the spring supplementary estimates of £20,000,000.

The external financing limit for the housing action trusts will be increased by £457,000, from £89,210,000 to £89,667,000, consisting of a reduction of £1,550,000 at the spring supplementary estimates and a subsequent increase of £2,007,000, transferred from estate action, city challenge and the single regeneration budget challenge fund. I draw attention to the figures for the external financing limit for the housing action trusts in my answer of 4 November 1996 to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) *Official Report*, column *346*. This incorrectly showed the limit rising from £878,960,000 to £879,210,000. The correct figures were £88,960,000 rising to £89,210,000.

The DOE/NT—new towns—non-voted cash limit will be reduced by £4,554,000 from minus £110,000,000 to minus £114,554,000. This reduction reflects an increase in capital receipts to the Commission for New Towns of £1,750,000 and a technical transfer of £2,804,000 to the DOE/OES—other environmental services—non-voted cash limit which is described later.

The DOE/OES non-voted cash limit will be increased £2,804,000 from £25,289,000 to £28,093,000. This reflects a transfer from the DOE/NT—new towns—non-voted cash limit to provide for supplementary credit approvals to local authorities to cover their capital contributions to the Commission for the New Towns under road cost sharing arrangements.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 4—local government and planning, England—covering sections A to F of that vote, will be reduced by £1,250,000 from £31,127,007,000 to £31,125,757,000. The decrease is the cumulative result of reductions in the payments made to the Valuation Office Agency, and in the expenses of valuation tribunals in section A—valuation services, in the grant payable to the Local Government Commission in section B—reorganisation of local government; and in the planning and minerals research programme, section D. This amount will be transferred to the DOE/LGR—local government reorganisation—non-voted cash limit for the reasons given later.

The DOE/LGR—local government reorganisation—non-voted cash limit will be increased by £1,250,000 from £105,669,000 to £106,919,000 to meet a greater than forecast demand for commutation and transitional costs of reorganisation supplementary credit approvals. The increase will be a met by the transfer from class VI vote 4—local government and planning, England—cash limit referred to above.

Some of the increases will be offset either by savings or transfers; the remainder is allowed for in the 1996–97 control total forecast outturn shown in the "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses", Cm 3601, published on Thursday 20 March 1997.

Sellafield (Rock Characterisation Facility)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those organisations which responded to the renewed invitation to make submissions on the plans by Nirex to develop a rock characterisation facility near Sellafield, indicating the documents that each submitted. [21002]

Mr. Gummer: Letters received since the close of the inquiry, and the main reports to which they refer, are listed in the annex attached to the decision letter on the appeal, a copy of which has been sent to the hon. Member.

Wirral, South (Visits)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times he visited the Wirral, South constituency during *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997. [21217]

Mr. Gummer: I have made one visit to Wirral, South in the last three years, which was not on departmental business.

PRIME MINISTER

Basic Pension Plus

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on basic pension plus proposals. [19816]

The Prime Minister: The Government's proposals for basic pension plus will bring about the largest extension of personal ownership since the spread of home ownership and will provide secure pensions for the increasing number of elderly people in the next century.

Contraceptives (Minors)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has made to the petition presented to him by Mrs. Jenny Bacon, together with right hon. and hon. Members, on Wednesday 12 March, on the subject of the provision of contraceptives to minors. [21284]

The Prime Minister: My office has sent an acknowledgement. The Under-Secretary of State for Health my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), will write to Mr. and Mrs. Bacon about their petition shortly.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Attorney-General what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21208]

The Attorney-General: I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *613–14*. This gives figures of 94.3 per cent. for the Crown Prosecution Service and 92 per cent. for the Serious Fraud Office. In the case of the Treasury Solicitor's Department, 75 per cent. of invoices were paid within 30 days. The Government Property Lawyers paid all bills in accordance with contract.

Next Steps Principles

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Attorney-General how next steps principles are being applied in the Crown Prosecution Service and Serious Fraud Office. [21514]

The Attorney-General: As I announced on 27 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *797*, to the hon. Member, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office are now both operating according to next steps principles. Each Department has agreed a management framework which explains how these principles, which include the introduction of new performance measures and devolution of responsibilities, are being applied in practice. Copies of the management frameworks have been put in the Libraries of the House.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Government Car Service

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what performance targets he has set for the Government car service and interdespatch service; and if he will make a statement. [21643]

Mr. Freeman: Following my announcement on 3 December, I have made arrangements for the establishment of a new agency from 1 April. It will comprise the Government car service and the interdespatch service and will be known as Government Car and Despatch Agency. I have set the following performance targets for the financial year 1997–98.

Financial

Achieve 100.5 per cent. cost recovery on an accruals basis.

Operate within a maximum deficit on the Vote of –£270,000 excluding payments for voluntary early retirement or severance.

Achieve a sales turnover of £10. 3 million.

Quality

Achieve a customer satisfaction rating of 92 per cent.

Maintain ISO 9002 accreditation for the Government car service pool, and extend it to the interdespatch service.

Efficiency

Achieve no less than 2 per cent. reduction in running costs in real terms.

Environment

Achieve an annual average of 25.5 miles per gallon for GCS and IDS fleets.

I am placing copies of the framework document for GCDA in the Libraries of the House.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those compliance cost assessments published during the latest six month period. [21644]

Mr. Freeman: Since April 1993, the Government have required Departments to prepare and publish compliance cost assessments with all proposed legislation presented to Parliament to assess the impact on business costs. This includes a special test of the impact on small businesses. Since January 1996, the responsible Minister has had to certify that he has seen the CCA and is satisfied that the regulatory proposal strikes the appropriate balance between cost and benefit.

I have presented to Parliament today a Command Paper—Cmd 3593—listing 101 CCAs published between 1 July 1996 and 31 December 1996 plus two CCAs published in June 1996 which were omitted from the previous Command Paper. Copies of the CCAs listed are available in the Libraries of the House. This is the sixth such Command Paper.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will publish guidance for Crown servants involved in the investigation or prosecution of a criminal offence referred to in his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, columns *600–01*, summarising the Government's response to the recommendations made by Sir Richard Scott following his inquiry into the export of arms and arms-related equipment to Iraq. [21637]

Mr. Freeman: I have today published two guidance booklets—"Giving Evidence or Information about Suspected Crimes: A Guide for Crown Servants" and "Giving Evidence or Information about Suspected Crimes: Guidance for Departments and Investigators".

The booklets provide advice on the responsibilities of Crown servants who believe that they have official information which may be relevant to the investigation or prosecution of a criminal offence. The booklets also set out comprehensive procedures for handling requests for such information from investigators, prosecutors or the defence. The availability of the booklets is being made known to all Crown servants. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21196]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, columns *613–14*.

Bletchley Park

Mr. Allason: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent representations he has received concerning the purchase of Bletchley park by Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair and its current ownership. [20674]

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated under the terms of its framework document to the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate under its chief executive, Mr. Neil Borrett. The agency is therefore responding to the question.

Letter from N. E. Borrett to Mr. Rupert Allason, dated 19 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply to your Question regarding Bletchley Park.

PACE is responsible for the management and disposal of the part of Bletchley Park owned by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

PACE has not received any representations concerning the purchase of Bletchley Park by Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair. We are not aware of any Government Department receiving such a representation.

The Land Certificate records that the title is registered at the Land Registry and is currently vested in the Secretary of State for the Environment and British Telecommunications Plc.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Football Trust

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to ensure that the Football Trust can resume its grant aid programmes for football at all levels of the game. [20992]

Mr. Sproat: I have recently met representatives of the Football Trust to discuss its future funding programme. I am hopeful that a solution will be found soon that will enable the trust's grants programme to be resumed. The Government remain committed to delivering on schedule the essential football ground safety improvements agreed following the Taylor report.

Lottery Awards

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the lottery awards in excess of £100,000 which have been made to charitable bodies. [21177]

Mr. Sproat: I have arranged for a list of all awards in excess of £100,000 to charitable bodies—as defined by each distributor—to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the lottery awards in excess of £1 million which have been made for the arts. [21178]

Mr. Sproat: To date, there have been 105 awards in excess of £1 million for the Arts. I have arranged for a list to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the lottery awards in excess of £1 million which have been made for sport. [21176]

Mr. Sproat: To date, there have been 79 awards in excess of £1 million for sport. I have arranged for a list to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Crystal Palace

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement regarding the future provision of athletic facilities at Crystal Palace. [21350]

Mr. Sproat: No decisions about the long-term investment in the future of Crystal Palace national sports centre will be taken without prior consultation with the relevant sporting governing bodies. The English Sports Council have decided that the needs of athletics should be included in consideration of plans for developing Crystal Palace. However, should it ultimately be decided after consultation to change or close the athletics facilities there, this would be only after ensuring that additional facilities are provided elsewhere in London.

North West Tourist Board (Charter)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the tourism charter issued by the North West tourist board; and if she will make a statement. [21181]

Mr. Sproat: I have seen the North West tourist board's charter for tourism. Tourism makes an invaluable contribution to the economy in the region covered by the board. Some 10.8 million visitors. including 1.2 million from overseas, came to the region in 1995, spending over £1.4 billion. The tourism industry in the region will benefit from the action plan set out in the tourism strategy "Success through Partnership" which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched on 5 February.

The English Tourist Board will help to take forward this plan through its Agenda 2000 consultation. I am sure that the North West tourist board will play a full part in the regional discussions that are being organised by the ETB, and in particular the roadshow for the north-west which is due to take place on 26 March. I have no doubt that the tourism charter will form a sound basis on which discussions can take place.

Globe Theatre Site

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage for what reason she accepted the advice of English Heritage to cover over for perpetuity the site of the original Globe theatre before archaeologists and academics had the opportunity to pursue the excavations to determine the position and the shape and size of the stage, without further consultation. [21235]

Mr. Sproat: The Globe's remains were discovered in 1989 and part of the site was subsequently excavated and fully recorded; the exposed material was protected by a temporary covering. The current development proposals do not involve any disturbance of the Globe's remains. They do, however, provide an opportunity to replace the temporary protection, and it is in respect of that work that scheduled monument consent was applied for and granted last year. In this particular case, it would not have been open to us, even if we had wished, to attach conditions to the statutory consent requiring further excavation. Leaving the Globe's remains buried will keep open the possibility of their being further investigated in the future when this can be done comprehensively and well. This approach to the remains is consistent with Government policy set out in PPG16, "Archaeology and Planning".

Listed Buildings (Ecclesiastical Exemption)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to review the ecclesiastical exemption from listed building and conservation area controls. [21611]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In implementing proposals to restrict the ecclesiastical exemption in 1994, the Government undertook that the new arrangements would be formally reviewed after two years.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Wales and I have invited Mr. John Newman, reader in the history of art at the Courtauld Institute of Art, university of London, and a former chairman of English Heritage's churches advisory committee, to conduct the review. His terms of reference will be:

> To review the operation of the Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Order 1994; in particular to establish whether there is, within each of the six denominations whose buildings retain the ecclesiastical exemption under the terms of the order, a formal control procedure for proposed works to listed churches and unlisted churches in conservation areas which provides protection for such buildings comparable with what would otherwise apply under secular controls.

Mr. Newman will start in May and aims to submit a report by September. He will be consulting the six exempt denominations, the principal heritage organisations in England and Wales and representatives of local authorities. He would also welcome comments from other interested bodies and individuals. These may be sent to him c/o Buildings, monuments and sites division, Department of National Heritage, 2–4 Cockspur street, London SW1Y 5DH.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of bills to her Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and

(b) within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21207]

Mr. Sproat: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 12 March 1997, *Official Report*, column 220.

Works of Art (Acceptance in Lieu of Tax)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will place in the Library a list of the objects and property accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax during the financial year ended on 31 March; and if she will specify *(a)* the amount of tax satisfied in each case, *(b)* which offers carried conditions as to destination, *(c)* the date in each case of the recommendations received by her from the Museum and Galleries Commission for the acceptance of objects, *(d)* the total for the financial year of the tax thus satisfied and *(e)* how much of this total was covered in the public accounts by means of resort to the reserve in accordance with Government policy as announced on 26 July 1985, *Official Report*, column 779. [21348]

Mr. Sproat: The information requested is as follows:

Item	*Tax satisfied (£)*	*Conditions as to destination*	*Date of MGC recommendations*
Four paintings and silverware from Temple Newsam House	155,400.00	Conditional	16 October 1995
An archive of family papers	78,140.21	Wish	7 March 1996
Two wings of a 13th-century ivory triptych	17,500.00	Wish	11 January 1996
A collection of military medals	16,000.00	Conditional	11 January 1996
Furniture and lamps by Giacometti	80,500.00	Wish	18 October 1995
10 acres of woodland at Tadworth, Surrey	4,800.00	Unconditional	[1]n/a
Two archives of documents relating to estates in Cumbria and Somerset	9,450.00	Wish	25 January 1996
Les Andelys (painting) by Maurice de Vlaminck	48,272.69	Conditional	15 April 1996
Three Thomas Girtin watercolours and a portrait by John Opie	373,000.00	Wish	28 March 1996
A 17th-century pair cased alarm striking clock by Edward East	14,000.00	Unconditional	28 March 1996
Lower Woods, North Avon	608,958.00	Unconditional	[1]n/a
The Old Man and his Grandson (drawing) by Arthur Rackham	5,600.00	Conditional	15 April 1996
Staffelsee (painting) by Wassily Kandinsky	125,093.00	Wish	14 August 1996
A Queen Anne year-going longcase clock by Daniel Quare	70,000.00	Unconditional	1 July 1996
Landscape with Lord Coventry on a Blue Roan Horse and Deer, Hounds and Attendants and a Dead Stag (painting) by John Wootton	126,545.00	Conditional	13 July 1996

[1] The Museums and Galleries Commission does not advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on offers of land. Instead, my right hon. Friend seeks advice from bodies such as the Countryside Commission.

The total expenditure in respect of the AIL scheme to date for the financial year 1996–97 is £1,733,258.90. This includes an additional payment of £78,140.21 for an archive of family papers which were accepted in 1995–96. One offer costing £608,958 was met from a call on the reserve.

Lottery Funding (Advice)

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to ensure that groups and organisations who wish to apply for lottery funding know whom to approach for information and advice. [21647]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My Department has published a new lottery information leaflet, produced in conjunction with the national lottery distributing bodies and Camelot. The leaflet has been designed to promote understanding of the purpose and function of the lottery. It tells potential applicants who does what and how to contact them.

Two million copies of the leaflet have been printed and over one and a half million are being distributed to bodies such as libraries, citizens advice bureaux and local authorities. They will also be sent to members of business organisations such as the Lions, Rotary International, chambers of commerce and round tables. They might be able to assist groups in putting together lottery applications.

Copies of the leaflet are available from the Libraries of the House and can also be obtained free of charge from my Department, the distributing bodies and Camelot.

Museums and Galleries (Attendances)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will place in the Library the attendance figures for the financial year ended 31 March reported by the national museums and galleries for which she is responsible, broken down into the individual institutions, but including their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage change on the attendance figures for the preceding year. [21338]

Mr. Sproat: The following table lists the forecast number of visits to the 12 national museums and galleries in England for the financial year ended 31 March 1997, and the actual figures for the financial year 1995–96. The information is provided by the institutions. More accurate figures for 1996–97 will be available in July.

	Number of visits in 1995–96 (million)	Forecast number of visits in 1996–97 (million)	Provisional percentage increase/decrease over the previous year
British Museum[1]	6.1	6.5	+7
Imperial War Museum	1.31	1.23	–6
National Gallery[1]	4.5	5.0	+25
National Maritime Museum	0.58	0.44	–24
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside[1]	1.22	1.21	–1
National Portrait Gallery[1]	0.82	0.79	–4
Natural History Museum	1.46	1.75	+20
National Museum of Science and Industry[1]	2.7	2.7	—
Tate Gallery[1]	3.1	2.5	–19
Victoria and Albert Museum	1.49	1.60	+5
Wallace Collection[1]	0.16	0.18	+13
Royal Armouries at Fort Nelson	0.02	0.03	+34
Total	23.5	23.9	+2

[1] The number of visits to premises for which admission is not charged are estimated or counted by other means.
1. It is not possible to accurately identify the number of visits to the Royal Armouries in the Tower of London. The forecast number of visits to the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds which opened in March 1996 is 455,000.
Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Return of Historic Objects

Mr. Legg: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her policy on the return of historic objects in museums to countries of origin; and if she will make a statement. [21609]

Mr. Sproat: Decisions about the possible return of historic objects in museums to countries of origin are primarily matters for the governing bodies of each museum. These decisions raise complex issues of law and of general museum policy. Where there are legal constraints on disposal, the Government have no intention of legislating to remove those constraints. The Museums and Galleries Commission is currently preparing good practice guidelines on the steps that museums should take in response to the requests for the return of objects from abroad. Any director concerned about specific requests for the return of objects may wish to write for advice to the chairman of the Museums and Galleries Commission.

Library and Information Matters (Report)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she will make a report on library and information matters in accordance with her responsibilities under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. [21610]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today laid before both Houses a copy of my report for 1995 and 1996.

English Sports Council

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about the appointment of ministerial nominees to the English Sports Council in the regions. [21567]

Mr. Sproat: Further to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) on 24 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *496–97*, a paper setting out the remit of the ministerial nominees to the regions of English Sports Council was agreed with the chairman of the council. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. I expect to meet those concerned shortly to discuss this.

Public Libraries (Information Technology)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she will report on the terms of reference of the working group on information technology in public libraries which was announced in "Reading: The Future". [21648]

Mr. Sproat: I have today placed in the Libraries of the House a copy of the detailed terms of reference which I have given to the Library and Information Commission's working group on information technology in public libraries, which will be chaired by Mr. Matthew Evans.

Lottery Award Information

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the national lottery awards in excess of £1 million made to heritage projects. [21568]

Mr. Sproat: To date there have been 82 awards in excess of £1 million for heritage projects. I have arranged for a list to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to provide national lottery awards information based on the new parliamentary constituency boundaries. [21569]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today provided this information to the House of Commons Library.

Flounder's Folly, Craven Arms

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will take steps to ensure that funds from the national lottery are provided to shore up Flounder's folly on Callow hill, Craven Arms, Shropshire. [21372]

Mr. Sproat: Decisions on heritage lottery applications are made independently of Government by trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund. The fact that Flounder's folly is privately owned would, at present, rule out lottery funding. However, new powers will be introduced later in the year which will allow the NHMF to fund any worthwhile heritage project which provides public benefit and access, irrespective of ownership. Guidance, taking into account the new powers, will be issued in the autumn.

WALES

EU Funding

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *238*, what cost element of each expenditure heading in "Government Expenditure and Revenue, Wales 1994–95" relates to expenditure supported by receipts from European Community institutions; where those receipts are shown in that publication; and if he will make a statement on his Department's accounting methodology for such expenditure. [20820]

Mr. Hague: Those receipts from European Community institutions which were administered by the Welsh Office, including those which passed through the Intervention Board, totalled around £220 million in 1994–95. These were applied to the agricultural programme—£167 million—and other environmental services programme—£53 million. Expenditure supported by non-Welsh Office receipts is included in the total of estimated general government expenditure in Wales but is not separately identifiable.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what factors underlie the different treatments of financial contributions of the EU in *(a)* "Government Expenditure and Revenue, Wales, 1994–95" and *(b)* "Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 1996–97", Cm. 3201; and if he will make a statement. [20817]

Mr. Hague: No attempt is made in "Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 1996–97" to make a territorial allocation of the UK's net contribution to the European Communities as this expenditure is non-identifiable. In "Government Expenditure and Revenue, Wales 1994–95", Wales is allocated a share based on Gross domestic product. This amounts to £53 million—4.2 per cent. of the UK's net contribution of £1,267 million.

Departmental Employees

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* permanent full-time, *(b)* part-time and *(c)* temporary employees his Department has; and how many of these in each category are employed in (i) London, (ii) Wales and (iii) elsewhere. [20740]

Mr. Hague: The number of permanent full-time, part-time and temporary staff employed by my Department are as follows:

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Temporary*
London	24	—	—
Wales	1,875	278	226
Elsewhere	—	—	—

The figures include staff working in CADW.

Social Security Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what factors underlay the differences in the definition of social security expenditure in *(a)* table 5 of "General Expenditure and Revenue, Wales, 1994–95", and *(b)* table 7.7 of "Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 1996–97", Cm 3201; and if he will make a statement. [20818]

Mr. Hague: The figure for non-identified social security expenditure published in table 7.7 of "Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 1998–97" is incorrect. Her Majesty's Treasury issued an erratum slip in August 1996. The figure in table 5 of "General Expenditure and Revenue, Wales 1994–95" is correct.

Outturn Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the total outturn expenditure by his Department on purchases of goods and services during the 1996–97 financial year and the amount of this spent on goods and services purchased in Wales. [20748]

Mr. Hague: The estimated outturn for expenditure by my Department on pay and other current expenditure on goods and services for 1996–97 is £2,583 million. This is consistent with the definition used in table 3.6 of the "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1997–98", Cm 3601. Information on the amount which is spent on goods and services purchased in Wales is not available.

Pharmaceutical, Dental and Ophthalmic Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the estimated outturn figures for expenditure in Wales for 1996–97 by the family health services authorities and the Dental Practice Board on *(a)* pharmaceutical services, *(b)* general dental services and *(c)* general ophthalmic services. [21222]

Mr. Hague: Forecast gross outturn, based upon health authority financial returns to January 1997—Dental Practice Board to February 1997—is detailed as follows:

	£ million
Pharmaceutical services	206
General dental services	72
General ophthalmic services	18

Health Service Revenue (Charges)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the estimated revenue to the national health and welfare services in Wales for 1996–97, broken down by the charges made to recipients for services in respect of *(a)* hospitals, *(b)* pharmaceuticals, *(c)* general dental treatment and *(d)* welfare foods. [21221]

Mr. Hague: There are no central records kept for hospital charges. The following table details estimated revenue by service to be achieved in this financial year:

Service	*£ thousand*
Pharmaceutical services	17,100
General dental services	19,300
Welfare foods	150

Glaucoma

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many prescriptions for the treatment of glaucoma were issued in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what were the net ingredient costs for each year. [21082]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information is given in the following table. Before 1993–94, figures were not available to a sufficient level of detail to identify specific treatments for glaucoma.

Number of prescription items prescribed for the treatment of glaucoma in Wales

	Number of items prescribed	Net ingredients cost (£000)
1993–94	242,000	1,761
1994–95	248,000	1,789
1995–96	258,000	1,868

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients received hospital in-patient or day care treatment for glaucoma in each of the last five years. [21083]

Mr. Jones: The information requested is given in the following table.

Number of in-patients or day cases treated for glaucoma in Wales[1]

	Number
1991–92	1,662
1992–93	1,729
1993–94	1,770
1994–95	1,633
1995–96	1,541

[1] Estimates based on the latest available returns submitted by hospitals.

Health Service Contracts

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many trusts failed to meet the deadline to agree contracts with their purchasers; and how many he expects to go to arbitration. [21086]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Agreement was reached by all trusts and health authorities in the 1996–97 financial year without recourse to arbitration.

Negotiations for 1997–98 contracting round are on-going.

Health Service Salaries and Wages

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the NHS salaries and wages costs for *(a)* administrative, clerical and management staff and *(b)* nurses and midwives in each financial year from 1989 to 1995 prices. [21085]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is contained in the following table:

	(a) Administrative, clerical and management £000	(b) Nurses and midwives £000
1988–89	86,869	438,480
1989–90	94,255	434,736
1990–91	103,547	433,982
1991–92	110,285	450,356
1992–93	125,594	457,093
1993–94	147,826	440,070
1994–95	153,156	444,644
1995–96	160,654	442,604

Sources:
Financial returns and annual accounts of district health authorities, NHS trusts, family health services authorities, the Health Promotion Authority for Wales and the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Notes:
1. Information on salaries and wages costs for family health services authorities are not held centrally, and figures for nurses and midwives cannot be disaggregated from administrative and clerical costs.
2. These figures exclude the costs of general practitioners' administrative staff as the information was not separately collected.
3. The latest version of HM Treasury gross domestic product deflators was used to uplift the figures to 1995 prices.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to ensure that *(a)* ecologists and *(b)* environmental scientists are employed by the Countryside Council for Wales; and if he will make a statement about recent redundancies of *(a)* and *(b)* at the Countryside Council for Wales. [21355]

Mr. Hague: The Countryside Council for Wales currently employs 176 full-time equivalent scientists—some of them part-timers—all of whom are qualified and/or engaged in ecological and natural science issues. The council will continue to employ suitably qualified staff to carry out its work. There have been no recent redundancies in the council, but eight staff employed on fixed-term contracts for specific work are due to leave in May when their work is completed.

General Practitioners

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of the current general practitioner work force in each health authority area falls within the age deciles *(a)* 30 to 39, *(b)* 40 to 49, *(c)* 50 to 59 and *(d)* 60 to 69 years. [21532]

Mr. Hague: The information is given in the following table:

General medical practitioners by age and health authority, 29 March 1996[1]

	Number				Percentage of total GPs			
Age in years	*30 to 39*	*40 to 49*	*50 to 59*	*60 to 69*	*30 to 39*	*40 to 49*	*50 to 59*	*60 to 69*
Clwyd	80	98	41	11	34	42	18	5
Dyfed	113	74	34	5	50	32	15	2
Gwent	74	82	65	21	30	33	26	8
Gwynedd	67	66	26	7	40	39	15	4
Mid Glamorgan	72	96	100	27	24	32	34	9
Powys	25	41	15	[2]—	29	48	17	[2]—
South Glamorgan	110	89	44	8	44	35	17	3

General medical practitioners by age and health authority, 29 March 1996[1]

Age in years	Number				Percentage of total GPs			
	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69
West Glamorgan	82	68	42	18	38	32	20	8

[1] Boundaries as at March 1996.
[2] Number less than 5.

Public Bodies

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to notify the economic development non-departmental public bodies in Wales of his strategic guidance for 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [21651]

Mr. Hague: I have written to the chairmen of the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales, Cardiff Bay development corporation, the Land Authority for Wales and the Wales tourist board, to inform them of many strategic targets and priorities for 1997–98. Copies of the letters have been placed in the Library of the House.

The targets I have set are demanding but will lead to private sector investment of over £700 million, the creation of over 10,000 jobs and the establishment of a network of strategic sites for further economic development throughout Wales. The majority of jobs to be created will be in those areas of highest unemployment, including the south Wales valleys and the west.

Derwen and Pembrokeshire Trusts (Merger)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those individuals and organisations who expressed *(a)* support for, and *(b)* opposition to, the merger of the Derwen and Pembrokeshire NHS trusts. [20301]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) on Monday 17 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *442*.

Wentlooge Levels (Flood Defences)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Wales Committee of the Environment Agency concerning the commencement of construction of the improvement of the flood defences on the Wentlooge levels sea wall between Cardiff and Newport. [21330]

Mr. Hague: None. Construction works commenced on the first phase of improvements to the Wentlooge sea defences in July of 1996.

Asthma

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of admissions to Welsh hospitals for asthma broken down by the patient's postcode in each of the last five years. [21288]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is in the table:

Number of admissions for asthma in Welsh hospitals by area of residence of patient[1]

Postcoded district	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Postcode districts in Wales[2]					
CF1	149	109	110	133	177
CF2	225	164	175	186	217
CF3	163	169	158	167	187
CF4	178	138	125	114	127
CF5	180	203	185	184	177
CF6	364	281	248	236	243
CF7	34	34	31	33	38
CF8	178	179	175	182	151
CF31	82	87	90	101	82
CF32	74	88	88	65	68
CF33	44	40	38	18	28
CF34	49	42	39	32	58
CF35	32	37	30	30	26
CF36	28	28	29	22	24
CF37	86	82	69	62	63
CF38	40	31	27	38	29
CF39	56	59	68	60	49
CF40	34	49	32	45	38
CF41	26	27	18	26	20
CF42	23	34	22	46	31
CF43	19	16	14	24	24
CF44	92	114	144	100	158
CF45	26	29	37	27	31
CF46	18	28	31	27	28
CF47	38	85	76	74	66
CF48	78	99	118	103	116
CH1 to CH4	13	10	15	9	17
CH5	8	12	17	12	14
CH6	27	31	22	34	35
CH7	77	62	79	63	60
CH8	40	47	51	29	31
LD1	18	29	28	22	33
LD2	8	9	10	8	5
LD3	54	57	30	33	40
LD4 to LD8	6	4	2	13	9
LL11	145	83	84	50	77
LL12	52	51	31	31	38
LL13	53	73	93	56	47
LL14	66	90	106	69	70
LL15	27	17	24	17	36
LL16	38	17	20	16	33
LL17	6	10	8	9	4
LL18	80	84	88	57	84
LL19	53	46	58	41	59
LL20	13	13	12	6	14
LL21	5	5	6	7	10
LL22	36	33	32	40	41
LL23 to LL27	11	12	21	11	28
LL28	11	11	17	5	15
LL29	40	30	40	36	44
LL30	47	39	42	46	35
LL31	10	12	18	13	16
LL32	9	11	4	7	8
LL33	6	3	22	5	9
LL34 to LL35	3	3	8	12	13
LL36	18	5	9	15	10
LL37 to LL40	11	12	18	4	4
LL41	19	6	28	13	6
LL42 to LL46	10	13	14	7	4
LL47 to LL52	17	7	17	10	11
LL53	25	15	22	22	28
LL54	21	9	17	10	11
LL55	33	23	52	28	57
LL56 to LL57	54	32	79	48	78
LL58 to LL59	11	18	12	14	24
LL60 to LL61	10	5	22	32	14

Number of admissions for asthma in Welsh hospitals by area of residence of patient[1]

Postcoded district	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
LL62 to LL65[2]	59	55	54	46	68
LL67 to LL68[2]	23	13	17	6	11
LL69 to LL71[2]	8	4	7	11	7
LL72 to LL75[2]	17	12	4	9	8
LL77 to LL78[2]	17	4	15	9	20
NP1	131	142	155	173	157
NP2	104	139	157	130	138
NP3	101	124	131	117	157
NP4	102	98	67	62	101
NP5	22	15	21	16	17
NP6	70	69	80	65	50
NP7 to NP8[3]	48	43	39	60	70
NP9	309	369	291	262	239
NP44	91	88	115	124	110
SA1	88	152	89	91	113
SA2	49	83	46	45	67
SA3	33	60	30	33	36
SA4	73	70	46	59	47
SA5	96	132	97	111	82
SA6	51	64	65	58	31
SA7	30	32	24	19	15
SA8	51	43	23	27	13
SA9	24	27	24	22	17
SA10	27	28	32	67	41
SA11	57	36	36	96	67
SA12	72	38	46	64	76
SA13	22	36	42	42	44
SA14	33	49	51	43	68
SA15	54	57	65	79	99
SA16	20	14	16	16	13
SA17	15	20	9	25	21
SA18 to SA19[3]	59	64	67	59	60
SA20	9	4	13	3	8
SA31	28	47	55	38	38
SA32	5	9	9	3	5
SA33	16	38	26	31	14
SA34 to SA37[3]	11	15	12	6	9
SA38 to SA39[3]	19	12	14	23	10
SA40 to SA42[3]	4	4	10	7	7
SA43	18	32	23	10	7
SA44 to SA47[3]	23	32	29	22	16
SA48	5	15	24	12	10
SA61	45	35	36	42	42
SA62 to SA64[3]	39	38	42	26	41
SA65 to SA66[3]	11	13	18	10	6
SA67	7	7	13	15	7
SA68 to SA69[3]	8	15	6	10	9
SA70	10	20	36	22	22
SA71	34	26	27	15	20
SA72	19	18	24	21	24
SA73	53	54	51	45	64
SY1 to SY15[3]	9	5	11	9	19
SY16	16	21	16	12	6
SY17 to SY19[3]	13	6	14	16	8
SY20 to SY22[3]	37	46	39	49	41
SY23	51	53	71	59	59
SY24	6	7	9	8	10
SY25	7	11	10	7	4
Other districts[4]	322	254	255	224	214
Total	6,286	6,318	6,309	5,886	6,211

[1] Estimates based on latest returns from hospitals.

[2] May include some districts which straddle the Welsh–English border.

[3] Districts merged to protect patient confidentiality.

[4] Outside Wales or not known.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of admissions for asthma to each Welsh district general hospital in each of the last five years. [21289]

Mr. Jones: The information requested is in the table:

Number of admissions to major acute hospitals in Wales for asthma[1]

Hospital	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Bronglais General Hospital	138	148	167	154	131
Cardiff Royal Infirmary	128	92	86	115	72
East Glamorgan General Hospital	304	319	246	306	279
Llandough Hospital	917	821	814	787	869
Morriston Hospital	221	208	134	141	n/a
Neath General Hospital	206	133	163	260	226
Nevill Hall Hospital	223	260	240	250	345
Prince Charles Hospital	261	399	502	415	491
Prince Philip Hospital	86	89	118	118	129
Princess of Wales/Bridgend General	333	346	358	290	305
Royal Gwent/St. Woolos	722	814	746	706	648
Singleton Hospital	331	388	356	375	494
University Hospital of Wales	313	263	236	265	297
West Wales General Hospital	156	248	239	207	175
Withybush General Hospital	251	248	257	203	260
Wrexham Maelor Hospital	445	400	441	288	343
Ysbyty Glan Clwyd	416	365	407	347	472
Ysbyty Gwynedd	377	271	463	349	412

[1] Estimates based on latest returns from hospitals.

Hedgerow Regulations

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what wildlife conservation research skills will be required by local authorities in Wales to apply the proposed hedgerow regulations. [21296]

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on the protection afforded to the linnet under the draft hedgerow regulations; [21087]

(2) what wildlife conservation expertise will be required by local authorities in Wales to apply the draft hedgerow regulations. [21094]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The research undertaken by ADAS to develop hedgerow evaluation criteria took account of the skills and advice currently available to local authorities.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the estimated cost to each local authority in Wales of implementing the draft hedgerow regulations. [21088]

Mr. Evans: The costs of implementing the draft regulations as laid in Parliament are included within local authorities' standard spending assessments but are not separately identified.

Schot Nippon Factory

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he is now in a position to reply to the right hon. Member for Aberavon regarding the Schot Nippon factory and its financing. [21040]

Mr. Hague: I have no outstanding correspondence from the right hon. Member on this matter.

Inward Investment

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new guidelines he has issued to the Welsh Development Agency as regards financial incentives to encourage inward investment to West Glamorgan and other areas. [21041]

Mr. Hague: On 19 March I wrote to the chairman of the WDA to inform him of the agency's strategic targets and priorities for 1997–98; a copy has also been placed in the Library of the House.

The guidance stated that the agency should concentrate on the creation and safeguarding of jobs through inward investment and company development. Moreover, the benefits should be spread throughout Wales, particularly in the remaining areas of higher unemployment in the south Wales valleys and the western areas of Wales; the targets which have been set reflect that and the agency is expected to recognise, within UK and EC limits, the extra costs of locating in areas outside of the eastern M4 and A55 corridors.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what estimate he has made of the number of children who will take up the nursery voucher scheme and the voucher income accruing in each local education authority area; [21075]

(2) what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of children who will take up the nursery voucher scheme in (i) the private sector and (ii) the independent sector and *(b)* the corresponding voucher income in each local authority area. [21050]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: On the basis of the estimates from local education authorities of the number of voucher-bearing children in their schools in the 1997 summer term, the total annual income for each authority would be:

Authority	*Estimate of numbers*	*£ income*
Anglesey	650	715,000
Blaenau Gwent	1,100	1,210,000
Bridgend	1,309	1,439,900
Caerphilly	2,148	2,362,800
Cardiff	3,400	3,740,000
Carmarthenshire	2,100	2,310,000
Ceredigion	750	825,000
Conwy	1,066	1,172,600
Denbighshire	900	990,000
Flintshire	1,763	1,939,300
Gwynedd	1,267	1,393,700
Merthyr Tydfil	750	825,000
Monmouthshire	636	699,600
Neath Port Talbot	1,640	1,804,000
Newport	1,850	2,035,000
Pembrokeshire	1,370	1,507,000
Powys	1,552	1,707,200
RCT	2,770	3,047,000
Swansea	2,535	2,788,500
Torfaen	1,081	1,189,100
Vale of Glamorgan	1,512	1,663,200
Wrexham	1,585	1,743,500

The number of voucher-bearing children in the private and independent sectors will not be known until those vouchers are redeemed. Some 450 schools, nurseries and play groups in private and voluntary sectors are registered to take part in the voucher scheme from April.

M4 (Baglan Bridge)

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *240*, if he will take steps to provide facilities to segregate smaller vehicles on the occasions when it is safe for them to use the bridge. [21151]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Due to the preceding interchanges not being suitable for upgrading to provide segregation facilities, and the fact that a suitable adjacent alternative route is available, it is not proposed to provide segregation. Efforts are being concentrated on improving driver information about closure arrangements by the provision of electronic message signing.

Rivers (Pollution)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many incidents of category 1 and 2 pollution have taken place in Welsh rivers in the first *(a)* six months and *(b)* nine months of 1996–97 and in each equivalent period for the pervious five years. [21331]

Mr. Hague: Information in the form requested is not held centrally. The Environment Agency, and its predecessor the National Rivers Authority, publishes annual reports on "Water Pollution Incidents in England and Wales", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. I understand that the report for 1996 is to be published shortly.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21209]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *613–14*. Additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dental Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what percentage of NHS general dental practitioners do not currently provide crowns and bridges. [21336]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. However, information on the number of dentists not claiming payment for the provision of crowns and bridges is shown in the table:

NHS general dental practitioners with an open contract who received a payment schedule in the period 1 October to 31 December 1996

	Number	*Per cent.*
Those not claiming for provision of crowns	106	12
Those not claiming for provision of bridges	351	41

NHS general dental practitioners with an open contract who received a payment schedule in the period 1 October to 31 December 1996

	Number	Per cent.
Those not claiming for provision of either crowns or bridges[1]	104	12

Note:
[1] Dentists not claiming for the provision of either crowns or bridges are also included in the individual totals for crowns and bridges shown in the table.

Baglan Hospital

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advertisements have now been issued inviting private finance initiative tenders for the Baglan hospital; and what dates have been fixed or estimated for the next stages in the contractual arrangements. [21116]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Glan-y-Mor NHS trust placed an advertisement in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* on 20 February 1997. Twenty-eight companies responded and will be given a prospectus and pre-qualification questionnaire by the trust. The trust is to organise a briefing day on 25 March with the intention that completed pre-qualification questionnaires be returned by early April. This will enable a shortlist of six to eight companies to be interviewed.

Care for the Vulnerable

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he is in a position to reach a decision as to what steps are now to be taken in the matters regarding care for the vulnerable, referred to him by Mr. Michael Power. [21150]

Mr. Hague: I am writing to the right hon. Member today about this case.

Velodrome Cymru Centre

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the implications for the development of cycling in *(a)* Blaenau Gwent and *(b)* Wales of the decision of the national lottery panel on sport to turn down an application for funding for the Velodrome Cymru centre in the Ebbw Fach regeneration area. [21279]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were exported by species from the United Kingdom in (i) 1995 and (ii) 1996 *(a)* with a for breeding certificate, *(b)* with a further fattening certificate, *(c)* with a for production/breeding certificate, *(d)* with a for slaughter certificate and *(e)* in total. [17826]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* For exports of cattle, sheep and pigs to other member states in 1996, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 24 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *76–77*. It is not possible to provide the additional information in the form requested.

Table 1 shows the numbers of farm animals certified for export to other member states in 1995. Table 2 gives details of exports of poultry to other member states in 1996. The figures in these two tables are collated from the ANIMO system and remain provisional and subject to amendment.

Table 1: Numbers of animals certified for export in 1995 with breeding, further fattening/production or slaughter certification

	Breeding	Further fattening/production	Slaughter
Cattle	550	335,050	0
Sheep	5,470	967,010	89,430
Pigs	78,110	790	1,150
Poultry	[1]12,000,640	—	227,860

[1] Comprises poultry certified as breeding and production; and as day-old chicks.

Table 2: Numbers of poultry certified for export in 1996 with breeding/production or slaughter certification

	Breeding/production	Slaughter
Poultry	[1]8,086,360	437,500

[1] Comprises poultry certified as breeding and production; and as day-old chicks.
GB figures only; figures for Northern Ireland not yet available.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what training hauliers must receive in order to be authorised to conduct humane slaughter during a sea crossing. [18997]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* I am not aware of any training provided with this specific aim.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *406*, if *(a)* a competent stockman is present on every sailing of the MV Cap Afrique from the United Kingdom when it is carrying livestock and *(b)* when animals are not accompanied by drivers on the MV Cap Afrique there is always a competent stockman on board. [20698]

Mrs. Browning: The attention of the operators of the MV Cap Afrique was drawn to the need to comply with the requirement for animals to be accompanied by an attendant.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy on the export for slaughter of live farm animals to another EU member state where those animals are to be slaughtered in a manner which is in breach of the Community provisions on the welfare of animals at slaughter. [20514]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* There is nothing to add to the statement which was given to the hon. Member on 13 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *356*.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department takes to ensure that pigs and piglets exported through Dover do not come into contact with any cloven-hoofed animals other than bovine animals or swine for breeding or production. [20621]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* A local veterinary inspector certifying pigs for breeding or production for export to another EU member states must receive a declaration from the exporter or transporter confirming that they will not come into contact with other cloven-hoofed animals other than bovine animals or swine which fulfil the conditions laid down for intra-Community trade. Additionally, spot checks, including supervised loading of animals on to livestock vessels, are carried out to ensure compliance with EU rules.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pigs exported during December 1996 and January 1997 were (i) acquired and (ii) loaded at *(a)* an EU approved collection centre and *(b)* a lairage. [20619]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* None. All pigs exported in December 1996 and January 1997 were acquired and loaded at their premises of origin.

Red Meat (Hygiene)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he received the final report from the hygiene advice team on red meat. [19571]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* This report was an internal working document for the Meat Hygiene Service which summarised and provided a comprehensive baseline of standards and practices in the fresh meat industry. I received a copy on 6 March 1997, although the range of problems identified had been known to me for some time and were, and continue to be, addressed on a plant by plant and strategic basis by the MHS in accordance with ministerial policy.

BSE

Mr. Pike: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what research published after 1990 he has evaluated into the effects of the disposing of BSE infected carcases in landfill sites; [20525]

(2) what discussions he has had with scientific bodies on the disposal of BSE-infected carcases to landfill sites. [20524]

Mrs. Browning: In May last year a sub-group of the independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which advises Ministers on BSE, considered the issue of BSE and the environment, including the question of disposal to landfill sites. They considered that, although the spongiform encephalopathy agent was not yet fully characterised, there was good evidence to believe that individual molecules were not infectious and that infectivity was associated with macro-molecular agglomerations indeed possibly with tissue fragments, albeit small ones. On this basis they concluded that

"it was unlikely that leachate from landfill sites would present a significant risk and there was certainly no justification for taking heroic measures to excavate sites, even those which had previously been used for material such as BSE-confirmed cattle".

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the estimated cost to Government for each financial year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000 of *(a)* the compensation arrangements to farmers for cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(b)* the payments to slaughterhouses for handling cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(c)* payments to renderers for handling cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(d)* the cost of storage, prior to incineration, of the rendered remains of cattle over 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(e)* the cost of incineration of the remains of cattle of 30 months of age which cannot now enter the food chain, *(f)* the calf slaughter premium, *(g)* the package of aid for the renderers, *(h)* the package of aid for the abattoirs, *(i)* the package of aid to the cutting industries, *(j)* the feed recall scheme, *(k)* the additional running costs for the agriculture departments and *(l)* each other item of expenditure resulting from the BSE crisis; and if he will list where applicable the net EU contribution for each measure, taking account of both the United Kingdom's contribution to additional EU spending and the effect of additional receipts on the United Kingdom abatement. [18670]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 6 March 1997]:* Details requested are as follows:

BSE-related measures

		£ million			
		1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
(a) OTMS: compensation to farmers	UK cost	687	228	229	230
	Net EU contribution	154	137	–4	40
(b) OTMS: payments to slaughterhouses	UK cost	79	32	32	32
(c) OTMS: payments to renderers	UK cost	53	39	39	39
(d) OTMS: cost of storage	UK cost	34	5	2	2
(e) OTMS: cost of incineration	UK cost	10	45	32	22
(f) Calf slaughter premium	UK cost	54	62	61	60
	Net EU contribution	28	–10	13	38
(g) Aid for renderers	UK cost	88	71	—	—
(h) and (i) Aid to abattoirs and cutting industries	UK cost	94	2	—	—
(j) Feed recall scheme	UK cost	5	1	—	—
(k) Departments' administration costs	UK cost	71	71	70	69
(l) Selective cull	UK costs	20	165	—	—
	Net EU contribution	—	68	–45	—

BSE-related measures

		£ million			
		1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
(m) Discretionary intervention	UK cost	175	178	153	91
	Net EU contribution	–33	–2	40	16
(n) Additional EU compensation agreed at agriculture council	UK cost	163	—	—	—
	Net EU contribution	–41	67	–29	—
(o) Drop in beef export refunds	UK cost	–80	–74	–57	–57
	Net EU contribution	–80	–74	–57	–57
(p) Write-off of existing intervention stock	UK cost	2	12	—	—
	Net EU contribution	—	8	–6	—
(q) Other items	UK cost	50	93	2	—
Total	UK cost	1,505	930	563	488
	Net EU contribution	28	194	–88	37

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the minimum temperature required *(a)* of the external gases and *(b)* inside a carcase for the safe disposal of a cattle carcase slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme. [20810]

Mr. Baldry: The independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which advises Ministers on BSE has looked at current and proposed methods of dealing with waste material from the slaughter of cattle last May, including incineration. The committee concluded that incineration in plants in which temperatures reached at least 850°c, would be sufficient to ensure that there was no risk either to those exposed to the smoke plume—that is, those living in the neighbourhood or those living downwind of the plant—or in relation to the ash which would be safely disposed of in appropriately licensed landfill sites. A copy of the news release issued by this Department on 7 June 1996 to publicise SEAC's advice is in the Library of the House.

Chickens

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many chickens have been found to be dead on arrival at United Kingdom poultry slaughterhouses since 25 April 1996. [20714]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Total throughput	*Dead on arrival*	
Great Britain	580,897,449	1,144,814	to
Northern Ireland	53,303,906	137,677	28 February 1997

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many broiler chickens slaughtered in the United Kingdom since 24 April 1996 were judged to be unfit for human consumption. [20713]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Total throughput	*Unfit for human consumption*	
Great Britain	580,897,449	6,995,228	to 28 Feb. 1997
Northern Ireland	53,303,906	538,065	to 28 Feb. 1997

Offal Ban

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy on the inclusion of calves' brains in the specified offal ban; and if he will make a statement. [20923]

Mrs. Browning: The matter has been reviewed on several occasions by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which has not recommended that the specified bovine material ban should be extended in this way. This is based on the scientific evidence which shows that brains from experimentally infected calves do not harbour detectable levels of infectivity although infectivity can be detected in parts of the intestine—distal ileum—which were declared SBM as a result.

Cattle Cull

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle were slaughtered under the 30-month scheme *(a)* up to and including 16 June 1996 and *(b)* (i) from 17 June 1996 to 25 August 1996, (ii) 26 August 1996 to 31 December 1996 and (iii) 1 January 1997 to the latest available date; how many abattoirs were paid for each period; and what was the total amount paid to abattoirs (1) gross and (2) net of EU contributions for each period. [20986]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is as follows:

Slaughterings under the over-30-months scheme

	Animals slaughtered[1] (number)	*Abattoirs receiving payment (number)*	*Slaughter fees paid to abattoirs[2] (£ million)*
(a) Up to and including 16 June 1996	136,901	59	5.9
(b) From 17 June 1996 to 25 August 1996	279,395	61	23.7
(c) From 26 August 1996 to 31 December 1996	716,401	66	26.2
(d) From 1 January 1997 to 7 March 1997	168,760	61	13.2
Total	1,301,457	—	69.0

[1] Includes OTMS animals slaughtered on-farm and subsequently incinerated.

[2] The slaughter fee is wholly funded by the Exchequer.

Salmonellosis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of salmonellosis have been recorded in farm animals categorised by species in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [21114]

Mrs. Browning: The Zoonoses Order 1989 requires that all isolations of salmonella from farm animals and poultry are reported. Incidents reported to this Department over the last five years are:

Year	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996 (provisional)*
Cattle and cCalves	940	1,465	1,899	2,052	1,575
Sheep	106	106	188	211	227
Pigs	261	346	360	353	347
Fowl	1,447	1,295	744	841	950
Turkeys	441	327	401	277	222
Ducks and geese	453	357	133	102	86

An "incident" refers to an isolation or isolations of salmonella from either an individual animal or from one or more animals in a group on one or more occasions.

The Department has a major research programme aimed at developing measures for the control and prevention of salmonella in livestock. In consultation with the industry, the Government has issued codes of good practice which offer advice on preventing the introduction and spread of salmonella in animal feedingstuffs and poultry flocks. Further codes are in preparation.

Apples

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the dangers to human health of the use of pesticides on apples grown in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the EU and *(c)* other countries; and if he will make a statement. [21096]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on 17 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns *372–73*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to promote the farming of apples in the United Kingdom without the use of pesticides; and if he will make a statement. [21097]

Mr. Boswell: There are no specific plans to promote the farming of apples without the use of pesticides. However, we are doing much to encourage organic farming which makes limited use of a very restricted range of mainly natural pesticides. There is an aid scheme which provides direct financial support for conversion, a free advice service and a dedicated research and development programme. We also fund the independent United Kingdom register of organic food standards.

Rendering Industry

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 10 March, *Official Report*, column *49*, if he will list the rendering plants and companies which have received financial assistance under the rendering industry support scheme 1996; and how much was paid to each. [21187]

Mr. Baldry: In 1996, 18 rendering companies received support under the rendering industry support scheme 1996, which covers the period 1 April 1996 to 31 March 1997. Since January 1997, the number of companies in receipt of support has increased by four bringing the total to 22.

The companies and the locations of the plants concerned are:

Company	*Location*
A. Hughes & Son (Skellingthorpe) Ltd.	Skellingthorpe
A. & W. Chambers Ltd.	Huddersfield
Anglo Beef Processors Ltd.	Newry
	Shrewsbury
Canterbury Mills Ltd.	Canterbury
Croda Colloids Ltd.	Market Harborough
Duncrue Food Processors Ltd.	Belfast
Dundas Brothers Ltd.	Inverurie
Dundas Chemical Company (Mosspark) Ltd.	Dumfries
Fats and Proteins (UK) Ltd.	Lancaster
Foyle Meats Ltd.	Londonderry
Gilberts Animal By-Products Ltd.	Cheddleton
J. F. Rockett & Sons Ltd.	Huddersfield
Lisburn Proteins Ltd.	Lisburn
Lloyd Maunder Ltd.	Cullompton
McIntosh Donald Ltd.	Aberdeen
Mid Ulster Proteins Ltd.	Craigavon
P. Waddington & Co. Ltd.	Bradford
Prosper de Mulder Ltd.	Doncaster
	Exeter
	Nuneaton
	Silvertown
	Widnes
Peninsular Proteins Ltd.	Torrington
Smith Brothers (Hyde) Ltd.	Hyde
Ulster Farm By-Products Ltd.	Crumlin
William Forrest and Son (Paisley) Ltd.	Motherwell

Support under the scheme is paid on a four-weekly basis. As at 19 March payments totalling about £82 million had been authorised.

I am unable to disclose information about support paid to individual renderers for reasons of their commercial confidentiality—exemption 13 in the code of practice on access to Government information.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 10 March, *Official Report*, columns *49–50*, if he will list the rendering plants and companies contracted by his Department to render *(a)* specified bovine material and *(b)* cattle carcases. [20958]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 18 March 1997]*: Of the plants approved to render cattle by-products in Great Britain, the following are currently contracted to the Intervention Board executive agency to process

over-30-month scheme cattle carcases, including their specified bovine material, in rendering lines licensed under the Specified Bovine Material Order 1996 (as amended):

Canterbury Mills Ltd., Canterbury
Dundas Brothers Ltd., Kintore
Fats and Proteins (UK) Ltd., Lancaster
Gilberts Animal By-Products, Leek
Granox Ltd., Widnes
J. G. Pears (Newark) Ltd.
J. L. Thomas Ltd., Exeter
Peninsular Proteins Ltd., Torrington
William Forrest and Sons (Paisley Ltd.), Motherwell.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21212]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) by the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *613–14*. Any additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Soil Erosion

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress in combating run off and soil erosion from fields sown to maize. [21147]

Mr. Boswell: The risk of run-off and soil erosion from fields sown to maize can be significant. In response to this the Maize Growers Association, with assistance from this Department and the Environment Agency, has produced a booklet entitled "Managing Maize", which will be sent to all known maize growers next month. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 17 to 19 March; and if he will make a statement. [21564]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I represented the United Kingdom for part of the Agriculture Council in Brussels on 17–19 March and for the remainder of the period the UK was represented by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland and officials.

The Council reached unanimous agreement on important proposals on cattle identification and beef labelling on a basis of article 43 of the treaty. The identification proposal requires the establishment of computerised systems for tracing cattle movements throughout their lives, improving cattle tagging, and a system of cattle passports similar to the one introduced in Great Britain last summer. Adoption of this proposal will facilitate the implementation of plans to develop a fully computerised database of cattle movements in Great Britain. The arrangements agreed on labelling provide for member states to decide whether or not to require the compulsory labelling of beef from the year 2000; and for the details of what information should be provided on labels under a compulsory system to be decided by the Council in the light of member states' experience between now and 1999. The labelling proposal as adopted met UK concerns to have a flexible, informative and less bureaucratic system than that originally put forward by the Commission, and this was secured in the final outcome.

The Council also agreed unanimously a proposal from the Commission determining measures and compensation relating to appreciable currency revaluations affecting farm incomes. The United Kingdom had strongly opposed the original proposal on the grounds that it discriminated against United Kingdom farmers faced with significant revaluations of the agricultural conversion rate for sterling. As a result, the proposal was substantially modified in the course of negotiation and the discriminatory elements removed on terms which fully met United Kingdom requirements.

On BSE, my noble Friend reported to the Council on progress in the United Kingdom on fulfilling the terms of the Florence agreement, and the recent submission to the Commission of a proposal for excluding meat from certified UK herds from the EU export ban. He urged the early submission of this proposal to the appropriate scientific committees, as provided for in the Florence agreement.

The Council had a first discussion of the Commission's proposals on agricultural prices for 1997–98, which include a long-standing proposal to reduce arable aid and set-aside payments. The United Kingdom endorsed the Commission's intention to achieve budgetary savings, but regretted the absence of moves to reduce agricultural support prices generally, or of proposals for the early reform of sectors such as milk, beef and cereals.

In a third structured dialogue with the countries of central and eastern Europe, the Council considered with those countries how to assist in the implementations of the EU's veterinary and phytosanitary regulations. There was agreement on the need for a better exchange of information on EU policy and legislation in this area, and for help from the PHARE programme to establish the required control and inspection facilities.

The Council discussed, at the request of France, the need for changes in the operation of the early marketing scheme for veal and the calf processing scheme. It was agreed that the beef management committee would address these issues as a matter of urgency on 21 March, and would consider inter alia a possible reduction in the rate of calf processing premium in response to a long-standing UK request.

The Council agreed some changes to the mandate of the European Commission in its negotiations with the USA on a veterinary equivalence agreement; and adopted by qualified majority—Spain, Portugal and Italy voting against—a proposal to open a malting barley quota for the USA in order to fulfil the EU's obligations under the World Trade Organisation.

The United Kingdom raised in the Council the need for an urgent report and proposals from the Commission on the welfare of battery hens, on which the Commissioner promised early action. The UK also backed a German request for the rapid submission to the Council of proposals on the transport of animals.

Livestock Cleanliness

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the document defining standards for clean livestock is to be published. [21565]

Mrs. Browning: As foreshadowed in the statement which my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made on 12 March 1997, *Official Report*, columns 372–74, the existing guidance in the Meat Hygiene Service operations manual has been enhanced today to provide a pictorial guide on dirty animals and the appropriate action to take when such animals are presented for slaughter. This will reinforce to all those involved in slaughtering, as well as other sectors of farming and associated industries, what is expected of them and the controls which will apply if they do not meet the appropriate standards. This issue was included in the interim report of the expert group on E. coli being chaired by Professor Pennington.

Proposals for publicising the potential sources of contamination and how to ensure that contaminated animals do not enter the food chain are being sent to interested organisations today for comment. Once comments have been considered, the Meat Hygiene Service proposes to launch a publicity campaign.

I have placed in the Library of the House copies of the amendment to the operations manual and draft publicity material sent to interested parties.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets have been set for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate for 1997–98. [21628]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have set the following targets for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate in 1997–98.

Financial Performance

1. To recover from industry and Government the full economic cost (calculated according to accruals accounting) of each of its main business activities of:
   licensing and surveillance
   policy work
   residue monitoring.
2. To operate within the net cash allocation as agreed by the MAFF Management Board.

Quality of Service

3. To deliver high quality policy advice to Minister.
4. To deliver high quality scientific assessment work.
5. To determine 80 per cent. of new marketing authorisations within 120 clock days;
   95 per cent. within 200 clock days.
6. To ensure that the first assessment of variations outstanding for more than 75 clock days on 1 April 1997 is completed by 31 October 1997 and that a first assessment of renewals outstanding for more than 90 clock days on 1 April 1997 is completed by 31 December 1997; and to ensure that first assessments for variations and renewals arriving after 1 April 1997 are completed within 75 and 90 clock days respectively.
7. To meet target timescales for centralised, decentralised and MRL applications under EU procedures.

Central Science Laboratory

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets have been set for the Central Science Laboratory for 1997–98. [21629]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The relocation of the Central Science Laboratory to the new purpose-built laboratory near York, with the subsequent closure of four major sites and several smaller sites, will be completed during the summer of 1997. In view of the major changes taking place within CSL, I have decided that during 1997–98 the baseline should be established which will allow efficiency and productivity improvements to be measured in subsequent years. I have set the following demanding but achievable targets for 1997–98 in relation to other areas:

Financial

100 per cent. recovery of full costs after allowing for relocation costs;

To achieve a net PES allocation agreed by MAFF Finance.

Efficiency

1 per cent. improvement in utilisation of productive time.

Delivery of Science

At least 90 per cent. of work completed to time and within budget;

Achieve a mean score of 3 on a scale of 0 to 5 for the assessment of customer satisfaction using the established methodology;

Proportion of project milestones achieved to be at or greater than 82 per cent. (MAFF commissioned projects).

Veterinary Laboratories Agency

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets have been set for the Veterinary Laboratories Agency for 1997–98. [21630]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have set the Veterinary Laboratories Agency the following strategic performance targets for 1997–98:

Financial Performance

full cost for all Veterinary Laboratories Agency services

management with the Supply Estimates Targets

Efficiency

an overall efficiency gain of 3 per cent.

Service Delivery

85 per cent. of ROAME R and D milestones achieved

Service Quality

achievement of a satisfactory report from a Visiting Group

achievement of laboratory accreditation for the Tissue Culture Section in Virology Department, the Lasswade laboratory and the Veterinary Investigation Centres.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets have been set for the Meat Hygiene Service for 1997–98. [21631]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I have set the following targets for the Meat Hygiene Service in 1997–98.

Operational

1. To take all necessary measures to ensure full compliance by the slaughterhouse industry with The Specified Bovine Material Order 1977, The Heads of Sheep and Goats Order 1996, and other related Statutory Instruments.

Quality and Delivery of Service

2. To carry out, in collaboration with the State Veterinary Service, a review of the guidance on HAS scoring in abattoirs as set out in the Operations Manual by 30 April 1997.
3. To ensure that all MHS contract and employed OVS, Meat Hygiene Inspectors and Meat Technicians have completed a formal training programme in hygiene by 31 July 1997.
4. To ensure that by the end of 1997–98 at least 90 per cent. of abattoirs are achieving HAS scores of more than 65.
5. To implement strictly the MHS clean livestock strategy included in the Operations Manual as revised in March 1997.
6. To implement a strict prohibition on carcases showing any faecal contamination being health marked for human consumption.

Financial Performance

7. To recover from plant operators the full economic cost (calculated in accordance with the relevant charging legislation and accruals accounting and Industry charges guide) of providing the statutory health inspection and controls at fresh meat premises.
8. To recover from Government Departments, Agencies and the Intervention Board the full economic cost (calculated in accordance with the relevant charging legislation and accruals accounting) of providing agreed services or other work undertaken on their behalf.
9. To operate within the net cash allocation as agreed during the year by the MAFF Management Board.

Meat Disposal Chain

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements are being made for financial support to the meat disposal chain in 1997–98. [21633]

Mr. Baldry: Support arrangements for the rendering industry in 1997–98 have now been finalised following consultation with interested parties. These implement the previously announced policy of making up to £59 million support available to the disposal chain as it adjusts to the changed value of animal by-products. They take the form of a non-statutory scheme, the rendering industry support scheme 1997. Copies of the scheme are being placed in the Library of the House.

The scheme provides for:

Payments to individual rendering companies for the rendering of 'clean' material (i.e. excluding the products of the Over Thirty Month Scheme);

Payments to be on a depressive basis phased out over the financial year and based on the actual amount of tallow produced and of meat and bone meal disposed of;

Tallow and MBM to attract different support rates (relating to average past values), phased out over different time-scales in recognition of future values.

Individual rendering companies will be free to set charges and prices to their suppliers on the basis of commercial judgment, taking account of support. Support levels will be transparent to suppliers of animal by-products. The Office of Fair Trading will continue to keep the competitive situation within the market under review.

The scheme will be administered by the Intervention Board.

In order to inform Ministers' decisions on the design of these support arrangements, Coopers and Lybrand were commissioned to report on the prospects for recovery in the markets for renderers' products. Their report is being published and copies are being placed in the Library of the House.

Sea Fish Conservation

Mr. Mans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to report to Parliament on the implementation of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992, as required by section 10. [21634]

Mr. Baldry: The primary purpose of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 was to make provision for the introduction of restrictions on time spent at sea. Implementing legislation in the form of the Sea Fish Licences (Time at Sea) (Principles) Order 1993 was introduced, but the policy was subsequently suspended following a legal challenge which was referred to the European Court of Justice.

Despite the European Court's endorsement of the legality of measures adopted by this House, it was decided that it would not be sensible to implement the planned arrangements for the days at sea policy for the reasons set out in my reply to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 25 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *711–12*.

In these circumstances there is nothing of substance to report and we do not propose to make any further reports to Parliament on this matter.

Butchers' Shops (Survey)

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the National Meat Hygiene Service provided to the European Commission concerning the survey carried out by environmental health officers in Birmingham of bone-in beef in butchers' shops. [21237]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No information was provided to the European Commission by the Meat Hygiene Service. Information on the audit carried out by Birmingham environmental health department was included in the "Programme to Eradicate BSE in the United Kingdom" which was presented to the Commission at a Council meeting on 3 June 1996. A copy of this document was placed in the library of the House on 4 June 1996.

The audit was also referred to in the document "BSE in Great Britain, A Progress Report, May 1996" which has been sent to Commissioner Fischler. A copy of this document was placed in the Library of the House on 1 July 1996.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the results of the survey carried out by environmental health officers of butchers' shops in Birmingham. [21236]

Mr. Hogg: I understand that the environmental services department of Birmingham city council carried out an audit in May 1996 of all 350 retail butcher outlets in Birmingham to check on compliance with specified bovine material controls. A small number of alleged cases of non-compliance were found.

Birmingham city council informed the Meat Hygiene Service, which is responsible for enforcing SBM controls in licensed beef slaughterhouses, of its findings. The MHS immediately carried out a full investigation. After examination of the samples provided to the MHS, two of the alleged cases were cleared as not being SBM. The MHS was unable to identify conclusively the nature of the remaining sample tissues in view of their age and deterioration. The MHS decided the most appropriate action was to destroy the material as if it were SBM.

In view of the council survey results, MHS principal official veterinary surgeons visited all the plants which traditionally supply the Birmingham market and reinforced the importance of full compliance with SBM controls to all MHS and plant staff.

Pesticides Safety Directorate

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets have been set for the Pesticides Safety Directorate for 1997–98. [21627]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have set the following targets for the Pesticide Safety Directorate in 1997–98.

Financial Performance

1. To recover from industry the full economic cost, calculated according to accruals accounting, of its services.
2. To recover from Government the full economic cost (calculated according to accruals accounting) of its services.
3. To operate within the net cash allocation as agreed by the MAFF management board.
4. To deliver the throughput of applications and processing times set out in the table below.

Quality of Service

5. To deliver high quality policy advice to Ministers.
6. To deliver high quality scientific work.
7. To achieve IIP accreditation by October 1977.
8. To carry out a customer satisfaction survey, covering both MAFF customers and the agrochemical industry, and to achieve a satisfactory result.

Table 1

Stream	*Applications completed*	*Maximum processing time in working weeks*
Technical Secretariat [1, 2]		
Normal	300	43
Administrative Fast	400	4
Fast	325	19
Experimental Permit Authorisation	10	34
Off Label	80	12
Extrapolated Experimental Authorisation	15	16
Departmental	15	52
Other	132	—
New Substances [1, 2, 3]		
Sift (EC and UK)	17	23
Active Substance	14	53
UK Reviews[2]		
Full	3	—
Other	8	—
EC Reviews[3]		
Non-Rapporteur (Monograph Co-ordination)	20	—
Total	1,339	—

Notes:

[1] 90 per cent. of applications received are covered by the processing targets except the EC and UK sifts for new substances where the figure is 100 per cent.

[2] Completed applications (these have no outstanding actions e.g. an approval issued or the application has been refused). These exclude withdrawals before evaluation has started.

[3] For EC applications (reviews or new active substances), completion is when the monograph is received by the Commission.

Swann Report

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he was notified of disagreements between Mr. Swann and *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Meat Hygiene Service in respect of the contents of his report for the Meat Hygiene Service. [20039]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* On 6 March 1997.

Fur Farms

Mr. Livingstone: Toask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many times officials of the State Veterinary Service *(a)* carried out routine inspections of fur farms over the last 12 months and *(b)* observed the killing of mink and fox during the last 12 months; and what method of killing was used in each case. [21240]

Mrs. Browning: The State Veterinary Service carried out six inspections of mink farms during 1996. Killing was not observed on any of these occasions.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fox farms there are in England and Wales by county. [21239]

Mrs. Browning: There is no requirement to register fox fur farms. However, I am not aware of any in England and Wales.

Grain Store, York

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the grain store at Clifton, York, was cleared of grain; for how long it remained empty; what is stored there currently, indicating the nature of the material and tonnage stored; what proportion of the total capacity is currently in use; whether the store has been, or is being, considered for storing bovine material resulting from the cattle cull; and how much per annum the store costs his Department to run *(a)* when empty and *(b)* currently. [21108]

Mr. Baldry: Before the current cereals intervention purchasing period which commenced on 1 November 1996, the store was cleared of barley on 31 January 1996.

The store remained empty for a period of ten and a half months until mid-December 1996 when 738 tonnes of rye was allocated to the store. This tonnage has now been sold but is still awaiting collection by the purchaser. A further 190 tonnes of rye has been allocated to the store, and should be delivered before the end of March 1997.

In addition to the rye, two of the eight sheds with a storage capacity of 20,000 tonnes have been sub-let to a private contractor for the storage of sugar beet nuts. The store has a total wheat capacity of 82,350 tonnes, comprising eight sheds totalling 79,500 tonnes and 32 bins totalling 28,250 tonnes.

The store is not being considered for storing bovine material resulting from the cattle cull.

The running costs of the store, when empty, is approximately £386,600 per annum, including store management fees, opportunity rent and contribution in lieu of rates. The additional running costs for actual storage are variable depending on time of intake and discharge and volume in store; these costs are calculated on the basis of £0.80 per tonne for intake, £0.70 per tonne for discharge and £0.022 per tonne per day for storage.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food where is the grain store nearest to York which is being used to store bovine material resulting from the cattle cull. [21107]

Mr. Baldry: The nearest grain store to York used for bovine material from the cattle cull is the Government-owned store at Hemswell Cliff, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, converted last year to store frozen product from the over-30-month-scheme.

Bovine Tissue

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what circumstances the National Meat Hygiene Service is permitted to destroy samples of bovine tissue provided to it as suspect specified bovine material. [21238]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The procedures which the Meat Hygiene Service would follow, if presented with samples of bovine tissues provided to it as suspect SBM, would depend on whether investigation showed that the samples were indeed SBM. If, following examination, the samples were discovered to be SBM, the MHS would rigorously investigate the circumstances of the case, gathering available evidence. When no longer required as part of the investigation and after appropriate photographs, the tissue would be stained and destroyed as such in accordance with the SBM order. If, following examination, the material is discovered not to be SBM, but is otherwise unfit for human consumption, the tissue would be stained and destroyed as unfit material in accordance with the Animal By-Products Regulations 1995. The MHS would undertake any relevant investigation of the provided material before destruction.

Newcastle Disease

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what *(a)* financial and *(b)* other assistance is available to farm businesses whose supply of point of lay pullets is halted by measures taken to contain Newcastle disease. [21145]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Animal Health Act 1981 makes no provision for the payment of consequential losses following an outbreak of a notifiable disease, including Newcastle disease and so such payments are made.

Directive 92/66/EEC, as implemented in Great Britain by the Diseases of Poultry Order 1994 (as amended) requires that controls on the movement of poultry are imposed in an area surrounding each confirmed outbreak of Newcastle disease. Every effort is made to limit disruption to the poultry industry consequent upon the imposition of these controls subject to the overriding need to contain the spread of disease.

Pigs (Welfare)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he plans to take to ensure compliance with the prohibition in the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1984 on the routine tail docking of piglets. [21294]

Mrs. Browning: The State Veterinary Service enforces all aspects of the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994. Welfare inspections of pig farms include, where appropriate, checks on compliance with paragraph 3, part IV, schedule 3 of those regulations concerning the tail docking of piglets.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he plans to take to ensure the enforcement of the law in respect of the welfare of pigs on farms and at slaughter. [21293]

Mrs. Browning: The State Veterinary Service carries out inspections to check compliance with legislation relating to the welfare of pigs on farm. All complaints are followed up as a matter of urgency. Legislation relating to animal welfare in slaughterhouses is enforced by the Meat Hygiene Service. In both cases, any unsatisfactory conditions or practices which are found are addressed immediately, by advice or by formal enforcement action, including, where necessary, the initiation of prosecution proceedings.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, how he plans to take forward the action plan on meat hygiene which he announced to the House on 12 March. [21632]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Meat Hygiene Service will be instructed to work to the performance targets which are set out in my reply earlier today to the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff). In working to these targets the Meat Hygiene Service will be giving effect to the comprehensive programme of action which I announced on 12 March. Once this range of measures has been implemented, I would anticipate repeating, if possible before April 1998, the thorough audit of hygiene standards in each individual plant which was carried out in 1995–96. For this campaign on hygiene standards to succeed, it will be essential for the industry to give full co-operation both collectively, through the Industry Forum of the Meat Hygiene Service and the Government/ Industry Group instituted by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, and in day-to-day operations in individual plants.

SCOTLAND

Scientists

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many scientists were employed by his Department and each of his Department's agencies on *(a)* the most recent date available and *(b)* for each year since 1979 on matters equivalent to those covered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; and if he will list each agency, service or central laboratory employing scientists on such projects. [18165]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 5 March 1997]:* The number of scientists employed in the Scottish Office, including its executive agencies other than the Scottish Prison Service, are shown in the table. This includes details for *(a)* the most recent date available—1 March 1997—and *(b)* a breakdown for each year since 1979.

The agencies and branches employing staff in the science group are as follows:

(a) *Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department*

Food Safety and Animal Health

Freshwater Fish Laboratory

Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries

Marine Laboratory

Scientific Advisers Unit.

(b) *Scottish Agricultural Science Agency*

(c) *Department of Health*

Public Health Policy Medical Division.

(d) *Education and Industry Department*

Innovation and Support services.

Number of staff in the Science group within The Scottish Office, 1979 to 1997 position as at 1 April (except for 1997 where figures relate to 1 March)

Year	Number staff (FTE)
1979	328.5
1980	325.0
1981	320.0
1982	311.0
1983	317.0
1984	319.0
1985	318.0
1986	276.0
1987	273.5
1988	270.5
1989	273.0
1990	273.0
1991	282.0
1992	282.0
1993	281.5
1994	279.5
1995	273.3
1996	260.9
1997	257.7

Woodlands

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those areas of Forestry Commission woodland proposed for sale in the next three financial years in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland; indicating for each (i) its area, (ii) its approximate location and (iii) if an agreement is in place to protect public access. [19707]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 12 March 1997]:* The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 20 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your Question about the sale of Forestry Commission woodlands.

The Forestry Commission's current disposals programme will continue until the end of the century, and the selection of properties for sale will accordingly be staged over that period. Advance notification of properties to be placed on the market is given in the Estates Gazette before a firm decision to sell is taken by the Commission. Copies of the Estate Gazette are to be found in the Library.

We have, therefore, not yet decided which areas we will be selling over the next three years, but I can tell you which forest areas are at present being offered for sale on the Open Market. I have indicated those where a Continued Public Access Agreement has been agreed or is under negotiation. The Commission encourages local authorities to enter into the Access Agreements it offers them but it is, of course, up to the local authorities to decide whether or not they wish to accept the offer.

Forestry Commission woodlands currently for sale on the open market

England

Local authority/name of property	Location grid reference	Area (ha)
Buckinghamshire		
Back Lane Wood	TL278178	7.5
College Wood	SP791330	51.0
Greens	TL277170	1.5
Cornwall		
Wheal Par	SX053561	5.0
County Durham		
Stanley Cottages Wood	NZ154388	'31.0
Cumbria		
Foulsyke	NY140218	17.0
Samgarth Woods	SD133945	71.0
Ulpha Park	SD191912	'29.0
Whinneyhow	NY137002	1.0
Devon		
Deershill	SS520172	11.0
Knowle Wood	SX533641	8.0
East Yorkshire		
Black Plantation	SE792368	14.0
Seaton Old Wood	SE787393	16.5
Hertfordshire		
Priest Wood	TL301160	28.0
Leicestershire		
Stoke Dry	SK845979	40.0
Lincolnshire		
Half Moon Wood	SK972158	2.0
Larch Plantation	SK980162	8.0
Nettleton Back	TA091013	'11.0
Rand Wood	TF081781	'19.0
White Lodge	SK970155	4.0
Norfolk		
Great Wood Outliers	TG150215	4.0

Forestry Commission woodlands currently for sale on the open market

England

Local authority/name of property	*Location grid reference*	*Area (ha)*
North Yorkshire		
Cottage Wood	SE682518	4.0
Dalby Bush	SE635719	36.0
Farm Wood	SE656715	6.0
Mill Wood	SE644735	24.0
Scoreby	SE697517	33.0
Northumberland		
Evistones	NY825970	46.0
South Yorkshire		
Old Park Wood	SE335015	[1]41.0
Suffolk		
Barthorps Folly	TM348459	[1]6.0
Wiltshire		
Stanton Park	ST895798	58.0

[1] Indicates CPA Agreement.

Forestry commission woodlands currently for sale on the open market

Scotland

Local authority/name of property	*Location grid reference*	*Area (ha)*
Aberdeenshire		
Auchinroath plantation	NJ276510	62.0
Balmakewan (3222M)	NO672676	0.6
Haremoss	NJ792495	21.0
Ryhnagoup wood, lot 1	NJ110505	16.0
Waggle hill	NJ814476	[1]152.0
Argyll and Bute		
Ardbrecknish	NN067208	[1]119.0
Scoor wood, lot 5	NM435205	360.0
Borders		
Edgarhope	NT557485	143.5
Dumfries and Galloway		
Cairnhead	NX700970	[1]1,361.0
Enchenhead	NS680060	[1]689.0
Little clyde	NS985170	645.6
Polskeoch	NS686023	[1]830.0
Shinnelhead	NS729991	[1]843.0
Highland		
Achandounie woods	NH633734	[1]44.0
Aline wood	NB215150	626.0
Ardmolich	NM710715	[1]92.0
Carsaig and Kinloch	NM530260	[1]488.0
Fairy bridge	NG258505	92.0
Glenhinnisdale	NG405575	[1]204.0
Kirkton	NG906410	92.0
Perth and Kinross		
Warroch	NO05065	68.0
South Ayrshire		
Docherneil	NX225885	72.5

[1] Indicates CPA Agreement.

Forestry Commission Woodlands currently for sale on the Open Market

Wales

Unitary authority/name of property	*Location grid reference*	*Area (ha)*
Conwy County Borough Council		
Blackthorn Covert	SH930770	21.5
Cefn Mawr	SH910568	81.7

Forestry Commission Woodlands currently for sale on the Open Market

Wales

Unitary authority/name of property	*Location grid reference*	*Area (ha)*
Cerrigellgwm	SH861475	20.0
Gwrych Castle Woodlands	SH925775	49.0
Blaenau, Gwent		
Craig Yr Arail	SO210044	58.0
Caerphilly County Borough Council		
Hafodrisclawdd	SO176020	[2]24.0
Carmarthenshire		
Allt Du/Cwm Ifor	SN615306	29.0
Penhill Wood	SN775315	4.0
Ceredigion		
Cefn Wig	SN472612	19.0
Gwynedd		
Amnodd Wood	SH810372	87.5
Bronaber	SH710317	10.0
Bryn Hendre	SH315373	10.0
Btryntirion	SH673192	[1]18.0
Cae Rhys	SH690346	[2]67.0
Cefn Glas	SH810381	12.0
Coed Mynydd Mawr	SH365408	24.0
Coed Y Craig	SH641078	35.0
Cwm Prysor	SH790380	56.0
Cymerau	SH688436	[1]87.5
Dolymoch	SH686422	[1]22.0
Frochas 1	SH325393	7.5
Frochas 3	SH333395	5.4
Frochas 4	SH336396	7.4
Garthanghard	SH661160	[2]29.0
Gelli Dywyll	SH686413	[1]25.0
Graianog	SH464488	[1]19.0
Pen Y Gribin	SH680190	[1]12.0
Pengwern	SH696427	[2]15.0
Rhiwbach and Tyddyn Bach	SH743462	[1]6.0
Tan Y Clawdd	SH436491	[1]13.0
Ty Coch North	SH584691	7.1
Ynys Creua	SH446430	67.0
Monmouthshire		
Wern Brake	ST440928	8.0
Neath and Port Talbot		
Graig Ynysgollen	SN802013	10.0
Nant Y Stalwyn	SN820097	[1]44.0
Powys		
Blaen Llia	SN925163	[1]185.0
Cilgwyn	SO940797	22.0
Coed Y Foel Road Improvement	SN918798	1.0
Freezeland	SO186138	[1]11.0
Llys Coppice and Penllys	SJ175215	16.0
Nant Tidnerth	SN879817	23.0
Rock Wood and Fronfraith Wood	SO168926	[1]31.0
The Smatcher	SO212602	[1]36.0
Tyn Y Rhos	SN878817	17.0
Waun	SN945775	35.0
Y Wern	SN855131	[1]453.0

[1] Indicates CPA Agreement.

[2] Indicates CPA Agreement being negotiated.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total amount spent by his Department on executive search agencies for appointments to non-departmental public bodies annually since 1992. [20184]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has incurred no expenditure on executive search services for appointments to non-departmental public bodies in the period stated.

NHS Trusts (Grants)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been given in start-up grants to NHS trust hospitals since 1990. [20181]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total cost of start-up grants to NHS trust hospitals since 1990 is £8,455,000.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the HIV and *(b)* the drug misuse budget for each health board in Scotland in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98. [20199]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1997]:* The resources available to Scottish health boards and the state hospital for HIV/AIDS and drug misuse services in 1995–96 and 1996–97 are set out in the tables. Provision of £25.659 million has been made available for these services in 1997–98, but the individual budgets have not been finalised.

Health Board 1995–96	*HIV care and treatment*	*HIV and aids prevention*	*HIV drugs related*	*Drug misuse*	*Total*
Argyll and Clyde	90,900	307,536	121,764	136,200	656,400
Ayrshire and Arran	89,800	166,000	252,450	305,780	814,030
Borders	65,000	88,000	13,000	35,000	201,000
Dumfries and Galloway	49,933	115,495	36,447	50,628	252,503
Fife	83,750	49,894	157,275	232,340	523,259
Forth Valley	142,091	170,589	140,390	80,093	533,163
Grampian	582,366	308,050	85,850	503,182	1,479,448
Greater Glasgow	2,324,000	572,000	662,000	2,293,250	5,851,250
Highland	80,497	266,894	0	43,150	390,541
Lanark	197,960	331,441	42,723	133,926	706,050
Lothian	4,308,682	694,340	1,100,550	2,190,654	8,294,226
Orkney	1,000	29,800	0	5,750	36,550
Shetland	6,250	47,150	4,500	6,500	64,400
Tayside	1,251,000	782,000	239,000	834,000	3,106,000
Western Isles	1,000	36,500	12,000	12,000	61,500
State Hospital	0	27,642	0	0	27,642
	9,274,229	3,993,331	2,867,949	6,862,453	22,997,962
					[1]819,000
					23,816,962

[1] This was used to supplement in-year as required in the light of emerging needs.

Health board 1996–97	*HIV care and treatment*	*HIV and aids prevention*	*HIV drugs related*	*Drug misuse*	*Total*
Argyll and Clyde	92,864	263,629	122,964	150,870	630,327
Ayrshire and Arran	91,252	162,680	251,000	338,303	843,235
Borders	65,165	100,000	13,000	70,200	248,365
Dumfries and Galloway	50,712	122,585	55,466	73,698	302,461
Fife	84,190	50,783	153,475	254,675	543,123
Forth Valley	143,633	168,188	259,000	99,716	670,537
Grampian	594,559	172,710	98,350	634,889	1,500,508
Greater Glasgow	2,355,538	695,000	624,000	2,545,000	6,219,538
Highland	80,889	261,556	0	99,570	442,015
Lanark	201,293	316,949	42,723	192,780	753,745
Lothian	4,356,348	828,188	774,358	2,155,396	8,114,290
Orkney	1,000	29,615	0	32,330	62,945
Shetland	6,250	32,850	4,600	25,860	69,560
Tayside	1,254,578	650,066	201,600	920,160	3,026,404
Western Isles	1,000	35,500	12,000	38,000	86,500
State Hospital	0	27,000	0	0	27,000
	9,379,271	3,917,299	2,612,536	7,631,447	23,540,553
					[1]1,142,447
					24,683,000

[1] This is used to supplement in-year as required in the light of emerging needs.

Prisoners

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of criminals currently serving time for offences in Scotland were previously convicted of offences when they were aged under 18 years; and if he will make a statement. [21273]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of this question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 20 March 1997:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about what percentage of criminals currently serving time for offences in Scotland were previously convicted of offences when they were aged under 18 years. The information requested is not collected centrally.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much in public funds local enterprise companies in Scotland control. [21017]

Mr. Kynoch: In 1995–96 local enterprise companies' budgets accounted for £461.4 million—85 per cent.—of the overall budgets for the Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise network. That figure includes £43.6 million for adult training allowances paid by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise on behalf of their local enterprise companies.

Departmental Equipment (Theft)

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total value of *(a)* computer equipment, *(b)* artwork and *(c)* other items stolen from his Department in each of the past five years. [20447]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is available for the last three years and is set out in the table,

	Computer £	*Artwork*	*Other* £
1994–95	—	—	[1]30,208
1995–96	10,500	—	9,695
1996–97	15,000	—	2,212

[1] Includes the theft of a vehicle and the loss of items valued at £15,000 as a result of a burglary.

Crime

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many recorded *(a)* burglaries, *(b)* incidents of assault, *(c)* incidents of car theft and *(d)* other incidents of violent crime there were for each police authority in Scotland in (i) 1985, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1996. [21277]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The tables provide the information for 1985, 1992 and 1995, the latest year for which information is available:

Number of crimes recorded in 1985, by police authority

Police authority	*Housebreaking*[1]	*Serious assault etc.*[2]	*Petty assault*	*Other violent crime*[3]	*Theft of motor vehicle*
Borders	771	93	362	79	172
Central	4,048	209	1,773	378	869
Dumfries and Galloway	1,203	58	613	110	238
Fife	4,874	172	1,852	400	1,343
Grampian	5,530	403	3,482	630	1,243
Highland	1,595	72	1,085	163	521
Lothian	14,858	1,316	3,475	1,572	5,082
Orkney	30	9	53	6	16
Shetland	52	7	56	19	20
Strathclyde	61,506	3,193	17,367	6,515	19,171
Tayside	6,184	481	1,952	584	1,215
Western Isles	47	8	88	10	48
Scotland	100,698	6,021	32,158	10,466	29,938

[1] Includes non-domestic and domestic premises.
[2] Includes murder, attempted murder, culpable homicide and serious assault.
[3] Includes handling offensive weapons, robbery, other non sexual crimes of violence and sexual assault.

Number of crimes recorded in 1992, by police authority

Police authority	*Housebreaking*[1]	*Serious assault etc.*[2]	*Petty assault*	*Other violent crime*[3]	*Theft of motor vehicle*
Borders	938	72	436	93	190
Central	3,579	354	2,159	651	1,152
Dumfries and Galloway	1,986	146	971	254	355
Fife	9,108	157	2,426	609	1,650
Grampian	7,050	401	4,473	777	1,841
Highland	1,342	119	1,440	285	357

Number of crimes recorded in 1992, by police authority

Police authority	*Housebreaking*[1]	*Serious assault etc.*[2]	*Petty assault*	*Other violent crime*[3]	*Theft of motor vehicle*
Lothian	15,840	973	5,634	2,364	5,841
Orkney	49	5	72	7	21
Shetland	23	9	95	11	13
Strathclyde	64,494	5,011	21,754	10,973	33,664
Tayside	8,695	453	2,892	1,138	2,318
Western Isles	56	9	117	33	31
Scotland	113,160	7,709	42,469	17,195	47,433

[1] Includes non-domestic and domestic premises.
[2] Includes murder, attempted murder, culpable homicide and serious assault.
[3] Includes handling offensive weapons, robbery, other non sexual crimes of violence and sexual assault.

Number of crimes recorded in 1995, by police authority

Police authority	*Housebreaking*[1]	*Serious assault etc.*[2]	*Petty assault*	*Other violent crime*[3]	*Theft of motor vehicle*
Borders	783	93	528	90	199
Central	2,523	277	2,544	548	921
Dumfries and Galloway	1,385	104	1,201	264	293
Fife	4,635	133	3,077	600	1,344
Grampian	7,217	316	5,459	891	1,628
Highland	1,176	83	1,679	349	492
Lothian	10,081	879	6,642	2,297	4,893
Orkney	28	4	87	13	20
Shetland	87	7	103	21	25
Strathclyde	39,180	4,664	22,061	9,650	25,613
Tayside	7,055	356	3,094	1,074	2,045
Western Isles	85	4	129	40	41
Scotland	74,235	6,920	46,604	15,837	37,514

[1] Includes non-domestic and domestic premises.
[2] Includes murder, attempted murder, culpable homicide and serious assault.
[3] Includes handling offensive weapons, robbery, other non sexual crimes of violence and sexual assault.

Loch Ewe Several Order

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce his decision in respect of the Loch Ewe Several Order application; and if he will make a statement. [21152]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Loch Ewe Several Order was laid before Parliament on 14 March and is due to come into force on 4 April.

Glaucoma

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients received hospital in-patient or day care treatment for glaucoma in each of the last five years. [21157]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of the letter in the House Library.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prescriptions for the treatment of glaucoma were issued in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what was the net ingredient cost for each year. [21156]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information for the years 1992 to 1996 is shown in the table.

The costs shown are based on the value of ingredients before addition of dispensing fees or deduction of discount or patient charges.

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Number of prescription items	281,779	288,217	296,685	304,356	320,680
Cost of ingredients (£)	2,060,686	2,113,062	2,164,059	2,221,377	2,461,542

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients suffering from glaucoma were treated by general practitioners during *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96. [21158]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Hospital Trusts (Contracts)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many trusts failed to meet the deadline to agree contracts with the purchasers; and how many he expects to go to arbitration. [21161]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Agreement was reached by all trusts and health boards in Scotland on their contracts in the present financial year without the need

for arbitration. Negotiations on contracts for 1997–98 are continuing and I do not anticipate any requirement for arbitration.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the median waiting times of admissions for *(a)* cataract operations, *(b)* hip replacements and *(c)* cardiac surgery (i) at each hospital where this operation was provided, (ii) by health authority and (iii) nationally in (1) 1994–95 and (2) 1995–96. [21160]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of the letter in the House Library.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what (1) provision Highlands and Islands Enterprise has made to run the proposed Cairn Gorm funicular in the event of the failure of the Cairn Gorm Chairlift Company; [21191]

(2) what financial provision Highlands and Islands Enterprise has made for reinstating the cost and removal of the proposed Cairn Gorm funicular in the event of it ceasing to operate; [21192]

(3) what limit has been placed on the period within which Highlands and Islands Enterprise must find a new operator of the Cairn Gorm funicular if the Cairn Gorm Chairlift Company fails; [21193]

(4) if he will list those projects in Scotland which the Highlands and Islands Enterprise *(a)* has made proposals for and *(b)* is currently fully underwriting in the event of a failure by the existing operator. [21194]

Mr. Kynoch: These are operational matters for Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I will ask the chairman of that organisation to write to the hon. Member.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21198]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *613–14*. Any additional information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Secure Unit

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to set up a secure unit in a Scottish prison; and if he will make a statement. [21037]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The subject of the question related to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its Chief Executive, Mr. W. E. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. George Foulkes, dated 20 March 1997:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your question about whether there are plans to set up a secure unit in a Scottish prison.

Prisoners in Scotland are held in conditions appropriate to their security classification and there are no plans to set up any "special" secure units of the kind which exist in some other prison jurisdictions. At present there are relatively few security Category A prisoners in Scotland. They are held in a number of different prisons including the small units at Peterhead and Shotts Prisons. The units were set up to manage those prisoners who need for a time to be located out of the mainstream but are suitable for use by Category A prisoners as necessary. Otherwise such prisoners are integrated within the secure prison system.

Health Service Commissioner

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time equivalent support staff were provided to the health service commissioner for Scotland in each year since 1992. [21055]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The posts of Health Service Commissioner for Scotland, for England and for Wales and the post of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration are all held by the same person. I understand that support services for those posts are provided from a central resource and are not separately allocated.

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints were made to the health service commissioner for Scotland in each year since 1992. [21053]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The health service commissioner's annual reports show:

Year	*Complaints received*
1992–93	119
1993–94	133
1994–95	144
1995–96	146

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many investigations into complaints were completed by the health service commissioner for Scotland in each year since 1992. [21054]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The health service commissioner's annual reports show:

Year	*Completed investigations*
1992–93	9
1993–94	11
1994–95	6
1995–96	7

Fox and Mink Farms

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many fox and mink farms there are in Scotland by county. [21291]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: There are no fox or mink farms in operation in Scotland.

Cairn Gorm Funicular Railway

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if Highlands and Islands Enterprise has authorisation to fund removal of the proposed Cairn Gorm funicular in the event of its failure. [21195]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has yet to complete his consideration of the request from Highlands and Islands Enterprise for approval of its proposed financial contribution to the cost of the funicular railway project. He is awaiting further information from Highlands and Islands Enterprise on the impact of the recently agreed visitors management regime on the project's financial projections. In considering the request for approval, my right hon. Friend will wish to be satisfied as to the financial viability of the project.

Trunk Road Projects

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the trunk road projects proposed by his Department which have not yet started in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–00; and if he will indicate the estimated cost of each project in each financial year. [21542]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

Project/proposed construction start	*Estimated expenditure* 1997–98 £	1998–99 £	1999–2000 £
1997–98			
M6 DBFO[1]	2 million	2 million	11 million
M8 DBFO[1]	1 million	3.5 million	3.5 million
A828 Creagan Bridge	0.6 million	3.8 million	2.1 million
A75 The Glen	120 thousand	7 million	2.6 million
1998–99			
A1 Haddington–Dunbar	230 thousand	14.7 million	15 million
1999–2000			
M80 DBFO[1]	1.5 million	1.5 million	3.5 million
M77 Floak–Fenwick	0.5 million	1.4 million	17.2 million

[1] DBFO—Design, Build, Finance and Operate.

Class Sizes

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pupils are in classes of 40 or over at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary level in each Scottish local education authority. [21541]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: There are no classes with 40 or more pupils at either primary or secondary level in Scotland.

Housing Waiting Lists

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many families in each housing authority area in the constituencies of *(a)* Roxburgh and Berwickshire and *(b)* Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale have been on waiting lists for local authority tenancies in each of the years 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1993 and any subsequent years for which figures are available. [21544]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is not held centrally.

Health Board Funding

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the public expenditure general allocation uplifts and parity adjustments for all health board areas in Scotland for 1997–98. [21539]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: General allocation uplifts and parity adjustments for 1997–98 are as follows:

Health Board	*General allocation uplift £000*	*Parity adjustment £000*
Argyll and Clyde	8,994	–789
Ayrshire and Arran	7,584	3,303
Borders	2,318	–839
Dumfries and Galloway	3,255	–876
Fife	6,748	–1,291
Forth Valley	6,090	–2,481
Grampian	9,727	921
Greater Glasgow	21,127	–5,473
Highland	4,364	1,697
Lanarkshire	10,582	4,865
Lothian	14,424	–663
Orkney	434	253
Shetland	508	473
Tayside	8,353	–2,215
Western Isles	784	–123

Homelessness

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many households were registered as homeless in the constituencies of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale and Roxburgh and Berwickshire in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983, *(c)* 1987, *(d)* 1991, *(e)* 1993 and *(f)* each subsequent year for which figures are available. [21528]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The available information relates to local authorities and not to parliamentary constituencies. It is published in the Scottish Office series of housing statistical bulletins—bulletins HSG/1992/3, HSG/1995/7, HSG/1996/4. These are available in the House Library.

Small Town Initiative

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the extra resources which will be granted to Hawick as a result of inclusion in the first round of Scottish Enterprise's small town initiative. [21547]

Mr. Kynoch: The expenditure on projects and programmes to benefit Hawick in the context of the small towns initiative have yet to be finalised. At this stage, it is not possible to determine the extent of any additional resources which may be required.

Scottish Borders Enterprise

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the budget made available to Scottish Borders Enterprise for the past five years for which figures are available. [21543]

Mr. Kynoch: The allocation of budgets to its local enterprise companies is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Farm Enterprises

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total amount of money paid from UK and EU funds to farm enterprises in Roxburgh and Berwickshire and in Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale for the last five years for which figures are available. [21537]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information required could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

House Building

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of houses built in the constituencies of Roxburgh and Berwickshire and in Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available broken down into different kinds of tenure, and indicating how many were built by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* other social rented sector providers. [21540]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The available information, which relates to local authorities and not to parliamentary constituencies, is set out in the table. Information by tenure is not available.

New dwellings completed, 1986 to 1995

	Berwickshire	Ettrick and Lauderdale	Roxburgh	Tweeddale
(a) by local authorities				
1986	22	—	8	—
1987	17	—	4	6
1988	—	—	28	54
1989	31	—	18	4
1990	—	—	—	8
1991	29	14	—	6
1992	—	6	—	6
1993	19	4	—	—
1994	—	—	—	—
1995	14	2	—	—
(b) by housing associations				
1986	12	—	—	30
1987	—	38	26	—
1988	9	—	15	33
1989	12	26	33	—
1990	—	—	—	—
1991	6	4	66	32
1992	25	—	—	6
1993	—	—	20	34
1994	—	—	—	—
1995	42	161	69	28
(c) by private builders				
1986	15	51	32	45
1987	40	67	56	93
1988	29	60	30	38
1989	66	112	72	46
1990	69	203	131	124
1991	50	55	87	34
1992	46	77	54	23
1993	22	75	48	23
1994	19	99	41	61
1995	40	75	46	50

Local Government Staff Commission Report

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive the local government staff commission (Scotland) report; and if he will make a statement. [21606]

Mr. Kynoch: The staff commissioners submitted their report to my right hon. Friend on 10 March 1997. I am placing copies in the House Library today.

Scottish Agricultural Science Agency

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the performance of the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency against its targets for 1996–97; and if he will make a statement on the targets for 1997–98. [21605]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The agency is on course to meet the key performance targets for 1996–97 which I set out in my written answer of 3 April 1996, column *276*).

For 1997–98 I have set the agency the following key performance targets:

- Fulfilment of the Service Level Agreement with SOAEFD within the running costs allocated to SASA for 1997–98;
- Continuation of the programme of consultation with all customers on the quality of the work done by the Agency;
- Completion of 93 per cent. of all scientific tests and analyses within the timescales set by customers;
- Improvement in the unit cost of the scientific work of the Agency (cost per direct scientist hour);
- Publication of a comprehensive review of the scientific work of the Agency 1992–97.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20894]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information required is as follows: *(a)* Those executive NDPBs which are covered by the Companies Acts are required to publish annual reports and some other bodies are also required by the statute creating them to publish annual reports. These bodies are:

- Hannah Research Institute
- Macaulay land Use Research Institute
- Moredun Research Institute
- Rowett Research Institute
- Scottish Crop Research Institute
- Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board
- Scottish Council for Educational Technology
- Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust
- Scottish Seed Potato Development Council
- Scottish Vocational Education Council.

In a number of other cases the body is required by statute to produce an annual report on the exercise and performance of its functions for the Secretary of State which he is obliged to lay before Parliament. These bodies are:

Crofters Commission
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland
National Museums of Scotland (required by statute at least every three years, but voluntarily produces an annual report)
National Galleries of Scotland (required by statute at least every three years)
Deer Commission for Scotland
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
Scottish Agricultural Wages Board
Scottish Enterprise
Scottish Examination Board
Scottish Homes
Scottish Legal Aid Board
Scottish Natural Heritage
Scottish Tourist Board
Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust
Parole Board for Scotland
Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration.

Some bodies publish reports on a non-statutory basis. They are:

Accounts Commission for Scotland
National Library of Scotland
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland
Scottish Arts Council
Scottish Community Education Council
Scottish Film Council
Scottish Further Education Unit
Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
Scottish Medical Practices Committee
Scottish Sports Council.

(b) Those bodies which are required to publish their annual accounts under the terms of the Companies Acts, the Friendly Societies Acts or other legislation are:

Hannah Research Institute
Macaulay Land Research Institute
Rowett Research Institute
Scottish Crop Research Institute
Scottish Council for Educational Technology
Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust
Scottish Seed Potato Development Council
Scottish Vocational Education Council.

Some bodies are required by statute to submit annual accounts to the Secretary of State who is obliged to pass them to the Comptroller and Auditor General. He is then obliged to lay copies of them before Parliament. These bodies are:

Accounts Commission for Scotland
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland
National Library of Scotland
National Galleries of Scotland
National Museums of Scotland
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
Scottish Enterprise.

Some other bodies hold registers which are available for inspection at the offices of the body. These are: Highlands and Islands Enterprise—financial decisions relating to registered interests are also published in the annual report, National Museums of Scotland, Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Enterprise—summary is also available at time of annual report and financial transactions involving board members published in annual report and accounts, Scottish Film Council and Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency is currently preparing a list of members' interests which will be available to the public on request.

Scottish Office Quangos

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the *(a)* total running costs of Scottish Office quangos and *(b)* the running costs of each such quango in each year since 1992, showing in each case the total (i) salary bill and (ii) expenses paid to members; and what were the salary and expenses paid to each individual in respect of quango membership in the latest year for which figures are available. [19231]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information about payments made to individual board members of executive non-departmental public bodies in Scotland in 1996–97 is given in "Scottish Office Appointments to executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies and NHS Bodies at 1 December 1996", copies of which were placed in the House of Commons Library on 23 December 1996. All NDPBs publish annual reports which are also placed in the House of Commons Library. With one exception, these include such information as is available on running costs, staff salaries and members expenses. The exception is the Crofters Commission, for which the available information is:

	1992–93 £'000	*1993–94* £'000	*1994–95* £'000	*1995–96* £'000
Running costs	1,307	1,397	1,607	1,446
Staff costs	936	1,037	1,046	1,006
Board member expenses	37	33	47	34

Employment

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* male and female employees were engaged in (i) manufacturing and (ii) agriculture and fishing in the constituencies of (x) Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale and (y) Roxburgh and Berwickshire in the (1) 1979, (2) 1983, (3) 1987, (4) 1991, (5) 1993 and (6) the last year for which figures are available. [21545]

Mr. Kynoch: Information for the parliamentary constituency areas requested is available for years since 1984 in which the census of employment has been held, and is shown in the table:

Employees in employment

Parliamentary constituency	*1980 Standard industrial classification*				*1992 Standard industrial classification*		
	[3]*1984*	*1987*	*1989*	*1991*	[2]*1991*	*1993*	[1]*1995*
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale							
Male							
Manufacturing	3,400	3,100	2,900	2,600	2,400	2,700	2,700
Agriculture and Fisheries	900	700	700	700	—	[4]—	[4]—
Female							
Manufacturing	2,200	2,000	1,900	1,600	1,400	1,700	1,400
Agriculture and Fisheries	100	100	100	100	—	[4]—	[4]—
Roxburgh and Berwickshire							
Male	3,900	3,900	3,900	3,800	3,800	3,300	3,500
Agriculture and Fisheries	1,500	1,100	1,100	1,000	—	[4]—	[4]—
Female							
Manufacturing	3,200	3,200	3,300	3,100	2,900	2,600	2,500
Agriculture and Fisheries	200	200	200	100	—	[4]—	[4]—

[1] The annual employment survey replaced the biennial census of employment in 1995.
[2] Data are available under the 1992 standard industrial classification only from 1991. Some employees previously classified under manufacturing in the 1980 SIC are classified under services in the 1992 SIC. For 1991, both bases are given for manufacturing for comparison.
[3] A census was not held in 1983; 1984 figures are provided.
[4] Confidential under the Statistics of Trade Act 1947.

Public Relations

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent on public relations *(a)* in actual terms and *(b)* in real terms in each year since 1979. [20540]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information is not available in the form requested.

TRANSPORT

Whitburn Street Relief Road, Bridgnorth

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the application for a transport supplementary grant in respect of the Whitburn street relief road in Bridgnorth; and if he will make a statement. [21174]

Mr. Watts: Shropshire county council included this scheme in its transport policies and programme bid for resources in the local transport capital settlement for 1997–98. The scheme was part of the council's general minor works programme. It was not possible to meet any bids under that heading. All resources for 1997–98 under the TPP system have been allocated. The county council could bid for additional supplementary credit approval should any surplus SCAs become available for redistribution.

A46 Dualling

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will announce the start of construction work on the dualling of the A46 between Lincoln and Newark; and if he will make a statement. [21173]

Mr. Watts: I have instructed the Highways Agency to complete the statutory procedures as rapidly as possible. The next stage would be to make the compulsory purchase order. This would enable preparation to begin for the invitation of tenders for building the scheme, with a view to start of works in 1999.

Westhaven AH190 (Sinking)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he plans to issue to fishing vessels working in the same vicinity as that in which the Westhaven AH190 sank. [20842]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Andrew Welsh, dated 20 March 1997:

Navigational information is promulgated and regularly updated through Admiralty charts and Notices to Mariners. Information about pipelines, cables and other seabed installations is set out on specialist charts produced for the fishing industry by the Sea Fish Industry Authority.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date responsibility for the collation and dissemination of information about the emergency position indication radio beacon for the Westhaven AH190 was transferred from the Marine Safety Agency to the Coastguard agency; what were the procedures for that transfer; and in what form the information was expressed. [20844]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Andrew Welsh, dated 20 March 1997:

Responsibility for collation and dissemination of information about Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons, including that for the 'Westhaven AH 190', was transferred from the Marine Safety Agency (MSA) to the Coastguard Agency (TCA) on the 24 February 1997. Training on registry procedures was given by the MSA to TCA during week commencing 13 January 1997. Both written and verbal instruction on the mechanisms for EPIRB registration was provided during this period.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* co-ordination and *(b)* staff training took place in the Coastguard service related to the transfer of emergency position indication radio beacon

administration from the Marine Safety Agency; and what staff and at what grades worked at the Coastguard agency on the date of the transfer. [20845]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* The transfer of the emergency position indicating radio beacon—EPIRB—administration from the MSA to the Coastguard Agency took place on 24 February 1997.

(a) The co-ordination of the transfer was conducted by the appropriate operations managers of both organisations at a series of meetings and involved:

(i) conversion of the MSA database to operate under Coastguard software;

(ii) one month period "double entry" on the MSA and Coastguard databases to ensure consistency in the input process;

(iii) the familiarisation and training of Coastguard staff on the database system.

(b) Coastguard staff training related to the transfer covered a five-day period from 13–17 January 1997, and included:

(i) familiarisation on the background to the EPIRB registration database;

(ii) the general administration regime of the database;

(iii) data input training.

In addition to the "double entry" period during which Coastguard staff improved their familiarity with the database, they also received appropriate software application training on 13 December 1996.

The Coastguard staff involved with the EPIRB database on 24 February were:

One coastguard station officer; one administration assistant; one part-time clerk/typist.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when the emergency position indication radio beacon documentation was received from the skipper of the Westhaven AH190; when it was processed; on what dates it was logged; and which authorities dealt with it; [20841]

(2) what actions his Department intends to take in respect of the loss of the Westhaven AH190; and what is the planned time scale for these actions; [20843]

(3) at what time and what date the emergency position indication radio beacon of the Westhaven AH190 was activated; [20846]

(4) what steps he intends to take to implement compulsory registration of emergency position indication radio beacons on fishing vessels. [20847]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* The loss of the fishing vessel Westhaven is the subject of an inspector's inquiry carried out by the marine accident investigation branch. Investigations of this type should be completed within 12 months of the date of the accident. Interim recommendations can, however, be made at any time if there are urgent lessons to be learned emerging from the investigation.

The registration of the Westhaven's emergency beacon is being examined by the Marine Safety and Coastguard agencies. The results will be passed to the MAIB.

M25 (Widening)

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce his decision on proposals to widen the M25 between junctions 12 and 15. [21515]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend has decided that the proposals for widening the M25 between junctions 12 and 15 should go ahead. A copy of the decision letter is being sent to all those who commented on the environmental statement and copies have also today been placed in the Library.

A36 (Improvements)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the A36 is classified as a strategic route; an what are the current plans for improvements along the A36. [21245]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the programme for improvements on and the classification of the A36 route.

The A36, (together with the A46), is an important strategic trunk road route linking Southampton and Bristol. There are two major schemes in the trunk road programme for the A36–the proposed Salisbury Bypass and the proposed Codford-Heytesbury Improvement. There are also two network enhancement projects in the programme for the A36: Phase 2 of the West Wellow traffic calming scheme and the preparation of the third and final phase of the scheme, to include Whinwhistle Road junction.

Departmental Management Plans

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out his Department's management plans for the coming financial year. [21641]

Sir George Young: I have today published my Department's departmental plan 1997. This outlines how my Department will use its administrative and other resources in 1997–98 and the following two years. Copies of this document are available in the Library. It will be supplemented by the business plans to be published by each of my Department's executive agencies.

The transport report 1997, presented to Parliament today, sets out expenditure plans for the Department of Transport, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the Office of the Rail Regulator, for the period 1997–98 to 1999–2000. Copies are available in the Library.

London Underground (Service Objectives)

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has set quality of service objectives for London Underground Ltd. to achieve in 1997–98. [21624]

Mr. Bowis: As is customary at this time of year, I have today written to Peter Ford, the chairman of London Transport, setting London Underground's quality of service objective for the year ahead. The table shows those objectives, London Underground's objectives for 1998–99, which were set last year as part of a package of three-year objectives, and its interim targets for this year and its performance to the beginning of January.

Per cent.

Measure	1996–97 to date	1996–97 target	1997–98 target	1998–99 target
Train service regularity (percentage headways achieved)	[1]93.0	95.7	95.9	96.2
Percentage schedule operated	[2]94.2	96.5	96.9	97.2
Ticket purchase (percentage queuing under 3 minutes)	96.0	98.0	98.0	98.0
Escalator availability	92.3	92.0	93.0	94.5
Lift availability	96.8	96.0	96.0	96.0
Train service CSR	76.0	76.0	77.0	78.0
Train and station information CSR	74.0	73.0	75.0	76.0
Customer security and safety CSR	82.0	83.0	83.0	83.0
Staff helpfulness and availability CSR	69.0	69.0	70.0	71.0
Train and station cleanliness CSR	68.0	69.0	69.0	71.0

CSR = customer satisfaction rating.
[1] 95.8 per cent. excluding strike days during summer 1996.
[2] 96.4 per cent. excluding strike days.

Performance is to be measured using the mean average of the 13 periods of the year in question.

London Transport Finance

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changed he has made to London Transport's external finance limits for 1996–97. [21638]

Mr. Bowis: The external finance limits for London Transport for 1996–97 has been increased from £939 million to £964 million to reflect arrangements for paying grant in respect of Croydon tramlink. The external finance limit for crossrail has been formally reduced from £14 million to 6 million, reflecting my right hon. Friend's answer of 2 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *130*, about the project.

Electrically Powered Vehicles

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he proposes to take following the public consultation on measures to extend the concessions for electrically assisted pedal cycles to a wider range of electrically powered vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [21625]

Mr. Bowis: None. A significant number of respondents to the consultation exercise were not in favour of amending the existing regulations. After careful consideration of the submissions my Department received and of the implications to road safety should these concessions be extended, I have decided not to amend the present regulations.

Transport Council

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Transport Council held in Brussels on 11 March. [21639]

Sir George Young: The Transport Council met in Brussels on 11 March. My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping represented the United Kingdom.

The Council agreed a common position on a draft directive to continue for another four years the present arrangements harmonising the start and end dates of summer time throughout the Community. The UK asked for a statement to be entered in the Council minutes recording our preference for a recommendation. The Council and Commission agreed a joint declaration on the need for a study of the effects of summer time.

The Council reached political agreement, by qualified majority, on a draft regulation to continue Community funding for combined transport projects aimed at encouraging the transfer of traffic from road to more environmentally friendly modes of transport. The UK said that it would vote against the text when formally adopted, on the basis that the regulation was not an effective way of achieving this aim. Germany also opposed the measure. This was the only item on which the question of a vote arose.

The Council also reached political agreement on an amendment to directive 92/14 on aircraft noise. Its main effect is to update the list of aircraft from developing nations exempted until 2002 from the phase-out of some noisier aircraft. A provision allowing noisier aircraft to be banned from two of the three Berlin airports—Tempelhof and Tegel—was agreed.

The Council agreed terms of reference for a high-level group of officials to consider possible Community involvement in the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation—EUROCONTROL—and in a European aviation safety authority. The group will make a progress report to the June Transport Council.

The Council held an orientation debate on proposals for the introduction of a new digital tachograph. The issue was remitted to the Committee of Permanent Representatives—COREPER—for further consideration.

The Council held a further orientation debate on a draft directive on taxation and road user charges for heavy goods vehicles, and received a report from the Commission on proposals aimed at taking forward the Community's negotiations with Switzerland on transport issues. Conclusions were agreed instructing COREPER to pursue discussions on the draft directive, noting that agreement should be reached in conjunction with the conclusion of land transport negotiations with Switzerland.

The Council agreed a resolution calling on member states introducing new electronic fee collection systems for road pricing to use the technical standards developed by CEN—the European standardisation body.

The Council was invited to comment on a draft resolution, to be considered further by the ECOFIN Council, calling on the Commission to study the effects on the transport sector of levying a duty on aviation fuel.

The Commission gave progress reports on transport research, public-private partnerships for trans-European network projects and trans-European rail freight freeways.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what targets he has set for the executive agencies in his Department. [21640]

Sir George Young: The following key targets have been set for the Department of Transport's executive agencies. The targets are set out in the agencies' business plans, which include management objectives, performance indicators and key tasks, where appropriate to the agencies' business. Copies of the business plans are placed in the Library.

The key targets for the Coastguard agency are to:

discharge the Secretary of State's responsibility for maritime search and rescue, through its own or dedicated assets by:

maintaining a 24 hours SAR co-ordinating capability within, and including the coasts and shoreline of the UK search and rescue region;

arriving on the scene of coastal incidents with 30 minutes of the call, 95 per cent. of the time; and by getting helicopters airborne within 15 minutes of a notification to "scramble" during the daytime and 45 minutes at night;

maintaining a comprehensive radio reception and transmission coverage of the UKSRR which enables SAR co-ordination action for the duration of incidents without interruption or equipment malfunction;

testing contingency plans for major maritime SAR incidents, particularly those involving passenger carrying vessels and merchant shipping and the offshore oil and gas industry by undertaking at least five live exercises, and additionally as required by the shipping industry to exercise passenger vessel emergency plans with SAR services; and by conducting 34 SAR awareness seminars;

maintain a fully operational 24-hours channel navigation information service covering the Dover strait traffic separation scheme, in concert with the appropriate French authorities;

discharge the Secretary of State's responsibility for dealing with marine pollution by the maintenance of a national contingency plan and in particular:

activate the plan within 30 minutes of notification of an incident;

commence action at sea to deal with a spill of dispersible oil within four hours of notification of an incident;

undertake one national and six local exercises in conjunction with local authorities, oil companies and harbour authorities; and

review the national contingency plan by 31 March 1998;

increase the number of prosecutions undertaken for marine pollution offences in conjunction with the Marine Safety Agency;

complete the installation of a computerised SAR incident recording system by 31 July and to report to the Department by the end of October 1997 on suitable targets for effecting a reduction in the number of incidents.

To implement phase 2 of the proposed reorganisation of the HM Coastguard operational structure "Focus for Change" by 31 March 1988.

The key targets for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency are to:

make an efficiency gain (on the basis of an overall efficiency index) of 2.5 per cent.;

complete successfully 495,000 vehicle excise duty enforcement cases by imposition of penalties and to recover, through penalties and duty from licensing, at least £2.85 for every £1.00 full cost spent by DVLA on vehicle excise duty enforcement;

deliver 95 per cent. of ordinary driving licences to customers within 10 workings days, 95 per cent. of vocational driving licences within nine working days, and 95 per cent. of first provisional driving licences within nine working days.

deliver 95 per cent. of registration documents for new vehicles within 12 days, and 95 per cent. of changes to vehicle registration documents within 13 days;

deliver answers to 96 per cent. of written inquiries within eight working days, and to answer 90 per cent. of telephone inquiries within 30 seconds;

ensure that at least 98 per cent. of driving licences, 98 per cent. of registration documents for new vehicles, and 97 per cent. of changes to registration documents are issued without a DVLA induced error.

The key targets for the Driving Standards Agency are to:

achieve an average annual return on capital employed on statutory activities of 6 per cent. of net assets, over the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 2002;

increase the weighted average of fees by no more than the increase in prices as measured by the retail price index over the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 2000, and by no more than the retail price index minus 1 per cent. in both 2000–01 and 2001–02;

achieve a national average waiting time for car and practical tests of six weeks and make appointments available within 10 weeks at 99 per cent. of permanent test centres;

aim to keep 99.5 per cent. of all practical test appointments which are in place two days prior to the appointment date;

answer practical test booking office telephones so that:

four of five calls will be answered on their first dialling attempt;

90 per cent. of calls which have been answered by an automatic system will then be answered by a human voice within 30 seconds; and

an average of no more than 4 per cent. of calls in the queue will be abandoned before being answered;

achieve a national average waiting time for theory tests of two weeks;

ensure theory test booking office telephones are answered so that:

incoming lines will not be engaged for more than 30 seconds in any week; and

95 per cent. of all calls which have been answered by an automatic system will be answered within 10 seconds by a human voice.

The key targets for the Highways Agency are to:

improve performance against the road user's charter targets set out in annexe C of the agency's business plan where achievement levels were below target in 1996–97 and improve systems for monitoring performance;

implement the six Whitehall standards set out in the citizen's charter fifth anniversary White Paper (As set out in annexe C of the business plan);

achieve 80 per cent. of the milestones relating to national schemes, design build finance and operate projects and other private finance initiatives listed in annex D of the business plan, or other milestones as may be substituted or added by Ministers;

complete 85 per cent. of the network enhancement and network control projects listed in annex E of the business plan;

complete 1,400 lane kilometres of surface renewal, including reconstruction, overlays, resurfacing, inlays and surface dressing (including resin-based surface treatments and retexturing);

assess the structural capacity of all remaining structures by March 1998 to ensure that from 1 January 1999, all vehicles up to and including the new 40-tonne maximum gross weight

standard can use all structures supporting trunk roads and other important routes over trunk roads; and complete 4,400 general inspections and 2,150 principal inspections;

safeguard 126 structures for use by 40-tonne vehicles;

contribute to the Government's target of reducing road casualties by one third by 2000 (compared to the annual average for 1981–85) by ensuring that accident rates between 1996 and 1998 on the motorway and all-purpose trunk road network do not exceed 21 accidents involving personal injury for every 100 million vehicle kilometres of travel and by completing 180 local safety schemes;

publish congestion monitoring information, including national road network assessment system maps and TrafficMaster data;

publish, as part of the agency's annual report, information about and activities covered by the agency's environmental strategy, for new schemes and network management and maintenance activities, demonstrating that the agency has given full weight to environmental issues. The information will quantify specific environmental effects and will detail measures taken to reduce the impact of roads on the environment, as indicated in annex F of the business plan;

develop revised efficiency indicator(s) by 30 June 1997;

ensure applications to the national roads scheme committee in 1997–98 to increase the cost of schemes are not to exceed 2 per cent. of the total programme value;

complete a risk analysis, and obtain client agreement to the risk estimate and referral points for those national schemes listed under the preferred route announcement;

Order publication, public inquiry and award of contract milestones in Annex D of the business plan.

The key targets for the Marine Safety Agency are to:

reduce the accident rate of UK merchant ships on a three-year rolling average;

reduce the number of deaths of crew and passengers on UK merchant ships on a three-year rolling average;

reduce the accident rate of UK registered fishing vessels on a three-year rolling average;

reduce the number of deaths on UK registered fishing vessels on a three-year rolling average;

ensure that the rate of merchant ship losses in the Red Ensign fleet remains below the world fleet rate on a three-year rolling average;

reduce the number of Red Ensign registered vessels detailed by other flag states as a percentage of the number inspected under port state control arrangements on a three-year rolling average;

undertake port state control inspections of 25 to 30 per cent. of foreign-registered ships visiting UK ports;

increase the number of prosecutions undertaken for Marine Pollution Convention offences, in conjunction with the Coastguard Agency;

ensure that at least 60 per cent. of available time is spent on core activities.

The key targets for the Vehicle Certification Agency are to:

achieve a net unit cost target of £74.96;

have at least 98 per cent. of approval certificates issued error free;

ensure that where errors do occur in certificates, corrected documents are issued within three working days in 95 per cent. of cases;

have at least 98 per cent. of invoices issued error free;

ensure that where errors do occur in invoices, corrected documents are issued within three working days in 95 per cent. of cases;

audit at least 50 per cent. of VCA's approved quality procedures.

receive a satisfactory appraisal report on the agency's technical performance from the Department of Transport's chief mechanical engineer.

The key targets for the Vehicle Inspectorate are to:

meet the requirements on levels and types of activity laid down in the memorandum of agreement on each road enforcement transport scheme;

develop a target for the 1998–99 financial year that will reflect effective provision of a statutory testing service to the industry, taking account of customer survey feedback; for 1997–98, to continue to achieve current test measures, as specified in the business plan;

meet the quality and general effectiveness levels as specified in the business plan measures;

devise a comprehensive and qualitative system for assessing customer satisfaction against which the performance of the agency can be judged;

make an efficiency gain (on the basis on an aggregated cost efficiency index) of 2 per cent;

break even while achieving an average 6 per cent. rate of return on capital, over the period 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1998;

improve staff awareness and satisfaction as measured through the annual survey;

secure the long-term development of the organisation through working for the investors in people award, implementation of an information systems strategy, and commencement of the MOT computerisation project.

Sefton Eurogateway Regional Challenge

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress with the trunk road aspects of the Sefton Eurogateway regional challenge. [21642]

Sir George Young: I am pleased to say that the Highways Agency will make its contribution of £770,000 to the Eurogateway project by funding the environmental improvements to the A5036 in 1998–99. This should now enable the project to go forward.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made with regard to the provision of roads supporting the channel tunnel rail link. [21215]

Mr. Watts: I have instructed the Highways Agency to proceed as rapidly as possible with trunk road schemes which support the channel tunnel rail link. A number of key decisions have been taken. These include:

Following approval by Royal Assent of the £170 million A2–M2 widening between Cobham and M2 junction 4, work is to proceed on preparation of the contract documentation with the aim to invite tenders for a design and build contract in the spring of 1998 with a view to a start of works in 1999.

Work is to begin on the next stage of developing the £70 million A2 widening scheme between Bean and Cobham, which will comprise two phases, with the Highways Agency launching the selection process for the design agent(s).

In association with the Bluewater development, work started last November on widening the eastbound carriageway of A2 between A296, Watling street and A2260 Pepperhill. Tenders have been received for the second stage of those works—adding two replacement slip roads and upgrading the third to the B255 Bean junction—programmed to start later this spring. Both contracts together will cost some £5 million and are being funded almost entirely by the developer.

Work is to proceed on the next stage of the £34 million A2–A282 Dartford improvement, with the Highways Agency starting the selection process for the Design Agent.

The Highways Agency has also identified a number of small-scale measures to improve safety, such as improved signing, white lining and merge areas on junctions between Pepperhill and Cobham, which will be introduced in the shorter term at a cost of about £30,000. Work on some of these has already begun.

The Highways Agency expects to announce the successful design agents for the A2 schemes later this year. This will allow the Agency to continue work on these important schemes which, will remove congestion and traffic delays that can occur, particularly during peak periods and in the summer.

A49 (Improvements)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for improvements to the A49 trunk road at its intersection with the A489. [21175]

Mr. Watts: I have allocated funds for the Highways Agency to develop plans to improve the layout of the A49–A489 junction by providing a separate lane for traffic turning right off the trunk road. The proposal includes realigning the trunk road carriageway and widening the Stretford bridge over the River Orny south of the junction.

Recently, advance warning signs have been improved to make the junction more conspicuous and help reduce accidents. The agency is also considering the possibility of improving visibility at the junction without prejudicing the main scheme. The agency expects its design agents, Shropshire county council, to issue a report on this at the end of March.

London Underground (Northern Line Improvements)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* stations and *(b)* interchange stations on the Northern line were improved in each of the past three years; and which stations will be improved in 1997–98. [21079]

Mr. Bowis: Improvements to London Underground's Northern line stations are an operational matter for London Underground. However, I understand the position to be as follows:

(a) Northern Line Stations

Station improvement projects in the last three years

1994–95

Colindale

Kennington

1995–96

Brent Cross

Burnt Oak

Chalk Farm

Clapham North

Clapham South

Finchley Central

Hampstead

Totteridge and Whetstone

Tufnell Park

1996–97

None

Station improvements in 1997–98

Clapham Common

Mornington Crescent

Oval

Tooting Bec

Tooting Broadway

(b) Interchange stations on the Northern Line

Station improvements in the last three years

1994–95

None

1995–96

Balham

King's Cross

Old Street

Waterloo

1996–97

Kentish Town

London Bridge

Station improvements in 1997–98

Bank/Monument.

To eliminate double counting, projects spanning more than one financial year have been allocated to the year in which the bulk of the work took place.

Heathrow Airport Terminal 5 Inquiry

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 17 March, *Official Report*, column *419*, (1) if he will furnish the reply given to the hon. Member for Thurrock in respect of the Heathrow terminal 5 inquiry to the inspector, Mr. Roy Vandermeer; [21226]

(2) if it is intended to revise the statement of Mr. T. Dockerty of the Department of Transport given to Mr. Roy Vandermeer on 27 February in respect of the Heathrow terminal 5 application; [21225]

(3) what mandate Mr. Dockerty of the Department of Transport had to give evidence at the inquiry into Heathrow terminal 5. [21230]

Mr. Watts: I will arrange to let the inspector of the Heathrow terminal 5 inquiry have a copy of the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Thurrock which appeared in column *419* of the *Official Report* on 17 March. There is no intention to revise the statement by Mr. Dockerty to the inquiry on 27 February.

Mr. Dockerty is a project manager in the Highways Agency, which acts for the Secretary of State for Transport at the inquiry. He is charged with representing the Secretary of State on a wide range of surface access matters, including evidence about the draft highways orders.

A36 (Salisbury Bypass)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold a planning conference into the proposed A36 Salisbury bypass. [21247]

Mr. Watts: No. Public consultation on three alternative routes for the bypass in 1988 showed overwhelming support for a route to the south of the city. This resulted in the selection of the published route which was the subject of year-long public inquiry held between 20 April 1993 and 27 April 1994. The inspector recommended in favour of the published route with one modification to take it further away from housing at Harnham on the south-west outskirts of the city.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the evidence submitted from the statutory agencies into the environmental impacts of the proposed A36 Salisbury bypass; and if he will announce a timetable for further consultation on this evidence. [21246]

Mr. Watts: Written representations by English Nature, English Heritage and the National Rivers Authority were made publicly available during the 1993–94 public inquiry into the proposed bypass. None of these bodies nor the Countryside Commission appeared at the inquiry to object to the proposed bypass. The report on the public inquiry was published on 29 October last year when my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport announced that they were minded to confirm the draft orders to authorise construction of the bypass subject to their further consideration of certain specified matters.

Since then, English Nature, the Countryside Commission and the Environment Agency have been consulted in the course of reviews of the bypass which my right hon. Friends instructed the Highways Agency to carry out before they made a final decision on the scheme. The Highways Agency report on these reviews was placed in the Library on 17 March. It included the responses to the agency. The agency's report by the bodies they consulted will now be sent to interested parties to allow them an opportunity to comment. These comments will be taken into account in reaching a final decision on the bypass along with other representations received since last October's announcement. Six weeks are to be allowed for comments on the agency's report.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received from the Wiltshire area *(a)* for and *(b)* against the proposed Salisbury bypass since the start of the public inquiry. [21244]

Mr. Watts: The inspector who held the public inquiry reported objections to the bypass from some 300 sources, 20 of which were subsequently withdrawn. In addition, there were 280 pro-forma objections and four petitions of objection. He reported support for the bypass from 40 sources and one petition of support. He also reported that publication of objectors alternative routes attracted support for the published proposals from 75 additional sources.

Between the close of the inquiry and the announcement on 29 October last year that my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment were minded to confirm the draft orders authorising construction of the bypass a further 166 representations were received which included some 120 general objections to the bypass and three letters of support. Since the announcement on 29 October, a further 2,771 representations have been received of which 2,599 are pro forma postcards and letters. Of these representations, 802 are for the bypass and 1,956 against. The majority of representations are from the Wiltshire area.

British Rail Passenger Companies

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each former British Rail passenger company *(a)* the estimated value of the assets, *(b)* the sale price, *(c)* the levels of subsidy to be paid for those years for which information is available and *(d)* the length of the subsidy period. [20981]

Mr. Watts: The asset value of the former British Rail train operating companies at the point of sale was a matter for the British Railways Board. The TOCs were each sold at a net asset value of £1—that is assets net of all liabilities. Subsidy levels to be paid for each franchise by franchise year are set out in my answer of 31 October 1996, *Official Report*, columns *241–42*; and my answers to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *118–19* and 27 February, *Official Report*, columns *294–95*.

Railfreight Distribution

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the amount of the subsidy paid to English, Welsh and Scottish Railways following the sale of Railfreight Distribution and the length of time this subsidy will be paid; [20917]

(2) if he will list the estimated value of the assets of Railfreight Distribution; [20918]

(3) if he will list the income received by the Exchequer following the sale of Railfreight Distribution; [20919]

(4) if English, Welsh and Scottish Railways Holdings Ltd. will be allowed to operate through the channel tunnel without payment being made by the company; [20920]

(5) if his Department will be making payments to Eurotunnel as part of the financial arrangements made following the sale of Railfreight Distribution; [20921]

(6) if English, Welsh and Scottish Railways have been allowed a pensions holiday as part of the financial arrangements following its purchase of Railfreight Distribution; [20914]

Mr. Watts: The financial terms of the sale will be made known after sale completion.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the companies which bid to purchase Railfreight Distribution. [20922]

Mr. Watts: Bids were received from English, Welsh and Scottish Railway Holdings Ltd. and from a consortium led by Management Consortium Bid Ltd.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what basis the sale of Railfreight Distribution requires the approval of the European Commission. [20911]

Mr. Watts: The Commission has been notified of the offer for sale under article 93(3) of the treaty.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total cost of advisers, consultants and legal advice of the sale of Railfreight Distribution. [20912]

Mr. Watts: The sale of Railfreight Distribution has not yet been completed.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff are currently employed by Railfreight Distribution; and at what location. [20913]

Mr. Watts: The number of staff currently employed by Railfreight Distribution is 1,182, based principally at Allerton, Birmingham, Crewe, Derby, Dolland's Moor, Mossend, Paddington, Saltley, Tinsley, Trafford Park, Wakefield, Wembley and Willesden.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if English, Welsh and Scottish Railway Holdings Ltd. has applied for a safety case for *(a)* new locomotives and *(b)* rolling stock. [20915]

Mr. Watts: English, Welsh and Scottish Railway is discussing with Railtrack a prospective route acceptance safety case for its new Class 66 locomotive.

British Railfreight Companies

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the former British Railfreight companies *(a)* the estimated value of the assets, *(b)* the sale price, *(c)* the amount of subsidy to be paid to the purchaser and *(d)* the length of the subsidy period. [20916]

Mr. Watts: The answers are as follows:

(a) The price for each sale reflects the value to the purchaser of the assets and liabilities of the company.

(b) The gross proceeds for each of the former BR freight companies were as follows:

Rail Express Systems Ltd.: £24.2 million;

Loadhaul Ltd., Mainline Freight Ltd. and Transrail Freight Ltd.: £225.15 million;

Freightliner (1995) Ltd.: £5.39 million.

(c) and *(d)* None of those sales involves subsidy. Freightliner is receiving track access grant of up to £75 million over five years.

The sale of Railfreight Distribution has yet to be completed.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21200]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *613–14*. Additional information could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Roads (Expenditure)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was his Department's expenditure on roads in each of the past five years. [21347]

Mr. Watts: The information is as follows:

1991–92: 2,635

1992–93: 2,859

1993–94: 3,099

1994–95: 2,933

1995–96: 2,703.

A34

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the A34 in Great Wyrley in the South Staffordshire constituency; and if he will make a statement. [21189]

Mr. Watts: The Highways Agency will start construction on the first phase of the A34 Great Wyrley traffic calming scheme in 1997–98.

M6

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his plans for improving the M6 between junctions 11 and 16; and if he will make a statement. [21232]

Mr. Watts: We now intend to widen the M6 motorway between junctions 11 and 16 to dual four lanes by adding one lane to each side.

Seventy per cent. less land will be needed, greatly reducing the impact of adjacent land and the local environment. A high standard of environmental measures will also be provide, including noise mounds and landscaping. Many properties close to the motorway will benefit from reductions in noise and 10 properties will be spared from demolition. Along with these benefits, we have also saved over 40 per cent. of the cost of the original scheme.

To minimise congestion and diversion during construction and future maintenance, we have devised an innovative method of providing continuous hard shoulders at bridges. This will allow three lanes in each direction to be maintained for 90 per cent. of the time during the works. Most existing bridges will be retained, reducing disruption during construction to local communities.

Widening will help to keep traffic moving and will encourage use of the motorway instead of less suitable local roads.

The previous draft orders are being withdrawn.

London Taxi Fares and Fees

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about London taxi fares and fees. [21463]

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has made an order increasing London taxi fares by 4 per cent. with effect from Saturday 26 April. The new tariff will be:

Initial minimum charge: £1.40—for the first 483 m (528.4 yd) or 108 seconds.

Then 20p for each additional 241.5 m (264.2 yd) or 54 seconds until the fare exceeds £9.00 fare represents a journey of about 6 miles.

Once the fare exceeds £9.20p for each 161 m (176.1 yd) or 36 seconds.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has decided that there will be no change in the Public Carriage Office's fees for a London taxi driver's licence—£87 for a three-year licence—or in the annual fee for licensing a London taxi—£78.

A249 Iwade to Queensborough Improvement

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his letter of 14 March to the hon. Member for Faversham, when he confirmed the publication of the draft compulsory purchase order for the A249 Iwade to Queensborough improvement scheme; what is the hoped for start date for the construction of this project; and how this date will be affected if the procedures are foreshortened by the absence of objections. [21153]

Mr. Watts: I have instructed the Highways Agency to give this scheme high priority.

The draft compulsory purchase order has been published today, 20 March. The future progress of the scheme depends upon the satisfactory completion of the remaining statutory procedures, including a public inquiry should one prove necessary. If a public inquiry is required the earliest possible start of works would be in the year 2000. If no objection were received and a public inquiry then became unnecessary, the timescale might reduce by several months.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ireland (Diplomatic Status)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Irish participants *(a)* from the Anglo-Irish secretariat at Maryfield and *(b)* involved in the talks at Castle buildings have been granted diplomatic status; and what level of immunity from arrest and criminal charges this gives. [21004]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: None in either category. The officials in question have not therefore acquired any level of immunity from arrest and criminal charges as a result of diplomatic status.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will hold discussions with his counterparts in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to ascertain if returned asylum seekers facing a charge of desertion from the Army can be tried in a country other than that to which they are returned; [21319]

(2) if he will hold discussions with his counterparts in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to ascertain if returned asylum seekers facing a charge of desertion from the Army are entitled to the benefit of civilian legal advice; [21321]

(3) if he will hold discussions with his counterparts in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to ascertain if returned asylum seekers facing a charge of desertion from the Army would be tried in open court; [21320]

(4) if he will hold discussions with his counterparts in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to obtain their opinions on claims of the forcible abduction of asylum-seekers from Germany while awaiting the opportunity to provide intelligence to NATO officers; [21322]

(5) if he will hold discussions with his counterparts in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine on the penalties potentially faced by asylum seekers deported by a member of NATO who face charges of desertion from the Army after their return to those countries. [21318]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I have no plans at present to hold discussions with the Russian, Belarusian or Ukranian Foreign Ministers on these matters.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will hold discussions with his German counterpart on the obligations to asylum seekers who face maltreatment on return to their country of origin and who have provided intelligence information to the benefit of the United Kingdom as a member of NATO; [21317]

(2) if he will hold discussions with his German counterpart on the deferral of deportation orders against asylum seekers in Germany who face deportation to Russia, Belarus or Ukraine until it can be established whether any of those asylum seekers were given indications of asylum in the course of interrogation by intelligence officers reporting to NATO or members thereof. [21316]

Mr. David Davis: Our understanding is that the German authorities have yet to take a decision on the status of the former Soviet Army officers but are considering the issue sympathetically. The British embassy in Bonn has drawn the public interest in this subject to the attention of the German Government. We continue to follow the matter closely. The practice of successive Governments has been not to comment on intelligence matters.

Russian Prisons

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the conditions prevailing in Russian prisons. [21327]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have made no separate assessment of the conditions, but follow closely the work

of the Russian presidential commission on human rights, the Council of Europe, and non-governmental organisations, in this area.

On 25 February, Vladimir Kartahkin, head of the presidential commission on human rights launched a report on conditions in Russia's prisons, which found "grave violations . . . and inhuman conditions". On 3 March, the Prosecutor General, Yuri Skuratov, warned of a "social explosion" unless urgent measures were taken. He highlighted overcrowding and the rising incidence of illness, especially tuberculosis,in prisons and remand centres.

These assessments are supported by independent human rights NGOs such as Human Rights Watch/Helsinki.

A programme for reforming the penal system has been adopted, but the lack of funds is a continual brake on progress.

Foreign Students

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many foreign students have benefited from English language training funded by the British Council in each of the last 10 years; and how much has been spent on such training in each of these years. [21216]

Mr. Hanley: The British Council spends a large proportion of its grant-in-aid in supporting teacher training and other projects which aim to improve the quality of English teaching in state education systems overseas. In 1995–96 this amounted to £17,500,000 or 16 per cent. of grant-in-aid. Figures for expenditure in other years are not readily available; neither are numbers for individuals, although in east and central Europe alone approximately 30,000 teachers benefited in the year 1995–96.

The Council does not teach English in this country. It does administer English language training in the UK for foreign students funded by the Overseas Development Administration's technical co-operation training programme, the FCO's Chevening scholarships programme, multilateral aid agencies and the council's own grant-in-aid. Overall figures for the last three years are as follows:

1996–97

395 students: £1,998,000.

1995–96

471 students: £2,459,000.

1994–95

520 students: £3,114,000.

These figures include fellowships funded by the Council from its government grant-in-aid as follows:

1996–97

17 students: £63,600.

1995–96

34 students: £161,000.

1994–95

54 students: £247,000.

Figures for previous years are not readily available.

During the past three years the British Council has also delivered English courses to 330,000 students in its language teaching centres overseas, which are all self-funding. The total number of students attending these courses over the last 10 years has been 960,000. This has been at no charge to the taxpayer.

St. Helena

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason the Government of St. Helena has refused to renew the immigration permit of the Swedish national, Mr. Mikael Olsson. [21051]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) on 17 March 1997, column *394*.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 March, *Official Report*, column *394*, what are the rules which govern the length of stay permitted to a visitor on St. Helena; and what guidance has been issued to the immigration officer on the application of these rules, with particular reference to extensions. [21190]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The Immigration Ordinance 1972 controls immigration into St. Helena. The immigration officer is guided by the St. Helena Government's immigration policy, which came into force on 1 July 1993, and permits that genuine visitors other than those who own homes in St. Helena or arrive there by yacht.

> "will be granted a permit to enter and remain on the Island for a period not exceeding three months. The period may be extended for further periods not exceeding three months up to a total of one year."

Bahrain

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report*, column *151* if he will make a further request for British embassy consular access to Mr. Yasser A. Al-Sayegh; and if he will make a statement. [21070]

Dr. Liam Fox: Our embassy in Bahrain will not be making a further request for consular access. The Bahraini authorities have stated that they consider Mr. Al-Sayegh to be a Bahraini national. He has family living in Bahrain.

China

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the value of British exports to China in each of the last five years. [21211]

Mr. Hanley: The value of British merchandise exports to China in each of the last five years was:

1996: £738.5 million

1995: £824.4 million

1994: £844.9 million

1993: £739.5 million

1992: £429.9 million.

Mrs. Tasmeen Ahmed

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects a decision will be taken on the application by Mrs. Tasmeen Ahmed, Ref. IMM D7103, to the United Kingdom post in Islamabad to join her husband in the United Kingdom; if all required documents have been received by the post; and if he will make a statement. [21074]

Dr. Liam Fox: I have asked our High Commission in Islamabad to provide me with a detailed account of the position. Thereafter I will send the honourable Member a substantive reply as soon as possible.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21203]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, c. *613–14*. Any additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Visas

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will grant visas to Miss Enoucha Mohamed Salem and Mr. Salah Moustapha, representatives from the Saharawi Youth Union, Ujsarso, for the period from 21 March to 1 April. [21120]

Dr. Liam Fox: Miss Salem and Mr. Moustapha attempted to submit entry clearance applications to our entry clearance section in Algiers. However, it offers a very limited service, because of the local conditions. Miss Salem and Mr. Moustapha have therefore been advised to apply in Tunis, the entry clearance post designated to handle Algerian applications. No decision can be taken until they or their application have been accepted and reviewed.

Russia

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the proportion of Russian *(a)* soldiers and *(b)* officers fleeing the Russian armed forces who are threatened with imprisonment in Russia. [21326]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have no reliable information on which to base a sound estimate.

Peto Institute

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the agreement between the United Kingdom and Hungarian Governments concerning the extension and refurbishment of the Peto Institute in Budapest. [21570]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Under an agreement in 1991 with the Hungarian Government, the Government made a contribution of £1.75 million towards the cost of building a new international Peto Institute in Budapest to be brought into operation by 1996. It has not proved possible to use this money for the purpose originally intended. The Government have instead now agreed a proposal from the Hungarians that these funds—approximately £2 million including interest accrued—should be applied to extend and refurbish an existing institute building in return for substantial benefits for UK citizens. These benefits include guaranteed numbers of places for British children receiving conductive education at the institute and for British students receiving professional training; reductions in fees for British children; and access on a cost basis to a guaranteed proportion of new family and student accommodation. The institute will continue to assist with the development of conductive education in the UK. A new intergovernmental agreement incorporating these benefits and appropriate safeguards for the implementation of the project will be signed later this month by the British ambassador in Budapest and a representative of the Hungarian Government.

Estonia

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the negotiations between Estonia and Russia on the delimitation of their border and on the implications for Estonia's aspirations for integration into the European Union. [21571]

Mr. Rifkind: I welcome recent progress in the Estonia/Russia border negotiations; I hope that the positive steps taken by the Estonian Government will lead to early agreement. If for reasons outside Estonia's control there are further delays, I see no reason why they should obstruct Estonia's progress towards membership of the European Union. I raised this with Mr. Primakov when I saw him on 28 February.

Hong Kong

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to publish the 1996 annual report on Hong Kong. [21572]

Mr. Hanley: The report was published today and a copy has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The report includes a foreword written by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. I commend it to the House.

Arms Embargoes

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the arms embargoes currently implemented by the United Kingdom and their scope; and if he will make a statement. [21573]

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom currently enforces 17 arms embargoes. Under the United Nations charter, we have a legally binding obligation to enforce arms embargoes imposed by the Security Council under article 41 of the charter. Other embargoes are imposed on a national basis or following agreement within the European Union or the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, formerly the CSCE.

Under UK law, binding UN embargoes are implemented by prohibiting the export of goods and technology on the military list which forms part III to schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended by the Export of Goods (Control) (Amendment No. 2) Order 1996. In addition, the supply of such items from the UK or supply abroad by UK-registered companies and nationals is prohibited by Orders in Council under the United Nations Act 1946. From time to time, the contents of the military list may change, for example, to reflect technological advances or continuing international efforts to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Orders in Council extend such embargoes to the Crown dependencies and the dependent territories. A licence is required for each export or supply from the UK or abroad by a UK-registered company or national.

National embargoes and those agreed in the EU and the OSCE prohibit only the export of goods covered by the embargo. With the exception of the embargoes on China and Iran, the UK interprets the scope of all such embargoes to cover goods and technology on the military list as defined above.

Companies are free to submit applications to export goods to any embargoed destinations. The Department of Trade and Industry, as the licensing authority, normally refuses such applications where the goods come within the scope of the embargo. But in exceptional circumstances the DTI might decide, after consultation with advisory departments, to grant a licence to export such goods to an embargoed destination, for example for humanitarian purposes.

The UK has an end-use—or catch all—control under which any goods may be brought under control if there is knowledge or grounds for suspicion that they might be used for activities linked to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or missiles for their delivery. But other goods, which are not normally controlled, do not become subject to control solely because they are to be used by the military, whether or not the destination concerned is subject to an embargo.

There are currently six binding UN arms embargoes:

Angola[1], Iraq[2], Liberia[3], Libya[4], Rwanda[5] and Somalia[6].

There are currently seven EU embargoes:

Afghanistan[7], Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia[8], Burma[9], China[10], Nigeria[11], Sudan[12] and Zaire[13].

The UK currently implements two embargoes as a result of decisions by the OSCE:

Armenia[14] and Azerbaijan[15].

There are currently two national embargoes:

Argentina[16] and Iran[17].

I shall keep the House informed of current arms embargoes and their scope on a yearly basis. All new embargoes or any amendments to existing embargoes will be announced at the time. I shall also shortly be laying in the Library of the House a list of all UK policy commitments to control strategic exports, including embargoes. An update version will be laid in the Library annually—or more frequently if policy changes require a revision. This statement will also be used to inform British industry.

Footnotes:

[1]Implemented in the UK on 1 October 1993. Products covered by the scope of the embargo can be supplied to the Government of Angola under licence, as long as they are imported through certain named points of entry into Angola;

[2]Implemented in the UK on 9 August 1990 as part of comprehensive trade sanctions;

[3]Implemented in the UK on 22 July 1993;

[4]Implemented in the UK on 15 April 1992 as part of a range of sanctions (following an EU arms embargo imposed on 14 April 1986);

[5]Implemented in the UK on 24 June 1994. The embargo does not apply to the sale or supply of arms and related material if under licence to the Government of Rwanda. But it does cover the sale or supply of arms and material to persons in States neighbouring Rwanda (i.e. Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire) if that sale or supply is for the purpose of the use of such arms or material with Rwanda;

[6]Implemented in the UK on 22 July 1993;

[7]Implemented in the UK on 17 December 1996;

[8]Implemented in the UK on 26 February 1996. This embargo does not extend to transfers of equipment needed for demining activities;

[9]Implemented in the UK on 29 July 1991;

[10]Implemented in the UK on 26 June 1989 (although a national embargo was announced on 6 June 1989). In the absence of agreement amongst EU partners on its scope, interpretation of the embargo was left to national discretion. As announced on 4 April 1995, the UK interprets this embargo to include:

> lethal weapons such as machine guns, large calibre weapons, bombs, torpedoes, rockets and missiles;
>
> specially designed components of the above, and ammunition;
>
> military aircraft and helicopters, vessels of war, armoured fighting vehicles and other such weapons platforms;
>
> any equipment which is likely to be used for internal repression.

[11]Implemented in the UK on 20 November 1995 (although a national embargo was announced on 11 November 1995);

[12]Implemented in the UK on 15 March 1994;

[13]Implemented in the UK on 7 April 1993;

[14]Implemented in the UK on 28 February 1992;

[15]Implemented in the UK on 28 February 1992;

[16]Implemented on 3 April 1982;

[17]Implemented on 1 March 1993. The scope of this embargo also covers items entered in Group O in Annex 1 of European Council Decision 94/942/CFSP on the export of dual-use goods, as amended. There are two exceptions to this embargo:

> goods essential for the safety of civil aircraft and air traffic control systems;
>
> radioactive material in the form of sources for medical equipment and deuterium labelled compounds for medical use.

Licences for any equipment (including the exceptions to the complete ban mentioned above) are not approved where there is knowledge or reason to suspect that it would go to a military end-user or be used for military purposes.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment the Government have made of recent Franco-German proposals in the intergovernmental conference on defence. [21574]

Mr. David Davis: Her Majesty's Government are a strong advocate of improved practical co-operation on defence among European countries. The decisions of the Berlin North Atlantic Council in June 1996 to support the development of the European security and Defence identity within NATO provide a sound framework for such co-operation, permitting the creation of militarily coherent and effective forces capable of operating under the political control and strategic direction of the Western European Union using NATO assets and capabilities when appropriate. Her Majesty's Government remain opposed to proposals to change the situation set out in the Maastricht treaty whereby the Western European Union elaborates and implements decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications, and to proposals to subordinate the Western European Union to the European Union and to introduce a commitment to the eventual merger of the Western European Union and the European Union. Her Majesty's Government are firmly committed to the principle that decisions with defence implications taken by the European Union shall be taken by unanimity. It is opposed to flexibility arrangements within the European Union which could lead to a group of countries taking on collective defence commitments within a European Union framework which would undermine collective defence within NATO. Proposals along these lines, such as those put forward by the French and Germans, would undermine the development of the European security and defence identity within NATO.

Asylum and Immigration Appeals

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department has taken in response to the recommendations made by Dame Elizabeth Anson in her reports as the independent monitor of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. [21645]

Dr. Liam Fox: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs sets great store by Dame Elizabeth's report, and, following annual publication, circulates guidance to all entry clearance posts to ensure that her recommendations are implemented. All entry clearance staff are expected to read the report. My officials in the UK examine Dame Elizabeth's recommendations in detail, and change procedures where necessary.

The independent monitor rightly considers that improved training will contribute significantly to improvements in our entry clearance operations. Acting in response to her reports, we have significantly broadened the scope of our training of entry clearance staff. Training courses and guidance have been introduced to develop the skills of entry clearance managers, locally engaged entry clearance support staff and interpreters. In her 1996 report Dame Elizabeth expressed her satisfaction with the improvements we have made to the training of our entry clearance managers and officers.

We have also worked hard to meet the improved administrative standards set by the independent monitor. Increased access to IT is a continuing priority, and improvements we have made are already paying dividends. Administrative systems designed to speed up, and improve the quality of, the entry clearance process, such as the preliminary assessment system and automatic reviews of refusals, have been introduced and improved after recommendations in the independent monitor's report.

It is inevitable that some recommendations cannot be enacted immediately. This is true of those concerning applications by elderly relatives and couples seeking infertility treatment. However, work is in hand on both, as a result of which guidance to staff will be amended.

Dame Elizabeth wrote in her 1996 report:"I am satisfied that in the three years I have monitored the standards and performance of the system of granting and refusing temporary visas there has been a general improvement in the whole process of applying and being granted or refused a visa." I know that Dame Elizabeth also is satisfied that entry clearance staff are acting within the law, and in accordance with their obligations under the citizen's charter, in the discharge of their responsibilities. We take heart from these acknowledgments of our efforts, and will strive to meet the independent monitor's recommendations in the future.

United Nations

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of the United Nations; and what discussions he had during his recent visit to Washington. [21646]

Mr. Rifkind: The United Kingdom is fully committed to a strong and effective United Nations in pursuit of the objectives set out in the charter. The United Nations plays a vital role in helping maintain international peace and security, and in promoting democracy, human rights, international law and economic and social progress around the world. As we approach the 21st century, we shall want to use the United Nations increasingly to help to achieve that partnership for sustainable human development about which I addressed the general assembly last September. The new global challenges such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and threats to the environment and to natural resources because of population pressures on present patterns of production and consumption, will require the international community to agree policies and to work out practical solutions through international co-operation. The United Nations has some unique advantages for this.

We welcome the commitment of the new United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, in setting the United Nations on the path of reform, so that it can better measure up to these challenges. When he visited London last month the Prime Minister and I were impressed by his determination to give reform a high priority. We support him in his plans to secure tighter budgeting, greater management efficiency and the elimination of overlap between different UN bodies.

But to succeed the United Nations needs not only to reform, but to be able to rely on the financial resources which member states have voted to it. I raised with a number of US Congressmen during my visit to Washington on 9 and 10 March our concerns on this score. At the end of 1996 the United States owed the United Nations some US $1.3 billion, which is approximately two thirds of total arrears due. This backlog of unpaid obligatory financial contributions is severely disabling the United Nations from working properly and from carrying out the policies voted by the member states. It also means that countries contributing to UN peacekeeping operations such as India, Bangladesh and the United Kingdom, which is currently owed £40 million, do not get their debts paid. I made it clear in Washington that this failure to honour financial obligations under the UN charter does the cause of UN reform no good and causes resentment among friends and allies. I know that President Clinton is committed to solving this problem. We need a new and fairer system of UN financing based more closely on the principle of capacity to pay and on the assurances that all member states will in future pay in full, unconditionally and on time. Once the problem of arrears has been dealt with, the British Government hope that it will be possible speedily to complete the process of UN reform and thus to relaunch the United Nations on its urgent new agenda.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Defence Equipment (Export Licences)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a list of all export licences relating to defence equipment *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused in (i) 1991 and (ii) 1992. [19699]

Mr. Nelson: Statistics of export licence applications refused during 1992 were included in the annual report of my Department for 1993, copies of which were placed in the Library of the House. It is the intention that statistics of export licences relating to defence equipment issued during 1992 will also be placed in the Library of the House in due course. Information in respect of 1991 is not directly accessible in the same form and at present there are no plans to place that information in the Library of the House.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many tonnes of oxide spent nuclear fuel have been *(a)* sheared and dissolved and *(b)* reprocessed in the thermal oxide reprocessing plant since March 1994; what reports on the operational process at THORP are provided to his Department by British Nuclear Fuels; and what restrictions are placed on the disclosure of operational details of THORP at Sellafield. [20455]

Mr. Page: BNFL recently stated that since March 1994 approximately 680 tonnes of spent nuclear fuel has been successfully sheared and dissolved and that by the end of March this year it is expected that the same amount will have been reprocessed. The disclosure of operational details are a matter for BNFL subject to meeting the relevant regulatory requirements. My Department maintains regular contact with the company on a range of issues, including THORP.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the past 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19775]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The information requested is as follows:

1981–82: 7
1982–83: 3
1983–84: 7
1984–85: 7
1985–86: 6
1986–87: 3
1987–88: 4
1988–89: 4
1989–90: 2
1990–91: 4
1991–92: 2
1992–93: 3
1993–94: 4
1994–95: 2
1995–96: 2.

With one exception, in 1982–83, all the Bills received Royal Assent. Prior to the 1992–93 session the figures include Bills sponsored by the Department of Energy.

Patent Office European Patents Special Reserve Fund

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what funds are currently held by the Patent Office European patents special reserve fund; and if he will make a statement. [21134]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Patent Office 1995–96 annual report and accounts, laid before the House in July 1996, showed the European patents special reserve fund at 31 March 1996 to be £21.4 million. The Patent Office's 1996 corporate plan, placed in the Library of the House in April 1996 gives further details.

European Space Agency Conference

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the ESA ministerial conference held in Paris on 4 March. [21425]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I attended the meeting at ministerial level of the European Space Agency Council in Paris on 4 March. Important decisions were taken which will reinforce ESA's contribution to the UK's industrial and scientific goals in space. Ministerial colleagues agreed on a new industrial policy and a new system for calculating scales of contribution for mandatory programmes. This should improve the agency's value for money and reinforce the competitiveness of European space industry.

The changes which have been agreed will end the traditional system of geographical return—juste retour—the system by which member states receive contracts in direct proportion to the levels of their ESA contributions. The level of juste retour has crept up from 80 per cent. when ESA was established to 96 per cent. in 1994–96 and was seriously undermining value for money in procurement and the agency's ability to improve the competitiveness of European space industry. The old system will be replaced with a mixed system of alternatives which offer lower guarantees for the mandatory and optional programmes and which would allow open competition in much preparatory and some technology activity. We also endorsed new measures to ensure fair allocation of activities among all industrial firms, including measures to safeguard the position of SMEs in bidding for ESA contracts. The new system, which will be introduced over the period 1997–99, signals a fundamental change in the agency's traditional practices towards a more competitive and open system of project procurement in which fixed expectation will play a less dominant role than they have in the past. I believe that UK companies are well placed to exploit fully this new system and increase their share of ESA business.

It was also agreed to introduce a new system of calculation for scales of contributions to mandatory programmes which has resulted in a saving to the UK of about £ million a year. A further formal ministerial meeting was envisaged 1998.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20897]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* The information requested by the hon. Member is shown in the table.

	Annual reports	*Annual accounts*	*Minutes of meetings*	*Agendas of meetings*	*Register of members' interests*
Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
British Hallmarking Council	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Coal Authority	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	Yes (V)
Commissioner for Protection against Unlawful Industrial Action	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Gas Consumers' Councils	Yes (S)	No	No	No	No
Post Office Users' National Council	Yes (S)	No	No	No	No
Post Office Users' Councils for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland	Yes (S)	No	No	No	No
National Consumer Council	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Design Council	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	Yes (V)
Monopolies and Mergers Commission	Yes (V)	Yes (V)	No	No	No
Policyholders' Protection Board	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Research Councils	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Simpler Trade Procedures Board	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No

(S) = Statutory. (V) = Voluntary.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the executive non-department public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens' charter. [20934]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 26 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *316*. The information given then is still current, with the amendment that details of the NAO's access to NDPBs are given in "Public Bodies 1996".

Business Grants (Devon)

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of grants given to businesses *(a)* in Devon and *(b)* in the South Hams, in each of the last five years. [21341]

Mr. Nelson: The total value of grants from my Department to businesses in Devon and in South Hams in each of the last five years is as follows:

£ millions

	Devon		*South Hams*	
	Total grant offered	*Total grant paid*	*Total grant offered*	*Total grant paid*
1996–97 to date	5.267	5.961	1.605	0.749
1995–96	3.571	6.916	1.020	0.899
1994–95	11.433	4.654	1.778	1.088
1993–94	4.586	4.184	1.679	1.784
1992–93	1.901	3.609	0.364	1.308

Food Chain (Foresight Investigation)

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on how food chain issues are being addressed by Foresight. [21559]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Several Foresight panels have interests in the food chain. In addition, a new Foresight group has been established to explore market and technology opportunities across the food chain. It will be chaired to David Sainsbury, chairman of J. Sainsbury plc. The new group includes industry leaders in food production, processing and retailing.

In broad terms, the group will be addressing issues which the food chain industries regard as critical to their future competitiveness. It will act in a cross-sectoral capacity, drawing together the interest of the wide range of Foresight panel sectors which impact on food chain businesses, such as food and drink , agriculture, retailing, manufacturing, and marine, for example.

The members of the Foresight food chain group are:

Member	*Position*	*Company*
David Sainsbury	Chairman	J Sainsbury
Mark Adams	Deputy Chairman	Geo Adams
Gordon Edge	Executive Chairman	Generics Ltd
Iain Ferguson	Chairman	Birds Eye Walls
James Godfrey	Farmer	—
Christopher Greig	Chairman	William Grant and Sons
Guy McCracken	Managing Director Food Division	Marks and Spencer
Sir David Naish	President	National Farmers Union
Gulam Noon	Chairman and Managing Director	Noon Products
John Shropshire	Managing Director	G's Marketing

Companies House

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set Companies House executive agency for 1997–98. [21659]

Mr. Lang: I have set Companies House the following targets for 1997–98:

- to make 95 per cent. of statutory documents available for public inspection within a maximum of five working days of receipt in Companies House;
- to achieve, on average, a monthly compliance rate for accounts submitted of 95 per cent.;
- to ensure that a minimum of 93 per cent. of fiche provided to customers are error free;
- to ensure that there is a minimum of 97 per cent. error free work in current processing;
- to answer 90 per cent. of incoming telephone calls within 20 seconds;
- to reduce the real unit costs of registration activity by 3 per cent. compared to the outturn in 1996–97; and
- to achieve, taking one year with another, a 6 per cent. average annual rate of return based on the operating surplus expressed as a percentage of average net assets.

In addition, I expect the chief executive of the agency to continue to reply within 10 working days to all letters from Members of Parliament delegated to him for reply.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of Companies House performance in answering the telephone inquiry service within the first six rings; and what impact privatisation of the telephone inquiry service in July 1996 had on the achievement of the target. [21335]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Companies House central enquiry unit and postal search operations were contracted out in July 1996 and new telephone equipment was installed in October 1996. This has led to the number of calls presented to operators increasing by 80 per cent. The contractors are now answering over 13,000 calls per week, 30 per cent. more than before the contract was awarded. Companies House is taking steps to ensure the contractor employs sufficient resources to answer all calls within the target of 90 per cent. of calls within 20 seconds or six rings.

The performance against the telephone answering target, as for other targets, will be assessed at year end and reported in the annual report and accounts for Companies House for 1996–97.

Fur Sales

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the number of retail businesses involved in selling fur garments in each of the last five years. [21243]

Mr. Page: This information is not available.

English Regional Development Organisations

Mr. Luff: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has yet considered the business plans of the English regional development organisations; and what level of financial support he proposes to offer for 1997–98. [21558]

Mr. Greg Knight: I have studied the current performance and future plans of the existing eight English regional development organisations. I am pleased to say that they continue to make a significant contribution to the work of my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau, and to the overall success of the United Kingdom in attracting inward investment and in particular to their region's performance. I have also had detailed proposals for the establishment of new regional development organisations in the east and south-east of England. Taking all this into account I have today offered a total of £10,47 million in grants for the inward investment promotion activities of the existing regional development organisations for 1997–98 and to establish the two new ones in the east and south-east who are being offered grants of £505,000 each.

This represents an 18 per cent. increase in total RDO grants to enable the UK to remain competitive in promoting its locational advantages in the face of increasing competition for mobile inward investment projects. I have allocated the grant aid as follows:

RDO	*1997–98 grant (£000)*
Northern Development Company (NDC)	1,665
INWARD Ltd. (in the North West)	1,393

RDO	1997–98 grant (£000)
Yorkshire and Humberside Development Agency (YHDA)	1,415
West Midlands Development Agency (WMDA)	1,314
East Midlands Development Company Ltd. (EMDC)	984
Devon and Cornwall Development International (DCDI)	954
London First Centre	1,015
West of England Development Agency (WEDA)	600
East of England Investment Agency	505
South East of England Regional Investment Office	505

Grant is offered on an annual basis according to past performance, ability to absorb additional funding effectively, and for an agreed programme of future activities, with proper regard to value for money. It is Government policy to encourage direct inward investment to the UK because it contributes significantly to economic growth. Inward investment brings benefits both to the country as a whole and more specifically to the assisted areas. The creation of new regional development organisations in the east and south-east of England completes the coverage of the UK map with such organisations and will greatly assist our efforts to attract inward investment.

Radio Spectrum

Mr. Luff: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has for introducing pricing to promote efficient use of the radio spectrum [21517]

Mr. Lang: The White Paper, "Spectrum Management into the 21st Century", Cm 3252, announced that national and regional services would be candidates for selective auctions; and that auctions could be used to promote the release of analogue broadcasting spectrum, subject to satisfactory safeguards for existing broadcasters. It also outlined administrative pricing proposals focused on areas and services affected by spectrum congestion. In responses to the White Paper, there was broad support for this package of measures.

The success of the radio industry depends on timely provision of its raw material, radio spectrum. This finite resource is becoming increasingly congested. We intend to proceed, as soon as parliamentary time is available, with legislation to introduce a package of measures to sustain future growth by encouraging its more efficient use.

Inward Investment (English Language Training)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effects of English language training for inward investment to the United Kingdom. [21218]

Mr. Greg Knight: None. However studies have shown that the English language is an important factor for many overseas companies when considering an investment location in Europe.

Insolvency Service

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set the Insolvency Service for 1997–98. [21657]

Mr. Lang: Against the Insolvency Service's planning assumption that compulsory insolvencies will total 27,500 in the year to 31 March 1998, I have set it the target of completing the same number with no more than 9 per cent. of uncompleted cases being more than 36 months old. I have also set it the target of reducing the unit cost of bankruptcy and compulsory liquidation case administration in 1997–98 by 3 per cent. The service's investigative resources have been maintained at current levels and I would therefore expect it to continue to take proceedings for the disqualification of unfit directors and to report on cases of criminal misconduct the levels achieved in the year 31 March 1997.

In addition, I have set the service the following quality of service targets for 1997–98:

- to report to creditors on assets and liabilities within eight weeks in at least 90 per cent. of call cases; and within 12 weeks in 98 per cent. of all cases;
- to hold the initial meeting of creditors within 12 weeks in 90 per cent. of all cases and within four months in 98 per cent. of all cases;
- to submit reports within 10 months in at least 90 per cent. of bankruptcy cases and 80 per cent. of company liquidation cases where there is evidence of criminality;
- to submit disqualification reports within 15 months in at least 80 per cent. of cases where there is evidence of unfit conduct by directors; and
- to check and action at least 95 per cent. of Insolvency Services account payment requisitions within five days or by the due date.

In addition, I expect the service to action 95 per cent. of invoices for payment within 30 days of receipt and the agency chief executive to reply within 10 working days to all letters from Members of Parliament delegated to him for reply.

Patent Office

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set the Patent Office executive agency for 1997–98. [21663]

Mr. Lang: I have set the Patent Office the following targets:

Efficiency

- To increase output in relation to total staff numbers by 2 per cent.
- To increase output in relation to total staff costs by 2 per cent.
- To increase output in relation to current expenditure by 2 per cent.

Quality

- To issue 90 per cent. of patent search reports within 12 weeks of receiving a request.
- To issue 90 per cent. of patent examination reports within 18 months of publication.
- To confirm payment of patent renewal fees within six working days of receipt.
- To issue 90 per cent. of initial design search and examination reports within 12 weeks.
- To confirm payment of design renewal fees within six working days of receipt.
- To issue 90 per cent. of trade mark examination reports within two months of data capture in the Patent Office.
- To advertise within seven months of examination trade mark applications which attract no substantive objection at examination stage.

To register within four months of advertisement 97 per cent. of advertised marks which are not formally opposed.

In addition, the agency will maintain its target to pay bills within 30 days of receipt of goods and services or of a valid invoice, whichever is the later, and I expect the chief executive of the Patent Office to continue to reply within 10 working days to all letters from Members of Parliament delegated to him for reply.

Radiocommunications Agency

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set his Department's Radiocommunications Agency for 1997–98. [21658]

Mr. Lang: I have set the Radiocommunications Agency the following quality of service targets for 1997–98 in respect of its licensing work and enforcement activities. These are in addition to achieving an overall efficiency improvement of 4 per cent. over 1996–97 and continuing to recover the full costs of its activities from customers.

Licensing

Category A: Licences that involve no frequency assignment, site clearance or international co-ordination; 100 per cent. of applications and amendments to be processed and despatched within five working days.

Category B: Licences that involve frequency assignment but no site clearance or international co-ordination; 90 per cent. of applications and amendments to be processed and despatched within 15 working days; remainder to be processed and despatched within 25 working days or an explanation for any delay provided to the applicant.

Category C: Licences that require frequency assignment and site clearance and/or international co-ordination; 90 per cent. of applications and amendments to be processed and despatched within 40 working days; remainder to be processed and despatched within 60 working days or an explanation of the delay provided to the applicant.

Category D: Renewals of all licences in category A to be processed and despatched within five working days; renewals of licences in categories B and C to be processed and despatched within 10 working days.

Enforcement

100 per cent. of safety of life services reports of interference to be investigated within 24 hours.

98 per cent. of business customers reports of interference to be investigated within five working days, the remainder within a further 10 days.

98 per cent. of domestic customers reports of interference to be investigated within 1 month, the remainder within a further month.

I also expect the agency's enquiry point to respond to 92 per cent. of calls within 30 seconds, and 95 per cent. of all invoices to be paid within 30 days, or within the timescale agreed with suppliers and the remainder to be dealt with within a further 30 days. In addition, the chief executive will continue to reply within 10 working days to all letters from Members of Parliament delegated to him for reply and to all written complaints addressed to him about the agency's services.

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the agency review of the Radiocommunications Agency has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [21661]

Mr. Lang: A report on the prior options review of the Radiocommunications Agency has been completed. Copies of this document, which completes the agency review process, have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Employment Tribunals Service

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made towards establishing the Employment Tribunals Service as an executive agency; and if he will make a statement. [21662]

Mr. Lang: The Government announced on 9 May last year their decision to establish the Employment Tribunals Service as an executive agency. The agency will be launched on 1 April 1997. I am confident that agency status will extend to the tribunals administration the benefits of improved efficiency and quality of service that we have seen in other DTI agencies. Copies of the ETS framework document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I have set the following targets for the ETS for 1997–98:

Industrial tribunals

To bring to a first hearing 85 per cent. of single cases within 26 weeks of receipt of application.

To reduce the disparity in performance between offices in relation to the above target so that all offices achieve at least 65 per cent.

To issue decisions within one week of signature by the chairman in 90 per cent. of cases.

To reduce the administrative cost of a completed case by 3 per cent. in real terms.

At least 80 per cent. of tribunal cases and 85 per cent. of tribunal judiciary to express satisfaction, in surveys, with the service offered by the agency.

Employment appeals tribunal

Seventy-five per cent. of appeals registered for full hearing to be ready for listing within six months of receipt.

Seventy-five per cent. of appeals registered for preliminary hearing to be ready for listing within six weeks of receipt.

Monopolies and Mergers Commission Cases

Dr. Howells: To ask the President the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library the instructions to his officials on the procedure to be followed during the handling of Monopolies and Mergers Commission cases. [211280]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am arranging for a copy of the guidance to officials on procedures for handling merger cases to be placed in the Library in the House.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21197]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *613–14*.

Financial Services Industry Employees

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the number of people employed in the financial services industry who have registered against them county court judgments, bankruptcy and Insolvency Act 1986 proceedings. [21309]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department does not maintain information in the form requested.

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set his Department's National Weights and Measures Laboratory for 1997–98. [21660]

Mr. Lang: I have set the National Weights and Measures Laboratory the following targets for 1997–98:

to ensure that external fee-earning activities remain self-financing;

to meet the net vote target;

to continue work to reduce the real cost of a programme hour by 4 per cent. over the period 1997–2000;

to complete 85 per cent. of European type approvals within 10 weeks;

to complete 95 per cent. of all calibration jobs—including preparation of certificates—within 18 working days of acceptance of the work; and

to meet 60 per cent. of the milestones included in the work programme agreed with my Department's Consumer Affairs and Competition Policy Directorate.

In addition, I expect the chief executive of NWML to reply within 10 days to all letters from Members of Parliament delegated to him for reply.

TREASURY

Valuation Office

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what targets will be set for the Valuation Office executive agency for the year 1997–98. [21566]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have set the following key targets for the Valuation Office in 1997–98:

Quality of Service

to provide a substantive reply to 100 per cent. of correspondence within 20 working days of receipt

to achieve further improvements against the agency's indicators for:

timeliness—by 1 per cent. to 98 per cent.

valuation quality—by 1 per cent. to 86 per cent.

Operational

to clear 330,000 appeals in aggregate against the 1990 and the 1995 rating lists, including clearance by 31 December 1997 of all those appeals lodged prior to 31 March 1996 which can be settled by agreement

to clear 97,000 appeals against the council tax valuation lists: with the aim, in co-operation with valuation tribunals, of clearing all those received after 1 April 1997 within six months of receipt

to undertake 57,000 cases for the Inland Revenue for capital gains tax and inheritance tax purposes, clearing 90 per cent. of valuation cases within 42 days and 87 per cent. of negotiation cases within six months of receipt

Financial and Cost Efficiency

to ensure the agency's net operating cost is at least fully covered by receipts

to break even from year to year within each business segment, after charging for the full cost of chargeable services including notional interest of 6 per cent. on the average working capital

to achieve efficiency savings of 6.6 per cent. of the agency's gross expenditure

Further details are set out in the agency's forward plan, copies of which will be placed in the Library of the House on publication.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19390]

Mrs. Angela Knight: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Basic Pension Plus

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the five per cent. national insurance contribution rebate which individuals will receive under the Government's basic pension plus proposal will be disregarded for income tax purposes. [20436]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The effect of the change for the 5 per cent. NIC rebate would be that the tax relief which is currently given where NIC rebates go into a personal pension would cease, matching the withdrawal of relief on contributions which an individual makes to a pension scheme; but the pensions in payment would be tax-free.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment the European Commission and the European Monetary Institute have made of the millennium compliance of those computer systems which will be involved in the introduction of the single currency; and if he will make a statement. [20535]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I am not aware of any specific assessment carried out by the European Commission or the European Monetary Institute of the millennium compliance of those computer systems which will be involved in the introduction of the single currency.

The European Commission is involved in discussions about the practical implications of economic and monetary union with a wide range of organisations, including those in the information technology sector. The Bank of England, which is represented in the European Monetary Institute, publishes a quarterly report entitled

"Practical Issues Arising from the Introduction of the Euro". The latest edition, published in December 1996, incorporates a checklist of IT implications which includes reference to the millennium problem.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown of the figure of £3,108 million for non-identified miscellaneous expenditure set out in table 7.7 of the Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 1996–97, Cm 3201. [20819]

Mr. Waldegrave: The figures requested are given in the following table:

Miscellaneous non-identified expenditure from PESA 1996–97, Cm 3201

	£ million
Economic and financial administration (including Bank of England)	3,139
Net Contributions to the European Community	1,267
Parliament and Privy Council	267
Other central services	162
Allowance for shortfall	-460
Total	5,151

This total differs from that published in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1996–97 Cm 3201 as the net UK contribution to the EC was erroneously split between overseas services and miscellaneous expenditure. The correct figure for overseas services was £3,593 million, not £5,636 million.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of people who are economically inactive and wanting to work aged *(a)* over 40, *(b)* over 50 and *(c)* over 55 years, by region. [20341]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Stephen Timms, dated 26 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on inactive people aged 40 and over who would like a job, broken down by age and region.

Estimates available for the Labour Force Survey are shown in the attached table.

Economically inactive people aged 40 and over who would like a job by age and region—not seasonally adjusted

Autumn 1996, thousands

	40–49	50–54	55 and over	All aged 40 and over
United Kingdom	408	204	528	1,140
North	27	11	33	70
Yorks and Humber	33	16	51	100
East Midlands	27	12	30	69
East Anglia	12	[1]—	15	33
Greater London	64	18	72	154
South East (excluding Greater London)	55	36	95	186
South West	25	22	38	84
West Midlands	38	18	55	112
North West	46	20	48	114
Wales	29	19	32	80
Scotland	40	22	52	114
Northern Ireland	11	[1]—	[1]—	24

Note:

[1] Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Source:

ONS, Labour Force Survey.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were registered as unemployed in *(a)* May 1979 and *(b)* currently; and what was the method of calculation of the figures in each case. [21223]

Mrs. Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Llew Smith, dated 20 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many people were registered as unemployed in (a) May 1979 and (b) currently; and what was the method of calculation of the figures in each case.

The consistent series of seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment figures, based on the current coverage of the count, show that the number of people in the United Kingdom claiming unemployment-related benefits (Unemployment Benefit, Job Seeker's Allowance, Income Support or National Insurance Credits) was 1,086,800 in May 1979 and 1,746,300 in February 1997.

The seasonally adjusted series is maintained to be consistent with the current coverage of the count and takes into account all relevant changes which, unless adjusted for, would distort comparisons over time. It thereby allows meaningful comparisons with the past.

National Lottery

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the outturn figures for the proceeds paid *(a)* into and *(b)* out of the national lottery distribution fund that are included as general Government revenue and general Government expenditure for the financial years (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96; and what are the estimated figures for 1996–97. [20556]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The table provides outturn figures for payments into and out of the national lottery distribution fund in financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96. The Budget forecast is given for 1996–97.

National lottery distribution fund—income and expenditure

(all figures £ million)

Year	Income	Expenditure
1994–95	299	5
1995–96	1,515	165
1996–97	1,541	600

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has made to representations from the CBI regarding the economic disadvantages to the United Kingdom of the United Kingdom not entering into European monetary union. [19468]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* The Confederation of British Industry makes representations to me about a wide range of issues, including the potential advantages and disadvantages of the UK's possible participation in economic and monetary union. The Government and Parliament have a choice, thanks to protocol No 11 to the EC treaty, on whether the United Kingdom should participate in the single currency. The CBI's own surveys suggest that business leaders in the UK support the need to have this choice. The Government are committed to full involvement in negotiations on EMU, to protect the commercial and other interests of the United Kingdom whether or not we participate.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the oral answer to the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South West, (Mr. Legg) of 12 March, *Official Report*, column 353, under which provisions of the treaty on European Union on the EC would launch the third stage of EMU on a date after 1 January 1999. [20504]

Mr. Clarke *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The timetable for establishing the first stage of EMU is set out in article 109j of the treaty. The European Council has said at Dublin that this will begin on 1 January 1999.

Personal Pensions (Misselling)

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of those who were missold personal pensions have died before receiving compensation. [21011]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* That information is not available.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those companies involved in misselling personal pensions who compensated all those missold personal pensions. [21012]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* It is not possible to compile such a list at this stage since reviews of cases continue.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects that the process to compensate those missold personal pensions will be complete. [21013]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* The financial services regulators are working closely with firms responsible for sales of personal pensions to speed up the progress of reviews for those who have been missold personal pensions. The Government have made it absolutely clear to the pensions industry that rapid progress this year is imperative. Targets will be set once the PIA has concluded its top-level meetings with firms by the end of this month.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 96 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21213]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, (columns *613–14*).

State Earnings-related Pension Scheme

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *208*, if he will estimate the savings which would accrue in the current year from reduced expenditure on tax relief paid on contributions made to appropriate personal pensions if *(a)* all and *(b)* half of those earning under £10,000 per annum who are currently opted out of SERPS into APPs were to rejoin SERPS until retirement. [21076]

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 February to the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner), column *135*.

Earnings

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many and what percentage of employees had total earnings below the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions; and what proportion of these were part-time workers, in (i) 1970, (ii) 1980, (iii) 1990 and (iv) the most recent available year; [21060]

(2) if he will update the information in the answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) of 17 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *526*, estimating the average hourly earnings of part-time workers working fewer than 16 hours a week; and if he will provide figures for those working fewer than eight hours a week; [21071]

(3) if he will update the information in the answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) of 2 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *418*, estimating the average weekly hours of work of men and women with total earnings below the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions; [21069]

(4) if he will update the information in the answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) of 17 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *526*, estimating the average hourly earnings of men and women with total earnings below the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions. [21072]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 20 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions (21060, 21069, 21071, 21072) on employees earning under the national insurance lower earnings limit.

The latest figures available are from the Summer 1996 (June-August) Labour Force Survey.

In summer 1996, 2.73 million or 12.3 per cent. of employees had total earnings below the national insurance lower earnings limit in Great Britain; 93.4 per cent. of these were part-time. Labour Force Survey data on earnings for 1970, 1980 and 1990 is not available.

Average hourly earnings of female part-time workers working less than 16 hours a week were £6.20 per hour. Average hourly earnings of female part-time workers working less than 8 hours a week were £5.78 per hour. Due to small sample sizes no figures are available for male part-time workers.

The average weekly hours of work for men with earnings below the national insurance lower earnings limit were 18.3 hours in 1996. This compares with an average of 12.1 hours for women.

Average hourly earnings of men with total earnings below the national insurance lower earnings limit were £2.17 in 1996. This is lower than the average for women which was £3.37.

Jobs (Plymouth and Torbay)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total number of jobs created in *(a)* the Plymouth and *(b)* the Torbay travel-to-work areas in each of the past five years. [21344]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 20 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number of jobs created in the Plymouth and Torbay travel-to-work areas over the last five years.

The available information is for the levels of employees at 1991, 1993 and 1995. This is provided in the table below.

Employees: at September (thousands)

Travel-to-work area	*1991*	*1993*	*1995*
Plymouth	117.5	113.4	116.0
Torbay	39.6	39.5	43.7

Illegitimate Births

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the rate of illegitimate births in the latest year for which figures are available in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Northern Ireland. [21281]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Ann Winterton, dated 20 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question asking for the percentage of live births outside marriage in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland during the latest year for which data are available.

The figures requested are shown in the table below.

Percentage of live births outside marriage 1995

Area	*Percentage*
England and Wales	33.9
Scotland	33.7
Northern Ireland	23.1

These figures are published in the annual reference volume "Birth Statistics" Series FM1, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Correspondence

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letters of 17 November, 22 December and 26 January from the hon. Member regarding Vanlee Transport, Glasgow. [17403]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* I did so on 19 February.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide figures for his Departments' PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692-93*; and if he will list his latest estimates of annual totals for PFI projects, on the same basis as those given in table 5.5 on the Red Book. [20396]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The following tables show the information requested:

Table 1: Red book figures

Estimated capital investment	*1997–98 £ million*	*1998–99 £ million*	*1999–2000 £ million*	*Total £ million*
HM Treasury				
Project:				
Refurbishment of headquarters building	50	60	60	170
Inland Revenue (including the VOA)				
Project:				
Manchester/Stockport NOS[1]	17	0	0	17
St. John's House, Bootle	9	3	0	12
Edinburgh NOS[1]	7	0	0	7
Glasgow NOS[1]	8	0	0	8
Other NOS	5	6	6	17
Unidentified major works	17	10	6	33
Telephones exchanges and equipment	1	1	1	3
Total	64	20	13	97

Table 1: Red book figures

Estimated capital investment	*1997–98 £ million*	*1998–99 £ million*	*1999–2000 £ million*	*Total £ million*
HM Customs and Excise				
Project:				
Southampton accommodation[2]	2	0	0	2
Cutters	0	3	3	6
Number plate readers[3]	*	*	*	1
Radios	5	4	4	13
IT infrastructure[4]	0	15	15	30
Total	8	23	23	54
National Savings				
Project:				
Business Process re-engineering	6	9	0	15

Notes:
[1] PFI deals which were due to be signed in 1996–97 with capital profile split between 1996–97 (not shown) and 1997–98.
[2] The projected private sector capital investment is now expected to be incurred in 1997–98.
[3] Figures below £0.5 million indicated by *.
[4] The business case for this project is currently being reviewed and has not been included in the table showing the current revised figures.
Totals may not add up to sum of parts due to roundings.

Current revised figures

Estimated capital investment	*1997–98 £ million*	*1998–99 £ million*	*1999–2000 £ million*	*Total £ million*
HM Treasury				
Project:				
Refurbishment of headquarters buildings[1]	5	15	80	100
Inland Revenue (including the VOA)				
Project:				
Manchester/Stockport NOS[2]	35	0	0	35
St. John's House, Bootle	12	0	0	12
Edinburgh NOS[2]	9	0	0	9
Glasgow NOS[2]	9	0	0	9
Other NOS	0	8	9	17
Unidentified major works	17	10	6	33
Telephone exchanges and equipment	1	1	1	3
Total	83	19	16	118
HM Customs and Excise				
Project:				
Southampton accommodation[3]	14	0	0	14
Cutters	5	5	0	11
Number plate readers[4]	*	2	0	2
Radios	0	20	0	20
IT infrastructure[5]	—	—	—	—
Total	20	27	0	47
National Savings				
Project:				
Business Process[6] Re-engineering	6	9	0	15

Notes:
[1] Difference from estimate in Red Book figures, is due to re-profiling of expenditure.
[2] PFI deals which were originally due to be signed in 1996–97 but will now be signed in 1997–98 with all capital spending taking place in that year.
[3] The projected private sector capital investment is now expected to be incurred in 1997–98.
[4] Figures below £0.5 million indicated by *.
[5] The business case for this project is currently being reviewed and has not been included in the table showing the current revised figures.
[6] These figures are currently under review.
Totals may not add up to sum of parts due to roundings.

Defence Personnel (Taxation)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the annual revenue obtained by the Treasury through taxation paid by military and civilian personnel employed by the Ministry of Defence, broken down into *(a)* taxation on income associated with their employment and *(b)* tax revenue arising from VAT and other sales taxes. [20742]

Mr. Soames: I have been asked to reply.

The amount of income tax paid by military and civilian employees, or by my Department on their behalf within the terms of PAYE settlement agreements, was some £1.3 billion in the financial year 1995–96, the latest year for which complete information is available. The amount of VAT and other sales taxes paid by MOD employees is dependent on individual domestic transactions and is thus not available.

HEALTH

NHS Trusts (Chief Executives)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chief executives of hospital trusts were women in each year since 1991. [18708]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Networks

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many separate local area networks and wide area networks are currently in operation within the NHS. [19420]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Medicines Control Agency

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total income of the Medicines Control Agency in each of the last three years broken down by each major source indicating separately *(a)* the direct and *(b)* the indirect contributions from pharmaceutical companies. [19688]

Mr. Malone: The total income of the Medicines Control Agency in the last three years was as follows:

£ million

	Total	*Fee income*	*Miscellaneous income*
1995–96	22.4	22.0	0.4
1994–95	25.6	25.4	0.2
1993–94	24.2	23.8	0.4

The fee income was all from pharmaceutical companies and was received directly. Miscellaneous income includes some payments from pharmaceutical companies for the purchase of publications, provision of information, or attendance at seminars; it is not practicable to isolate the precise amounts.

Eating Disorders

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS centres there are for the treatment of eating disorders. [20542]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not collected centrally. A Royal College of Psychiatrists survey in 1992 identified 21 national health service specialist centres for treating eating disorders in Great Britain.

Blister Packs

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of hospital admissions were due to ailments caused by children ingesting pharmaceutical products which they extracted from blister packs in the last year for which figures are available. [20543]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Tonsil and Adenoid Removal

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children aged under 16 years in each health authority area were discharged from hospital after removal of tonsils and/or adenoids in the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will indicate the discharge rate per 10,000 children aged under 16 years in each health authority area. [20864]

Mr. Horam: The latest available information on the number of operations on patients under 16 for the removal of tonsils and adenoids, and the rate per 10,000 population, is shown in the table. Information on the number of children discharged from hospital is not available centrally.

Number of operations for the removal of tonsils and adenoids performed on patients aged 0–15 years, and rate per 10,000 population aged 0–15 years, by the health authority in which the patient is resident

NHS Hospitals, England, 1994–95

Health authority of residence	*Number of operations*	*Number of operations per 10,000 population*
Northumberland DHA	398	64.9
Sunderland DHA	491	75.6
North Durham DHA	420	62.6
South Durham DHA	403	70.2
Tees DHA	906	71.1
South of Tyne DHA	352	48.3
North Cumbria DHA	324	51.4
Newcastle and North Tyneside DHA	620	65.9
East Riding DHA	534	48.9
Grimsby and Scunthorpe DHA	641	82.4
North Yorkshire DHA	631	45.2
Bradford DHA	832	72.7
West Yorkshire DHA	1,190	95.0
Leeds DHA	932	63.7
Wakefield DHA	787	117.3
North Derbyshire DHA	280	39.1
Southern Derbyshire DHA	392	34.8
Leicestershire DHA	1,650	85.1
Nottingham DHA	562	43.5
Barnsley DHA	671	144.1
Doncaster DHA	800	125.9
Rotherham DHA	514	93.7
Sheffield DHA	567	56.6
North Nottinghamshire DHA	645	79.7
Lincolnshire DHA	947	80.8
Cambridge DHA	325	58.0
North-west Anglia DHA	749	88.8
Huntingdon DHA	134	43.3
Suffolk DHA	868	65.0
East Norfolk DHA	1,320	114.9
Bedfordshire DHA	115	9.4
North-west Hertfordshire DHA	380	70.1
South-west Hertfordshire DHA	264	51.1
Barnet DHA	308	49.6
Hillingdon DHA	188	38.0

Number of operations for the removal of tonsils and adenoids performed on patients aged 0–15 years, and rate per 10,000 population aged 0–15 years, by the health authority in which the patient is resident

NHS Hospitals, England, 1994–95

Health authority of residence	*Number of operations*	*Number of operations per 10,000 population*
East and North Hertfordshire DHA	632	61.9
Brent and Harrow DHA	428	44.0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow DHA	799	61.9
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster DHA	205	41.9
North Essex DHA	1,375	78.7
South Essex DHA	1,937	135.6
Barking and Havering DHA	1,231	156.8
Redbridge and Waltham Forest DHA	704	72.6
East London and the City DHA	613	40.8
New River DHA	591	60.5
Camden and Islington DHA	352	54.0
Bromley DHA	395	72.2
East Sussex DHA	856	64.8
East Kent DHA	880	76.6
West Kent DHA	1,721	84.3
Bexley and Greenwich DHA	556	58.8
South East London DHA	847	54.9
East Surrey DHA	217	58.0
Chichester DHA	190	60.2
Mid Downs DHA	394	65.0
Worthing DHA	283	63.6
Croydon DHA	385	55.9
North-west Surrey DHA	656	85.4
South-west Surrey DHA	231	49.3
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth DHA	680	59.7
Mid Surrey DHA	250	59.3
Kingston and Richmond DHA	289	51.9
Dorset DHA	622	51.4
Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire DHA	962	88.3
Southampton and South-west Hants HC	535	61.0
North and Mid Hampshire DHA	638	50.2
Wiltshire and Bath DHA	784	48.7
Isle of Wight DHA	136	59.4
Berkshire DHA	899	54.8
Buckinghamshire DHA	808	55.8
Northamptonshire DHA	1,116	85.9
Oxfordshire DHA	676	55.7
Bristol and District DHA	867	51.6
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly DHA	598	64.5
Exeter and North Devon DHA	383	44.2
Plymouth and Torbay DHA	807	71.5
Gloucestershire DHA	515	47.1
Somerset DHA	553	66.5
Herefordshire DHA	136	41.3
Worcester and District DHA	303	59.6
Shropshire DHA	703	81.6
North Staffordshire DHA	976	102.5
Coventry DHA	565	84.9
Dudley DHA	380	60.9
Sandwell DHA	505	79.6
Solihull DHA	234	56.4
Walsall DHA	802	139.7
Wolverhampton DHA	433	81.0
South Birmingham DHA	456	48.2
North Worcestershire DHA	232	39.8
South Staffordshire DHA	1,322	108.6
Warwickshire DHA	570	57.8
North Birmingham DHA	1,016	73.6
Chester DHA	330	87.2
South-east Cheshire DHA	508	56.7
North Cheshire DHA	299	41.0
Liverpool DHA	526	51.6
St. Helens and Knowsley DHA	410	54.5
Sefton DHA	378	63.6
Wirral DHA	458	61.7
Bolton DHA	554	95.2
Stockport DHA	457	77.7
Wigan DHA	761	115.4
North-west Lancashire DHA	799	89.9
East Lancashire DHA	1,396	119.4
South Lancashire DHA	559	84.6
Bury and Rochdale DHA	649	73.2
West Pennine DHA	1,368	128.8
Manchester DHA	1,319	130.3
Salford and Trafford DHA	962	103.0
Morecambe Bay DHA	438	74.3
England	71,717	71.6

Notes:

These statistics are generated by analysing the contents of a complex database. Over time, small numbers of inaccuracies present in the records are discovered and action is taken to correct them. As a result of this action, figures can slightly vary at times and consequently can be considered as "estimates".

Data in this table are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics.

Discharged Patients (Emergency Readmission)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients discharged from a medical specialty in each NHS trust in each of the last three years were subsequently readmitted as an emergency admission to that or another NHS trust within 28 days of discharge *(a)* as a crude percentage and *(b)* standardised for age and sex. [20862]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children aged under 16 years were discharged from each NHS trust over the last three years following elective removal of tonsils and/or adenoids; and what proportion of the children treated by each trust were readmitted as emergencies between one and 28 days after discharge. [20854]

Mr. Horam: Standard information on hospital admissions and discharges by diagnosis and operative procedure is available in the "Hospital Episodes Statistics" publications, copies of which are available in the Library. The additional information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Fractured Neck of Femur Patients

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted with fractured neck of femur; what percentage survived beyond 30 days of admission for this condition; and what percentage standardised for age and sex survived beyond 30 days of admission for this condition in each acute NHS trust in each of the last three years. [20867]

Mr. Horam: Standard information on hospital admissions by diagnosis is available in the "Hospital Episodes Statistics" publications, copies of which are available in the Library. As to the additional information requested, mortality in hospital after admission for fractured neck of femur is listed in a set of 14 clinical indicators we are preparing to pilot throughout the national health service. It will not be possible to link hospital admissions with deaths in the community after discharge from hospital for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted from home as emergencies with a principal diagnosis of fractured neck of femur; what percentage of these patients were discharged home within 56 days; and what percentage standardised for age and sex were discharged home within 56 days in each acute NHS trust in each of the last three years. [20868]

Mr. Horam: Standard information on hospital admissions by diagnosis is available in the "Hospital Episodes Statistics" publications, copies of which are in the Library. As to the additional information requested, discharge home after admission for fractured neck of femur is listed in a set of 14 clinical indicators we are preparing to pilot throughout the National Health Service.

Dilation and Curettage

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elective admissions for a D and C operation there were; and what percentage of all elective admissions to gynaecology these operations comprised, in each NHS trust in each of the last three years. [20855]

Mr. Horam: The latest available information has been placed in the Library.

First Births

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many first births there were at each NHS trust in each of the last three years; and what percentage of these births each year were by caesarean section. [20856]

Mr. Horam: The information available has been placed in the Library.

Diabetic Ketoacidosis Patients

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many emergency inpatient admissions with a main condition of diabetic ketoacidosis there were; and what was the admission rate per 100,000 standardised for age and sex from each health authority area in England in each of the last three years. [20865]

Mr. Horam: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Stroke Patients

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted as emergencies from home with a principal diagnosis of stroke over the last three years to each NHS trust; and what proportion of these patients were discharged home within 56 days *(a)* as a crude percentage and *(b)* as a percentage standardised for age and sex. [20859]

Mr. Horam: Standard information on hospital admissions by diagnosis is available in the "Hospital Episodes Statistics" publications, copies of which are available in the Library. Length of hospital stay of stroke patients, and discharge home are listed in a set of 14 clinical indicators we are preparing to pilot throughout the national health service as part of a commitment given in the White Paper marking the fifth anniversary of the citizens charter.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted as emergencies with a principal diagnosis of stroke as defined by international classification or disease codes 430–34 and 436–38 in the last three years for each NHS trust; and what proportion of these patients *(a)* survived after 30 days and *(b)* survived after 30 days after standardisation for age and sex. [20858]

Mr. Horam: Standard information on hospitals admissions by diagnosis is available in the "Hospital Episodes Statistics" publications, copies of which are available in the Library. As to the additional information requested, this calls for the linking of hospital admissions with deaths in the community, something that will not be possible in the foreseeable future.

Neonatal Units

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of babies were admitted to a neonatal unit for a period of *(a)* 48 hours or less and *(b)* more than 48 hours in each NHS trust in each of the last three years. [20863]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally in the form requested. Data of this kind have been reviewed by the Clinical Standards Advisory Group, which last reported in 1995. Copies of its report "Neonatal Intensive Care: Access to and Availability of Specialist Services" have been placed in the Library.

Acute Psychiatric Care

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of discharges from acute psychiatric care, *(b)* the number of such patients dying within one year of discharge, *(c)* the crude death rate within one year per 1,000 person years at risk for such patients and *(d)* the same death rate standardised for (i) age and sex and (ii) age, sex and diagnosis for each NHS trust for each of the last five years. [20857]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not available centrally.

Cardiac Patients

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted as emergencies with a

principal diagnosis of acute myocardial infarction; what percentage of these patients survived 30 days after admission; and what proportion standardised for age and sex survived 30 days after admission in each NHS trust in each of the last three years. [20869]

Mr. Horam: Standard information on hospital admissions by diagnosis is available in the "Hospital Episodes Statistics" publications, copies of which are available in the Library. The additional information required is not available at present in the form requested. However, we are preparing to pilot a set of indicators within the national health service, one of which is in-hospital mortality for acute myocardial infarction. It will not be possible to link hospital admissions with deaths in the community after discharge from hospital for the foreseeable future.

Tinnitus Research

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department is providing for research into tinnitus in the present financial year. [20754]

Mr. Horam: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. The MRC is always willing to consider high-quality research proposals.

Beta Interferon

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors led *(a)* Lambeth, *(b)* Southwark, *(c)* Lewisham and *(d)* Cambridge and Huntingdon health authorities not to purchase beta interferon. [20727]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities are responsible, through their purchasing and allocation decisions and the advice and support they give to clinicians, for achieving the best possible health outcomes for their populations within the resources available. We understand that Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham, and Cambridge and Huntingdon health authorities determined their local policies for the purchase of beta-interferon 1b on the basis of assessments of the clinical efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the treatment, and of local health needs, priorities and resources.

Transurethral Prostatectomy Patients

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients aged 55 to 84 years were admitted to each NHS trust over the last three years to undergo transurethral prostatectomy; and what percentage of these patients were readmitted within one year for a further prostatectomy *(a)* as a crude rate and *(b)* standardised for age. [20861]

Mr. Horam: Standard information on hospital admissions by diagnosis and operative procedure is available in the "Hospital Episodes Statistics" publications, copies of which are available in the Library. Reoperation after prostate surgery is one of a set of 14 clinical indicators which we are preparing to pilot throughout the national health service as part of a commitment given in the White Paper, which marked the fifth anniversary of the citizens charter.

In-patient Asthma Episodes

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many in-patient asthma episodes of four days or more among children aged under 16 years per 1,000 children aged under 16 years there were for each health authority area in England in each of the last three years. [20866]

Mr. Horam: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people with relapsing/remitting MS in the area covered by the Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority. [20729]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. Margaret Scott, chairman of Cambridge and Huntingdon health authority, for an estimate of the local position.

Commercial Food Premises (Rat Infestations)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many rat infestations in commercial food premises have been recorded in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [20927]

Mr. Horam: This information is not held centrally. However, the results of a 1993 survey, the most recent since the mid to late 1970s, showed that there had been a fall in the levels of both mouse and rat infestations in business premises with food-related uses. These results were published in a Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food news release on 6 June 1995.

Tobacco Products

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements he has put in place to control and monitor additives in tobacco products; and if he will make a statement. [21262]

Mr. Horam: A new 10 year voluntary agreement between the Tobacco Manufacturers Association, the Imported Tobacco Products Advisory Council and the Department of Health has been successfully negotiated and will come into force shortly. The new agreement covers the additives which may now be included in tobacco products and arrangements for the approval by the Department of Health of new additives in the future. Manufacturers have undertaken to sign a certificate that their products conform to the terms of the agreement one year from the date it comes into effect. Current arrangements for monitoring the constituents of tobacco products and their smoke by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist remain in place. Copies of the text of the agreement have been placed in the Library.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *263*, if he will list for each of the

nine measles, mumps and rubella vaccines for which the product licence has been cancelled, the date on which the product licence was granted; whether the licensing of the vaccine was on the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines; on what date each cancellation took place; what safety concerns had been identified for each vaccine by the Medicines Control Agency; and under whose direction the licence was withdrawn. [21303]

Mr. Malone: With reference to the dates of granting of the nine measles, mumps, and rubella vaccines I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 12 March, at column *263*. Information regarding the cancellation of product licences is commercially confidential. The recommendation of the Committee on Safety of Medicines are confidential.

I refer the hon. Member to the replies given on 6 November 1995, *Official Report* columns *607–11*, which discuss the replacement of the Urabe strain of MMR vaccine with the current strain.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates the Medicines Control Agency first raised safety concerns regarding mumps, measles and rubella vaccines containing Urabe strain of mumps vaccine with the manufacturers of Pluserix-MMR and Immravac; and if he will make a statement. [21164]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given on 6 November 1995 at columns *607–11* which discuss the replacement of the Urabe strain of MMR vaccine with the current strain. Discussions between the Licensing Authority and marketing authorisation holder are confidential.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment of the safety of mumps, measles and rubella vaccine was made by the Joint Committee on Vaccination prior to its 1988 recommendation for a vaccination programme; when the Committee on Safety of Medicines considered that assessment; and if he will make a statement; [21168]

(2) on what date the Joint Committee on Vaccination advised the introduction of a vaccination programme using combined mumps, measles and rubella vaccines; if he will list the members of the committee on the date on which the recommendation was made; if he will publish the committee's advice; which Ministers instructed that the committee's advice should be implemented; and if he will make a statement; [21267]

(3) what factors led his Department to announce on 1 September 1988 that a vaccination programme using combined mumps, measles and rubella vaccines would commence in October 1988; and if he will make a statement. [21167]

Mr. Horam: The joint committee on vaccination and immunisation decided at its meeting of 7 November 1986 to recommend to Ministers that a combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine be introduced into the United Kingdom childhood immunisation programme as a replacement for single antigen measles vaccine. This recommendation was made following consideration of the experience of several other countries which had successfully used MMR vaccine for a number of years.

The JCVI recommended that MMR vaccine be introduced to: provide protection against measles, mumps and rubella; stimulate an increase in the uptake of measles vaccine; and augment the schoolgirl rubella immunisation programme with the aim of eliminating congenital rubella syndrome. The elimination of measles and congenital rubella syndrome were targets set by the WHO European region in its "Health for all by the year 2000" programme.

Before the introduction of MMR vaccine, the JCVI gave careful consideration to available information from Finland, Sweden and the USA on the safety, efficacy and efficiency of the vaccine and from trials conducted by the Public Health Laboratory Service communicable disease surveillance centre in about 10,000 immunised United Kingdom children. It is not the responsibility of the Committee on the Safety of Medicines to consider assessments made by the JCVI.

The Government's agreement in principle to this change was announced by Baroness Trumpington on 7 April 1987 and the change was confirmed in an announcement by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on 17 December 1987. Work on the implementation of the recommendation was guided by a working party established by the Department under the chairmanship of Sir John Badenoch, chairman of the JCVI.

The recommendations of the JCVI, as endorsed by Ministers, are made available in the publication "Immunisation Against Infectious Disease" copies of which are in the Library of the House. A list of the recommendations and statements concerning immunisation against measles, mumps and rubella is included in the answer to the question from the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey at column *265*.

The membership of the joint committee on vaccination and immunisation at April 1988 was as follows: Chairman: Sir John Badenoch. Members: Professor J. E. Banatvala; Dr. M. F. H. Bush; Professor A. G. M. Campbell; Dr. K. M. Citron; Professor J. G. Collee; Professor A. M. Geddes; Dr. D. G. Grahame Smith; Professor P. Grob; Dr. P. F. Grundy; Professor D. Hull; Dr. I. Jones; Professor J. K. Knowelden; Professor H. P. Lambert; Professor R. J. Levinsky; Dr. A. J. McFarlane; Professor D. L. Miller; Dr. J. Noble; Professor C. Peckham; Mrs. D. Roden; Dr. D. Reid; Dr. G. Schild; Dr. J. Selkon; Dr. J. W. G. Smith; Professor R. W. Smithells.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *263*, if the Pluserix MMR vaccine was recommended for approval by the Committee on Safety of Medicines; and if he will make a statement. [21302]

Mr. Malone: Marketing authorisations are granted by the Licensing Authority. When appropriate, the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines is sought. However, the recommendations of the committee are confidential.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the dates on which the Committee on Safety of Medicines and its sub-committees have considered the safety of measles and rubella vaccines since 1 January 1992; and if he will make a statement. [21166]

Mr. Malone: The safety of measles and rubella vaccines was considered by either the Committee on Safety of Medicines or its sub-committee on the following dates: 23 September 1992, 2 May 1995, 3 October 1995, 26 October 1995 and 31 October 1995.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessments of the safety of *(a)* mumps, measles and rubella vaccines and *(b)* measles and rubella vaccines have been made by the joint committee on vaccination since 1 January 1988; if he will publish those assessments; and if he will make a statement. [21171]

Mr. Horam: The joint committee on vaccination and immunisation regularly receives information on reported adverse events, including yellow card reports from the Medicines Control Agency, as well as published papers on safety and other expert advice. When considering the place of any vaccine in the UK immunisation programme very careful consideration is given to the likely risks and benefits of each vaccine. JCVI's recommendations for the United Kingdom programme reflect is assessment of this. The introduction of MMR vaccine in 1988, the measles/rubella campaign in the winter of 1994–95, and the introduction of a second dose of MMR in 1996 were all recommended after looking at the safety of the vaccines concerned. Since January 1988, the committee has considered the matter of MMR vaccine, or its component vaccines, at each of the 18 meetings it has held.

The recommendations of the committee, as endorsed by Ministers, are made available in the publication "Immunisation Against Infectious Disease", copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when a product licence was granted to Immravax; when the product was withdrawn; on whose authority; and if he will make a statement. [21169]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 12 March 1997 at column *263*. Marketing authorisations are granted by the Licensing Authority. Information regarding the withdrawal of a product is commercially confidential.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the products which had a product licence on 2 September 1988 for the prevention of mumps, measles and rubella, and the dates of the granting of those product licences; and if he will make a statement. [21268]

Mr. Malone: The available information listing the vaccines for the prevention of mumps, measles and rubella on 2 September 1988 is as follows:

Product name	*Date of grant*
Pluserix MMR vaccine	17 June 1988
M-M-R-II	17 August 1972

Hospital Trusts (Contracts)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trusts failed to meet the deadline to agree contracts with their purchasers; and how many he expects to go to arbitration. [21081]

Mr. Horam: Information on the number of trusts which fail to meet the deadline for agreeing contracts is not collected centrally because their services may be bought by a large number of purchasers, including health authorities and general practitioner fundholders. It is too early in the contracting round to be able to assess the number of contracts which will go to arbitration, but the numbers are likely to be small.

Crohn's Disease

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* incidence and *(b)* prevalence of Crohn's disease, broken down into age bands, for each of the last 10 years for which data are available; and if he will make a statement. [21270]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the numbers of yellow card reports regarding Crohn's disease in childhood associated with the use of measles vaccine for each of the last five years for which figures are available; what assessment the Medicines Control Agency has made of such data; and if he will make a statement; [21269]

(2) what assessment the Medicines Control Agency and the Committee on Safety of Medicines have made of the association between the use of measles vaccines and the incidence of Crohn's disease; and if he will make a statement. [21165]

Mr. Malone: From 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1996, three reports from the United Kingdom of Crohn's disease as a suspected adverse reaction to vaccines containing the measles component were sent to the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

A report of a suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the vaccine.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave on 17 January 1996 at columns *593–94*. Together with the Department, the Medicines Control Agency has reviewed all the available evidence and considers that a convincing link between immunisation and Crohn's disease has not been demonstrated.

NHS (Electricity Supply)

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the savings to the NHS in fuel costs from the liberalisation of electricity supply. [21162]

Mr. Horam: It is not possible to distinguish the effect of the liberalisation of electricity supply from other factors affecting fuel costs in the national health service.

Duo-Japanese Vaccine

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of the duo-Japanese vaccine on the national health service. [21351]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health has no knowledge of duo-Japanese vaccine.

Glaucoma

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the incidence of glaucoma in ethnic minorities relative to the rest of the population; and if he will make a statement. [21352]

Mr. Horam: Studies have indicated that people of African extraction are four times more at risk of Glaucoma than Caucasians. Everyone at special risk of developing the condition, because they are aged over 40 and have a close relative with glaucoma, is automatically entitled to a free national health service sight test.

Medical Records (Libel)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards exist under the Access to Medical Records Act 1990 to prevent a patient being libelled by a member of the medical profession; and what redress there is for patients able to demonstrate that a libel has been committed in their medical record. [21353]

Mr. Horam: If a patient who has been given access to his or her record under the Access to Health Records Act 1990 feels that inaccurate information is contained in that record there is a legal right to have the information corrected. If the patient and the record holder do not agree that a record is inaccurate the Act requires that a note of the alleged inaccuracy be made on the record.

Patients who remain dissatisfied can make a complaint under the NHS complaints procedure or an application to the courts.

These rights are in addition to those rights under the general law, including the law of libel.

Royal London Hospital

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the differences between the proposals for the new Royal London hospital project announced on *(a)* 4 April 1995 and *(b)* 16 April 1996. [21354]

Mr. Malone: I am not aware of any proposals announced on 16 April 1996.

Fluoride

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department issues on the maximum safe daily dosage of fluoride. [21356]

Mr. Malone: No guidelines have been issued. The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy's report on health and social subjects 41 (sixth impression), which was first published by the Department of Health in 1991, gives details of the safe intake of fluoride for infants, children and adults. Copies of the fluoride chapter in the COMA publication will be placed in the Library.

Edgware General Hospital

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will initiate early discussions with Barnet district health authority and the Wellhouse Trust, to co-ordinate and monitor the provision of comprehensive new casualty facilities at Edgware general hospital, along the lines agreed in his discussions with the hon. Members for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) and Harrow, East. [21395]

Mr. Horam: The health authority have agreed arrangements to assess the service being provided, along the lines indicated in the letter my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote on 20 January 1997.

Disabled People

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken by his Department to ensure that all health authorities meet the mobility needs of disabled people living in NHS care following the removal of the mobility component from the disability living allowance for long-stay NHS patients. [21465]

Mr. Burns: The national health service has been and continues to be responsible for meeting the mobility needs of everybody living in its care as part of its day-to-day work. The more effective targeting of the disability living allowance has not affected this responsibility.

Accident and Emergency Services (Essex)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank in order of *(a)* travel time and *(b)* road miles the six nearest accident and emergency hospitals available to emergency ambulances when taking patients from incidents in (i) Purfleet, Essex, (ii) Aveley, Essex, (iii) Grays, Essex, (iv) Tilbury, Essex and (v) South Ockendon. [21531]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. David Micklem, chairman of South Essex health authority, for details.

Stillbirths and Infant Deaths

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were for each of the past five years, the total costs to his Department if (i) the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy and (ii) the core and project funding for the national perinatal epidemiology unit. [21332]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	CESDI	*National perinatal epidemiology unit*
1992–93 (outturn)	n/a	0.683
1993–94 (outturn)	1.761	0.738
1994–95 (outturn)	2.080	0.759
1995–96 (outturn)	2.068	0.706
1996–97 (provision)	2.039	0.700

Expenditure for 1992–93 is not separately available in respect of CESDI.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, columns *352–53*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the evaluation of the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy which was commissioned from the South East Institute of Public Health. [21278]

Mr. Horam: Copies of the report "Evaluation of the Initial Implementation of the Confidential Enquiry of Stillbirth and Death in Infancy" will be placed in the Library shortly.

Departmental Expenditure (South-West)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure in *(a)* Devon, *(b)* South Hams and *(c)* Torbay in each of the past five years. [21342]

Mr. Horam: The table sets out total expenditure from 1991–92 to 1995–96:

£000

Total expenditure	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Devon FHSA	126,788	145,551	169,379	193,747	199,622
Exeter DHA	115,624	120,932	—	—	—
North Devon DHA	46,777	51,216	—	—	—
Plymouth DHA	109,753	115,952	—	—	—
Torbay DHA	90,992	98,125	—	—	—
Exeter and North Devon DHA	—	—	172,695	182,155	186,673
Plymouth and Torbay DHA	—	—	224,672	233,778	241,552

Note:
1995–96 figures are provisional.
Source:
Health Authority and Family Health Services Authority Annual Accounts.

Departmental Annual Report

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he plans to publish his Department's annual report and expenditure plans for 1997–98 to 1999–2000; [21333]

(2) if he will publish a table updating the figures in table 3 of his Department's 1996 annual report, Cm 3212. [21339]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health departmental report was published today. It will include a table which updates the figures in table 3 of Cm 3212.

Heart Attack Victims

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the proposal for motor cycle ambulances to provide an initial rapid response to heart attack victims in urban areas. [21030]

Mr. Horam: Ambulance services are increasingly making use of motor cycles to get paramedics more quickly to the scene of incidents. When ambulance services have adopted call prioritisation systems the arrival of a paramedic on a motor cycle within the target time will count towards the patients charter standard.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to provide paramedics with clot busting drugs for heart attack victims. [21031]

Mr. Horam: There are risks connected with the administration of these drugs and there are no plans at present to provide them to paramedics. However, the position is kept under review.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure a rapid response by ambulance services to heart attack victims. [21033]

Mr. Horam: On 1 April four ambulance services will be implementing call prioritisation systems which will enable them to assess calls so that the most serious cases get the quickest response. Other ambulance services will adopt these systems on or after 1 October 1997 at a date agreed with their purchasers.

It is estimated that in the longer term some 3,000 additional lives a year could be saved by these procedures.

A new patients charter standard has been set that all ambulance services will be expected to reach 75 per cent. of immediately life-threatening calls within eight minutes by the year 2001 with further progress thereafter.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of heart attack victims who reach hospital or receive adequate medical attention in each health region. [21034]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available in the form requested. The review of ambulance performance standards published last year, which is available in the Library, suggested that survival rates could be improved and we are taking measures to ensure that this is the case.

Defibrillators

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions has he had with the Home Secretary regarding the provision of defibrillators in police service vehicles. [21038]

Mr. Horam: There have been discussion at official, but not ministerial level. This is a matter for local discussion by chief police officers and ambulance services, and a scheme is under operation in the City of London.

Salmonellosis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1)what assessment he has made of trends in the number of human cases of salmonella typhimurium (DT) 104; and if he will make a statement; [21106]

(2) how many cases of salmonellosis have been recorded in humans in each of the last five years; how many and what percentage were recorded as the salmonella typhimurium (DT) 104 strain; and if he will make a statement. [21105]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is given in the table:

Year	Total salmonellas	S. typhimurium DT 104	S. typhimurium DT 104 as a percentage of total salmonellas
1992	31,355	789	3
1993	30,650	1,509	5
1994	30,411	2,848	9
1995	29,717	3,698	12
1996[1]	30,272	4,006	13

Note:
[1] Provisional figures.
Source:
Public Health Laboratory Service.

The Government's independent advisory committee on the microbiological safety of food's working group on microbial antibiotic resistance in relation to food safety, which was set up last year and the epidemiology of foodborne infections group, which is chaired by the Department of Health, are giving careful consideration to this organism. Copies of the terms of reference to these groups have been placed in the Library. In addition the Department of Health is funding a study into "factors affecting the survival and heat resistance of Salmonella typhimurium DT104".

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21204]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) on 18 July 1996 at columns *613–14*.

NHS Pension Scheme

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes to the funding arrangements *(a)* for health authorities in England and *(b)* for Buckinghamshire health authority he has made as a result of his decision that general practitioner practice staff should be eligible for membership of the NHS pension scheme; and if he will make a statement. [21337]

Mr. Malone: An additional £65 million in general medical services cash-limited funds has been allocated to health authorities in 1997–98 to enable them to develop primary care through existing mechanisms and to take advantage of the additional flexibilities and initiatives in the White Paper "Delivering the Future". This includes the proposal to open up the NHS pension scheme to GP practice staff. All health authorities have received a minimum of 2 per cent. growth moneys.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 March, *Official Report*, column *339*, how many expressions of interest in the NHS pension scheme derived from *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* their staff. [21357]

Mr. Malone: In England, 1,116 practices and 6,564 practice staff responded to the staff interest survey carried out in 1994. Of those responding, over 80 per cent. of general practitioner practices indicated that they would allow all their staff to join the NHS pension scheme and 77 per cent. of staff indicated an interest in joining.

A. Simplex Allergy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to the medical profession in diagnosing and treating A. simplex allergy; and if he will make a statement. [21233]

Mr. Horam: The diagnosis and treatment of allergies are matters for the medical profession. There are no reports of this type of allergy in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the link between delays in gutting fish and the increase of A. simplex allergy; and if he will make a statement. [21228]

Mr. Horam: Current practices in the United Kingdom fishing industry mean that the parasite A. simplex is unlikely to be present in fish purchased in this country.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have contracted A. simplex allergy from contaminated fish in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [21234]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to those at risk from A. simplex allergy; and if he will make a statement. [21229]

Mr. Horam: We are not aware of any reports of this type of allergy in the United Kingdom. Current practices in the UK fishing industry mean that the parasite A. simplex is unlikely to be present in fish purchased in this country.

Consultants (Suspensions)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS consultants had a period of suspension during (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96; and what were the total amounts payable to them during each of those years; [21119]

(2) how many consultants are currently suspended with full pay by the NHS; and what is the total annual salary of those under suspension. [21118]

Mr. Malone: Information on the number of national health service consultants suspended is only held centrally for those cases lasting more than six months and was not collected before 31 March 1995. For the period 31 March

1995 to 31 December 1996 there were eight reported cases, all of which have been resolved. There are currently no reported cases of consultants under suspension lasting more than six months. Information on the total salary costs of consultants under suspension is not available centrally.

Antipsychotic Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the link between tardive dyskinesia in mental health patients and the use of antipsychotic drugs; and if he will make a statement. [21227]

Mr. Burns: The links between tardive dyskinesia and the use of antipsychotic drugs in mental health patients are very well researched and well known. The information has been widely available for many years.

Heart Attack (First Aid)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps is he taking to promote public education in respect of the recommended first aid measures against the onset of a heart attack. [21039]

Mr. Horam: We have recently produced large quantities of public education materials for use by ambulance services around the country on recognising the early signs of a heart attack and how to perform cardio-pulmonary resuscitation. There are other regional and local campaigns in the same field.

Factor 8

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations *(a)* he and *(b)* the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), have received from the Haemophilia Society in regard to (i) the availability of recombinant factor 8 for children with haemophilia and (ii) the risks for children not receiving recombinant factor 8; what reply he has sent; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement. [21112]

Mr. Horam: Earlier this month the chairman of the Haemophilia Society, Rev. Alan Tanner, wrote both to me and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health about a number of issues relating to recombinant factor 8. I shall be replying shortly.

Cancer Treatments (Clatterbridge Hospital)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have received cancer treatment at Clatterbridge hospital, Wirral, in each of the last five years. [21219]

Mr. Horam: The information requested may be found in the publication "Ordinary and day case admissions for England, Financial Year 1995–96", copies of which are available in the Library.

Worcester District General Hospital

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to work towards the signing of the contract for the new Worcester district general hospital before the dissolution of Parliament. [21186]

Mr. Horam: All national health service trusts with private finance initiative schemes, such as for the new Worcester district general hospital, should continue to prepare their full business cases and will be fully supported in this by officials at the NHS executive and Her Majesty's Treasury. However, following the announcement of the general election Ministers and officials can no longer take decisions with financial implications for a future Administration. This means that Ministers will not be able to approve the full business case for the PFI scheme for the new Worcester district general hospital if it is submitted for approval before the general election.

Contraceptives (Minors)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement indicating those provisions in his departments circular, "Health Services Management Family Planning Services for Young People", which govern the situation in which contraceptives may be prescribed for minors *(a)* without parental consent and *(b)* without first discussing the situation with the child's usual general practitioner; and if he will identify the steps which are taken by his Department to ensure that these provisions are met by those providing contraceptive services. [21283]

Mr. Horam: The appendix to the circular sets out in paragraph 3 the criteria to be satisfied in providing contraceptive advice and/or treatment to young people under 16 without parental knowledge or consent. Paragraph 4 states that the doctor must use his clinical judgment to decide if these criteria are satisfied. Paragraph 4 also states that a doctor who is not the young person's GP would be advised, with the young person's agreement, to discuss his action with the GP involved.

To ensure that these guidelines are fully understood, the British Medical Association in partnership with other medical and voluntary organisations has produced advice for health professionals on this issue. This guidance makes it clear that a young person must be strongly encouraged to involve his or her parents and their reasons for not wishing to do so should be fully explored.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of girls aged under 16 who were prescribed contraceptives in the latest year for which figures are available; what estimate he has made of the number of those girls to whom such prescriptions were given without parental knowledge; and if he will make a statement. [21282]

Mr. Horam: Details are not held centrally of the number of young women under 16 prescribed contraceptives, or if they were advised or treated without their parents' knowledge or consent as specified in the Department's 1986 guidelines.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will update the table placed in the Library on 29 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *780*, on the practice fund management allowance expenditure by each health authority to include expenditure estimates and revised totals for 1996–97. [16651]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 19 February 1997]:* The information requested for 1995–96 and 1996–97 has been placed in the Library. I regret that there was an error in the labelling on the table placed in the Library on 29 March 1996 and a revised version of this table has also been provided.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the average *(a)* management and *(b)* computer costs for a general practitioner fundholding practice in each health authority in England in each of the past five years. [17470]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 24 February 1997]:* The available data have been placed in the Library.

For 1995–96 and 1996–97, the tables identify allocations to health authorities for practice fund management allowance and computing allocations, and separately identify preparatory year and full fundholders so that a meaningful average can be calculated.

For 1993–94 and 1994–95, the tables identify the total PFMA expenditure by full and preparatory year fundholders, but divided by full fundholders only.

The figures for 1995–96 and 1996–97 include both computer purchase costs, shown separately, and computer maintenance costs, included within general PFMA. Both these components are excluded from the 1993–94 and 1994–95 figures, so the figures are not comparable over time.

Data by Family Health Services Authority are not centrally available for 1992–93.

NHS Employees

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the Hospital and Community health services nurses who are *(a)* qualified, *(b)* unqualified, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* learner staff and *(e)* Project 2000 students, as whole-time equivalents, employed (i) in each region and (ii) overall in each year since 1991. [18773]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* The information requested will be placed in the Library.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *740*, if he will provide figures for his Department's PFI projects in the same form as used by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *692–93*. [20389]

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects contracts to be signed for the construction of the new Worcester district general hospital. [20805]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* This information is not available in the form requested.

The figures at table 5.5 in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" are an estimate built up from detailed figures for each of the schemes with a capital cost of £10 million and above, testing for PFI as at November 1996, together with an aggregate estimate for smaller schemes. Both sets of figures were then adjusted at an aggregate level to arrive at an estimate of the likely spend in each year. The trusts with schemes with a capital cost of £10 million and above are listed:

PFI schemes

Barking, Havering and Brentwood Community Healthcare NHS Trusts
Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Trust
Bishop Auckland Hospitals NHS Trust
Bradford Community NHS Trust
Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust
Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust
Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust
Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust
Central Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust
Chichester Priority Care Services NHS Trust
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust
East Berkshire Community Health NHS Trust
Gloucester Royal NHS Trust Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust
Guy's and St. Thomas's NHS Trust
Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust
Royal Hull Hospitals NHS Trust
King's Healthcare NHS Trust
Leeds Community and Mental Health NHS Trust
Norfolk and Norwich Healthcare NHS Trust
North Downs Community Health NHS Trust
North Durham Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
North Kent Healthcare NHS Trust
North Staffordshire Combined NHS Trust
Northern Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Oxleas NHS Trust
Papworth Hospitals NHS Trust
Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust
Pinderfields Hospitals NHS Trust
Pontefract Hospitals NHS Trust
The Radcliffe Infirmary NHS Trust
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton NHS Trust
Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust
Royal Victoria Infirmary and Associated Hospitals NHS Trust
Royal Hospitals NHS Trust
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
South Bedfordshire Community NHS Trust
South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust
Southampton Community Health Services NHS Trust
St. James' and Seacroft University Hospitals NHS Trust
St. George's Hospital NHS Trust
Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust
Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust
Walsgrave Hospitals NHS Trust
Wellhouse NHS Trust

West Middlesex University Hospitals NHS Trust
Wiltshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Worcester Royal Infirmary NHS Trust.

Residential Care

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current public expenditure cost of supporting retired people in residential care; and what estimate he has made of these costs in *(a)* 2020 and *(b)* 2040. [20489]

Mr. Burns *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* In 1994–95, the latest year for which this information is available, identified public expenditure on residential care for the elderly included £0.9 billion of local authority expenditure, net of income received, including fees and charges to clients, and £0.5 billion of Department of Social Security preserved rights income support. Information on residential allowance does not separately identify residential and nursing care. For residential and nursing care taken together, total net public expenditure on elderly by local authorities (net) and by DSS by means of preserved rights income support and residential allowance, amounted to about £2.7 billion in 1994–95. Future costs of long-term care discussed in the Health Committee report "Long Term Care: Future Provision and Funding", chapter IV, paragraphs 99 to 121, a copy of which is available in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Punishment Shootings

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the total cost to public funds arising from so-called punishment shootings in each of the last five years and the current year to date; if he will break down the costs in terms of *(a)* police costs, *(b)* medical costs, *(c)* compensation paid to victims and *(d)* ongoing cots to the social security budget; and of the latter in how many cases there are likely to be long-term payments. [9219]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Road Signs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the percentage of road signs which need replacement or repair on the United Kingdom primary route network. [8418]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. and learned Gentleman as soon as possible.

Paramilitary Violence

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people have died as a result of violence committed by *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist paramilitaries in Belfast, West since April 1992; [16471]

(2) how many punishment beatings have been attributed to *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist paramilitary groups in Belfast, West since April 1992; [16469]

(3) how many acts of terrorism have been attributed to *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist paramilitaries since April 1992. [16470]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Anglo-Irish Secretariat

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what names have been put forward by the Irish side of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat for the proposed Parades Commission. [17702]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I shall write to the hon. and learned Gentleman as soon as possible.

Properties (Rateable Values)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list for each council area, (i) the old and the new rateable value of commercial premises, (ii) the rateable value of domestic properties and (iii) the rateable value of other properties; and what was the *(a)* percentage increase in and *(b)* sums raised in respect of each category for each area *(x)* in 1995–96, *(y)* in 1996–97 and *(z)* projected for 1997–98 by means of (1) the regional rate and (2) local rates; [18514]

(2) if he will list the sums in respect of rate relief *(a)* paid in 1995–96, *(b)* paid in 1996–97 and *(c)* projected to be paid in 1997–98 in each council area; and in each case what percentage this is of the total sum raised by each council. [18515]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 4 March 1997]:* I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Computer Theft

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many items of computer equipment were seized or confiscated by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in November and December 1996; how many of these items were seized from *(a)* community centres, *(b)* commercial properties and *(c)* domestic residences; and how many individuals are or have been subject to criminal prosecutions as a result of evidence so obtained. [19943]

Sir John Wheeler: As part of an on-going investigation, a number of items of computer equipment were seized from various locations during November and December 1996. Some items are still retained.

A DPP file is pending and it would therefore not be appropriate to disclose further details at this stage.

Martin McGartland

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the sums paid out of public funds to Martin McGartland since 1991; by which agencies; and under what powers they were paid. [20749]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. and learned Gentleman as soon as possible.

Magheramorne Quarry, Lorne

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the report of Commissioner Mossop on the

public inquiry into the proposed landfill site at Magheramorne quarry, Lorne, Co. Antrim was presented to the Planning Appeals Commission and Department of Environment (NI). [21001]

Mr. Moss: I am advised by the chief commissioner of the PAC that the report of Commissioner Mossop was completed on 25 October 1996 and that the Commission reached a corporate decision on 2 December 1996. The report was received by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland on 17 December 1966.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of state for Northern Ireland when a copy of Commissioner Mossop's report on the public inquiry into the application for a landfill waste disposal site at Magheramorne quarry, Larne, will be placed in the Library. [21305]

Mr. Moss: It is not normal practice to place planning appeals commission reports in the Library, but on this occasion I will arrange to do so immediately following the Department's determination of the application.

Public Appointments

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to give equal access to hon. Members in relation to the public appointment process as is given to the Irish Government; and if he will make a statement. [21005]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. and learned Gentleman as soon as possible.

Groomsport Primary School

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the investigation into the fire at Groomsport primary school in 1996 indicating when *(a)* the site will be cleared and *(b)* rebuilding will commence. [21007]

Mr. Ancram: The Forensic Science Agency's final report on the fire is awaited by the South-Eastern education and library board which is responsible in the first instance for any reinstatement of damaged accommodation at the school. The board is currently considering some capital works to address the school's needs, but this will be subject to the availability of resources.

Public Sector Pension Schemes

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the actual and accumulated deficits and surpluses over the last five years of the five largest public sector pension schemes in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [21008]

Sir John Wheeler: Of the five largest public sector pension schemes in Northern Ireland, the teachers superannuation scheme, the principal civil service pension scheme (NI), the health and personal social services scheme (NI) and the RUC pension scheme are notionally funded/non-funded and therefore, the question of deficits and surpluses does not arise.

For the Northern Ireland local government officers superannuation scheme the net money available for investment, that is, actual surplus for each of the last five years, is listed.

Year	*Net money available for investment £ (million)*
1991–92	48,758
1992–93	45,921
1993–94	34,066
1994–95	39,616
1995–96	45,993

It is not possible to provide a meaningful figure for accumulated surpluses over the past five years. However, the actuarial valuation of the fund at 31 March 1992 was £214 million and at 31 March 1995 was £304 million.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of disability living allowance claim decisions were (i) reviewed and (ii) appealed against in the last year for which figures are available; and what percentage and number achieved variations of awards in their favour. [21009]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 19 March 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking for statistics on Disability Living Allowance decisions that were reviewed and appealed against in the last year for which figures are available.

The attached sheet sets out the most up to date information available for a complete year which, in this instance, covers the period from 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996.

Disability living allowance statistical information 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996

1. Total number of claims received: 48,633

2.

	Amount
Reviews	
Number of reviews received	22,256
Number of reviews decided	21,261
Number of reviews allowed	7,849
Success rate	37 per cent.
Appeals	
Number of appeals received	2,491
Number of appeals cleared	3,142
Number of appeals allowed	1,320
Success rate	42 per cent.

It should be noted that the number of appeals and reviews received during the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 do not necessarily relate to the number of claims received during the same period—i.e. some appeals and review applications were made on previous year claims.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings,

(d) the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [20898]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* The information requested is as follows:

Department of Economic Development

Name of body	*Publish annual report*	*Public annual accounts*	*Publish minutes of meetings*	*Publish agendas of meetings*	*Publish register of members' interests*
Construction Industry Training Board	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	Yes (wef 6/97)
Enterprise Ulster	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	[1]Yes
Equal Opportunities Commission	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	[1]No
Fair Employment Commission	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	[1]No
General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	Yes
Labour Relations Agency	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	[1]No
Local Enterprise Development Unit	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	[2]Yes (S)
Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	[1]No
Ulster Sheltered Employment Ltd.	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	[2]Yes (S)

(S) Statutory requirement.
[1] Maintain a Register of Members' interests, voluntarily, which are open for inspection at their offices upon request.
[2] Details regarding alternative directorships forms part of the Annual Return to the Registrar of Companies by all companies. The Annual Returns for LEDU and USEL are available to the public in Companies House.

Impartment of Health and Social Services

Name of body	*Publish annual report*	*Publish annual accounts*	*Publish minutes of meetings*	*Publish agendas of meetings*	*Publish register of members' interest*
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for NI	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Northern Ireland Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education	No	No	No	No	No
Mental Health Commission for Northern Ireland	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No

(S) = Statutory requirements. (V) = Voluntary.
1 - Report is published biannually.
2 - Report is published biennially.

Department of the Environment (NI)

Name of body	*Publish annual report*	*Publish annual accounts*	*Publish minutes of meetings*	*Publish agendas of meetings*	*Publish register of members' interest*
Fire Authority for NI	Yes[1] (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Laganside Corporation	Yes (V)	Yes (V)	No	No	No
NI Housing Executive	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
NI Transport Holding Company	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
NI Local Government Officers' Staff Commission	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No

(S) = Statutory requirements (V) = Voluntary

Department of Finance and Personnel

The Department does not sponsor any executive non-departmental public bodies.

Department of Education

Name of body	*Publish annual report*	*Publish annual accounts*	*Publish minutes of meetings*	*Publish agendas of meetings*	*Publish register of members' interest*
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools	No	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Trustees of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Trustees of the Ulster Museum	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards	Yes (V)	Yes (S)	No	No	No

Department of Education

Name of body	Publish annual report	Publish annual accounts	Publish minutes of meetings	Publish agendas of meetings	Publish register of members' interest
Belfast Education and Library Board	Yes (V)	Yes (S)	Yes (V)	No	No
North-Eastern Education and Library Board	Yes (V)	Yes (S)	Yes (V)	No	No
South-Eastern Education and Library Board	Yes (V)	Yes (S)	Yes (V)	No	No
Southern Education and Library Board	Yes (V)	Yes (S)	Yes (V)	No	No
Western Education and Library Board	Yes (V)	Yes (S)	Yes (V)	No	No
Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment	No	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Northern Ireland Museums Council	Yes (V)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Youth Council for Northern Ireland	Yes (V)	Yes (S)	No	No	No

(S) = Statutory requirements. (V) = Voluntary.

Department of Agriculture

Name of body	Publish annual report	Publish annual accounts	Publish minutes of meetings	Publish agendas of meetings	Publish register of members' interest
Livestock and Meat Commission	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Agricultural Wages Board	'Yes (S)	No	No	No	No
Agricultural Resource Institute	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Foyle Fisheries Commission	Yes (S)	Yes (V)	No	No	No
Fishery Harbour Authority	Yes (V)	Yes (V)	No	No	No
Fisheries Conservancy Board	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No

(S) = Statutory requirements. (V) = Voluntary.
' Report is published biannually.

Northern Ireland Office

Name of body	Publish annual report	Publish annual accounts	Publish minutes of meetings	Publish agendas of meetings	Publish register of members interest
Police Authority for Northern Ireland	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	Yes	Yes (S)	No	No	No
Rathgael and Whiteabbey Training Schools Management Board	No	No	No	No	No
The Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland	Yes (S)	Yes (S)	No	No	No

(S) = Statutory requirements.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open Government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens' Charter. [20937]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* The remit of the Parliamentary Commissioner does not extend to executive non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland. The Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland investigates complaints of alleged injustice as a consequence of maladministration by Northern Ireland Departments, including their agencies, while the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints investigates similar complaints against local and public bodies. The current list of executive non-departmental public bodies which are subject to the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints is as follows:

Agricultural Research Institute of Northern Ireland
Arts Council of Northern Ireland
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Education and Library Boards
Enterprise Ulster
Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland
Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland
Fire Authority for Northern Ireland
Fisheries Conservatory Board for Northern Ireland
General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
Industrial Training Boards
Labour Relations Agency
Laganside Corporation
Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland
Local Enterprise Development Unit
Metal Health Commission for Northern Ireland
Mental Health Commission for Northern Ireland

National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Northern Ireland Local Government Officer's Superannuation Committee

Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Northern Ireland Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education

Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority

Northern Ireland Museums Council

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action

Office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members

Sports Council for Northern Ireland

Staff Commission for the Education and Library Boards

Trustees of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Trustees of the Ulster Museum

Ulster Sheltered Employment Limited

Youth Council for Northern Ireland.

There are no executive non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland which are subject to scrutiny by the Audit Commission.

The following executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Northern Ireland Office are subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office.

Police Authority for Northern Ireland

Probation Board for Northern Ireland

Independent Commissioner for Police Complaints

Training School Management Board Rathgael and Whiteabbey.

The responsibility of the National Audit Office does not extend to the six Northern Ireland Departments which have their own similarly appointed body—the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The following executive non-departmental public bodies are subject to scrutiny by the NIAO.

Agricultural Research Institute of Northern Ireland

Agricultural Wages Board for Northern Ireland

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Belfast Education and Library Board

North Eastern Education and Library Board

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Southern Education and Library Board

Western Education and Library Board

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Enterprise Ulster

Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland

Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland

Fire Authority for Northern Ireland

General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland

Labour Relations Agency

Laganside Corporation

Local Enterprise Development Unit

Local Government Staff Commission

Mental Health Commission for Northern Ireland

National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Council for Post Graduate, Medical & Dental Education

*Northern Ireland Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action

*Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members

Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examination and Assessments

Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Northern Ireland Museums Council

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Sports Council for Northern Ireland

Staff Commission for Education & Library Boards

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Ulster Museum

Ulster Sheltered Employment Ltd

Youth Council for Northern Ireland.

There are no statutory provisions for open government. However, those executive non-departmental public bodies under the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints are subject to the code of practice on access to Government information.

All executive non-departmental public bodies listed in the publication "Public Bodies 1996" are subject to performance indicators and the provisions under the citizen's charter. A copy of "Public Bodies 1996" has been placed in the Library.

Secondary Schools

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further steps he proposes to take to raise the examination achievement level of boys attending secondary schools. [21304]

Mr. Ancram: I have set in place a number of initiatives to tackle low achievement in all Northern Ireland schools, including the raising schools' standards initiative, the "Making a Good Start" initiative, which provides additional classroom assistance in year 1, and targeting social need, which targets resources through local management of schools formulae. These will impact on low achievement wherever it occurs, including on boys' achievements.

Fox and Mink Farms

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* fox and *(b)* mink farms there are in Northern Ireland by county. [21314]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons a licence is required for a fox farm in Northern Ireland. [21242]

Mr. Ancram: A licence is required to set up the conditions for the importation and keeping of arctic foxes in terms of preventing their escape.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of state for Northern Ireland what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance

with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21199]

Sir John Wheeler: The percentage of bills paid within 30 days or contract payment terms is not available for the financial year 1995–96; also in 1996 revised sampling criteria were introduced following HMT direction. However, the percentage for the calendar year 1995 was 96.1 per cent. for the seven Northern Ireland Departments.

Bypasses

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what studies he has carried out of the consequences of bypasses of towns and villages in Northern Ireland with particular reference to the economic impact and changes in the quality of the environment. [21394]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for this subject has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from G. P. Fraser to Mr. William Ross, dated 19 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive to reply to your recently tabled PQ about studies carried out on the consequences arising from the provision of by-passes and towns and villages and in his absence I am replying on his behalf.

All major by-pass proposals are subjected to a rigorous cost benefit analysis and environmental impact assessment before they are added to the major roadworks programme. The cost benefit analysis takes account of many factors including cost, traffic volumes, journey time savings, road safety, economic benefits and the benefits or otherwise for other parts of the road network, while the environmental impact assessment considers the affect of the scheme on the surrounding environment and the likely reduction in levels of traffic pollution arising from reduced congestion.

Whilst traffic studies are carried out after completion of projects to check the accuracy of the appraisal projections, the Department has not carried out particular studies in Northern Ireland to measure wider economic or environmental changes to by-passed towns or villages.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Land Registers of Northern Ireland

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for the Land Registers of Northern Ireland in 1997–98. [21649]

Mr. Moss: For 1997–98, the following performance targets have been set for LRNI:

Output

1. To process 16.8 Land Registry registrations per member of staff per month.
2. To process 262.5 Registry of Deeds registrations per member of staff per month.
3. To process 48 Statutory Charges Registry registrations per member of staff per month.
4. To process 90.75 application units per member of staff per month.

Efficiency

5. To process regular Land Registry dealings in an average of 20 days.
6. To process regular Register of Deeds dealings in an average of three days.
7. To process regular Statutory Charges Registry dealings in an average of 15 days.
8. To process pre-completion land information applications in an average of eight days.
9. To achieve a unit cost of £46.24 for registrations.
10. To achieve a unit cost of £5.64 for land information services.
11. To achieve a combined weighted unit cost target of £26,68.

Financial

12. To cover Agency Costs out of fee income.
13. To increase overall productivity by at least 3 per cent.

Quality

14. To achieve a customer complaint ratio of more than 1.5 per cent.
15. To achieve a registration accuracy rate of at least 98.5 per cent.

Accessor for Military Complaints

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make an announcement about the post of independent assessor for military complaints procedures which falls vacant on 31 March. [21650]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am happy to announce that Mr. Jim McDonald has accepted appointment to the post of independent assessor for military complaints procedures and he will take up the position on 1 April 1997.

I am grateful to him for accepting the appointment and am confident that he will provide a valuable contribution in what I consider to be an essential element in maintaining public confidence in the Army's complaints procedures.

I wish to express my appreciation and thanks to his predecessor, Mr. David Hewitt, for all his efforts and to fully acknowledge the contribution which he has made in the important area of Army complaints procedures.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Custodial Costs (Young People)

12. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current annual cost of keeping a young person in *(a)* secure accommodation and *(b)* youth custody. [19793]

Miss Widdecombe: The cost of providing secure accommodation for young persons is a matter for individual local authorities. The Prison Service is responsible for meeting the costs incurred by local authorities in detaining juveniles sentenced under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933. The average annual cost of such detention is currently £126,022.

In 1995–96, the average cost per place in young offender institutions was £17,507 in closed establishments and £16,741 in open establishments.

Speed Cameras

13. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of motorists who are escaping prosecution for speeding because the police do not have the resources to maintain the existing speed cameras; and what measures he plans to take to remedy this situation. [19794]

Mr. Maclean: I do not consider that any estimate of that kind could be useful or meaningful. The Government have provided substantial and increased resources to the police service and it is for chief officers to decide how to order their priorities.

Police Recruitment

14. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government's target of *(a)* 5,000 extra police officers nationwide and *(b)* 1,000 extra police officers in London will be reached. [19795]

Mr. Howard: The additional £180 million being allocated over three years from April 1996 is sufficient to allow the police service in England and Wales, including the Metropolitan police, to recruit 5,000 constables by March 1999. Chief constables have estimated that the first 1,000 extra officers will be recruited in the present financial year.

16. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of extra police officers to be appointed in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* the South Wales police authority in 1997–98. [19797]

Mr. Maclean: It is for individual chief constables and police authorities to determine the number of officers in each force, having regard to the resources available to them. The additional £40 million we have allocated for extra officers in 1997–98 is sufficient to recruit 1,888 more police constables in England, and 112 in Wales, including 47 in the South Wales constabulary.

Pastoral Discussions (Confidentiality)

15. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what wording he plans to include in the draft code of practice consequent upon the passing of the Police Bill [*Lords*] that will ensure confidential protection of pastoral discussions between ministers of religion and members of their flock. [19796]

Mr. Howard: Authorisation of surveillance which intrudes on "confidential personal information" will require prior approval by a commissioner except in urgent cases. In addition, the police and customs have given an undertaking not to mount intrusive surveillance operations in circumstances covered by the seal of confession.

Crime Statistics

17. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the percentage rise in reported crime since 1979. [19798]

Mr. Maclean: No central record exists of the number of crimes reported to the police, although for the period in question, the average annual increase in recorded crime was 4 per cent.

Prison Officers (Drugs)

18. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are taken to ensure that prison officers do not bring drugs into prisons; and if he will make a statement. [19799]

Miss Widdecombe: A range of measures are taken to stop staff from smuggling drugs into prison. These include: searching of staff, the use of sniffer dogs and setting up intelligence systems. In addition, any staff who are caught with drugs and pursued through the Prison Service code of discipline, and, if necessary, the courts.

Prison Service Education Budget

19. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present education budget for the Prison Service in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [19800]

Miss Widdecombe: There is no central education budget: decisions on the size of education budgets are taken by individual governors. Governors' budgets for education this year totalled £35,297,815.

Prison Population

20. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the size of the prison population. [19801]

Miss Widdecombe: The prison population on 19 March was 59,529.

International Terrorism

21. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new measures he is supporting to combat international terrorism. [19802]

Mr. Howard: The Government continue to support measures, at home and in international fora, which will enable international terrorism to be countered more effectively. It is a matter of considerable regret that my hon. Friend's Bill, which would extend the law relating to conspiracy or incitement here to commit terrorist and other offences abroad, has not yet made the progress which the Government hoped it would.

As I stated in my reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) on 20 February, *Official Report*, column *756*, the Government intend to bring forward in due course proposals to strengthen existing controls on

terrorist, including international terrorist, finances. In the European Union and the Group of Seven industrialised countries plus Russia, the United Kingdom has initiated the development of "centres of excellence" directories to enhance counter-terrorist co-operation.

In the United Nations, we promoted the adoption last December of a new declaration on measures to eliminate international terrorism, and we are playing a constructive role in the preparation of a draft international convention for the suppression of terrorist bombings.

Deportation (Scotland)

22. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions have taken place with the Scottish Prison Service about the detention of persons awaiting deportation. [19803]

Mr. Kirkhope: Discussions took place with the Scottish Prison Service last summer about the detention of persons awaiting deportation. These discussions found that due to the relatively low numbers of persons held in Scottish prisons under sole immigration powers, there were no grounds on which to consider a custom built facility solely for Immigration Act detainees.

Prison Overcrowding

23. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's latest estimate of overcrowding in prisons in England and Wales. [19804]

Miss Widdecombe: As at 19 March the total in-use certified normal accommodation of the Prison Service estate is 54,578. The population as at 19 March is 59,529 and the operational capacity is 60,563.

Prisons (Ministerial Visits)

24. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons the Minister responsible for prisons has visited; and what assessment she has made about the management of those prisons. [19805]

Miss Widdecombe: Since becoming Prisons Minister I have visited all 129 Prison Service establishments in England and Wales.

During my visits, I have seen much to give me cause for encouragement. Against the backdrop of a rising prison population, the Prison Service has maintained an excellent security record, achieved a reduction in assaults and successfully implemented reforms to release on temporary licence, a national system of incentives and earned privileges, and mandatory drugs testing. I congratulate all concerned.

Young Offenders

25. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking in respect of young offenders; and if he will make a statement. [19806]

Mr. Maclean: We have proposed in the Crime (Sentences) Bill that curfew orders with electronic monitoring should be extended to 10 to 15 year-olds, and that the courts be given greater discretion to allow the identification of convicted juveniles. We will be introducing a new secure training order for 12 to 14-year-old persistent offenders. The Green Paper "Preventing Children Offending", which was published earlier this month, sets out our proposals for action to help children before they become offenders; and action to reinforce parents' responsibility for their children's behaviour.

Immigration

26. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates he has made of the effect on immigration levels of the abolition of the primary purpose rule and the admission of immediate members of the same family already resident in the United Kingdom. [19807]

Mr. Kirkhope: If the primary purpose rule were to be abolished it is estimated that currently between 1,200 and 2,200 applicants would be eligible for admission each year. It is not possible to estimate the effect of easier admission for the immediate family members of persons settled in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women, being (i) Pakistani (ii) Indian, (iii) Australian, (iv) Canadian and (v) Filipino citizens, have sought to enter the United Kingdom as spouses or financés, and have been successful on (1) application and (2) appeal in the most recent year for which figures are available. [21334]

Mr. Kirkhope: The latest available information on grants of entry clearance and on successful appeals against an initial refusal of entry clearance in India and Pakistan is given in table A. Corresponding information for the other countries is not available centrally. For those countries, information by nationally on those granted leave to enter the United Kingdom as spouses or fiancé(e)s is given in table B.

Table A: Grants of entry clearance on application, and successful appeals against a refusal of entry clearance, for spouses or financé(e)s, in India and Pakistan, 1995

Persons

Country where application was made	*Entry clearance granted on application, as spouse or financé(e)*		*Successful appeal against refusal of entry clearance as spouse or financé(e)*	
	Males	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
Pakistan	1,190	2,320	580	160
India	460	1,880	110	90

All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Table B: Persons admitted to the United Kingdom as spouses or financé(e)s, by selected nationalities, 1995

Persons

Nationality	*Granted leave to enter the United Kingdom as spouse or financé(e)*	
	Males	*Females*
Australia	420	580
Canada	140	260
Philippines	70	430

Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Metropolitan Police

27. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis concerning police manpower in south-west London. [19808]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend and I regularly meet the commissioner to discuss issues concerning the policing of London.

Asylum Seekers

28. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been waiting more than five years for a decision on their status; and what plans he has to recruit extra staff to deal with the backlog of cases. [19809]

Mr. Kirkhope: About 4,460 applications for asylum made before 1992 are currently awaiting a decision. New arrangements for tackling the backlog of asylum applications made before the Asylum and Immigration Act 1993 are to be introduced in April, with the aim of producing a higher rate of decisions within the staff resources already allocated to this block of work. Generally, the number of asylum caseworkers has increased more than sevenfold since 1988 and the number of undecided asylum applications has fallen from 69,763 in January 1996 to 54,490 at the end of January 1997.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers there were from *(a)* Poland, *(b)* the Czech Republic, *(c)* Hungary, *(d)* Romania and *(e)* Malta during each of the past four years. [21052]

Mr. Kirkhope: The requested information is given in the table.

Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, selected nationalities, 1993 to 1996

Principal applicants

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996[2]*
Hungary	5	5	5	5
Malta	*	—	—	—
Poland	155	360	1,210	890
Romania	370	355	770	445
Former Czechoslovakia	15	35	65	110
of which:				
Czech Republic	n/a	n/a	n/a	55
Slovakia	n/a	n/a	n/a	55

[1] Figures rounded to 5 with * = to 1 or 2 while n/a = not available.
[2] Provisional figures.

Prison Accommodation

29. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in supplying extra accommodation in Her Majesty's prisons. [19810]

Miss Widdecombe: The Prison Service is taking a number of steps to cope with the rising prison population, including opening new prisons, building new houseblocks and speeding up the refurbishment of existing accommodation. This will result in an additional 6,000 places over the next 18 months, increasing to 8,500 new places by March 2000.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the currently vacant cellular accommodation in prison establishments which is *(a)* pending refurbishment, *(b)* currently being refurbished and *(c)* deemed unfit for rehabilitation. [20692]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about vacant cellular accommodation.

The attached table provides the information you requested about accommodation which is out of use. There is no cellular accommodation deemed unfit for rehabilitation.

	Number
Accommodation out of use pending refurbishment	
Wakefield	202
Accommodation out of use currently being refurbished	
Bristol	8
Brixton	237
Camp Hill	86
Dartmoor	28
Everthorpe	5
Ford	35
Full Sutton	220
Glen Parva	132
Hull	6
Kingston	56
Leeds	252
Lewes	132
Liverpool	111
Long Lartin	74
Maidstone	1
Nottinghan	22
Parkhurst	133
Pentonville	156
Preston	156
Stoke Heath	60
Styal	18
Wandsworth	415
Wormwood Scrubs	50

Prison Staff

30. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to monitor the adequacy of prison staffing levels. [19811]

Miss Widdecombe: The adequacy of prison staffing levels is monitored regularly by Prison Service operational line managers.

Privately Operated Prisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the circumstances under which payments, other than the usual monthly contractual payments, are made to privately operated prisons; [18716]

(2) If he will list the payments which the Prison Service *(a)* has made and *(b)* plans to make to each privately operated prisons, other than the usual monthly contractual payments and the reasons for these payments. [18717]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about extra-contractual payments to the operators of privately managed prisons.

Excluding the regular monthly payments required by contract (which vary from prison to prison), additional sums paid in the last year have included:

- discharge grants
- some probation costs
- improvements to remedy latent defects in the fabric of the prisons (where prison buildings were provided by the Prison Service)
- capital costs introduced throughout the Prison Service (such as electrical work in cells and to accommodate overcrowding)
- changes in the service requirements, such as extra court escort commitments
- additional operational requirements, such as mutual aid between prisons

These payments are negotiated on a commercial-in-confidence basis.

These costs, where relevant, have been taken fully into account in the two studies comparing the costs of contracted out prisons with directly managed prisons (by Coopers and Lybrand for 1994–95 and the Home Office Economic Unit for 1995–96). It is not possible to predict when such payments may be necessary in future.

Blakenhurst Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of replacing the locks at HM prison Blakenhurst; and what factors prompted their replacement. [21000]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the replacement of locks at Blakenhurst prison.

The decision was taken to re-lock the prison on the basis of intelligence received that the security of the prison may have been compromised. The full cost of the relocking is the subject of negotiations between the Prison Service and the contractor.

Addicts Index

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the addicts index. [21046]

Mr. Sackville: We propose to bring the addicts index to a close on 31 March. A statutory instrument will shortly be laid before Parliament to revoke the existing provisions which require doctors to notify the Chief Medical Officer at the Home Office of details of patients they believe to be addicted to certain narcotic drugs. This year's notification statistics, due to be published in July, will therefore be the last in the series.

Reliance for information on the nature of drug misuse will henceforward rest mainly on the Department of Health's regional drug misuse databases and the Scottish drug misuse database. The DMDs are a superior source of information in a number of significant respects:

- they cover all drugs misused, not just the narcotics;
- they cover non-medical as well as doctor sources;
- the anonymity is attractive both to misusers and those treating them;
- the voluntary nature of the system promotes compliance.

The value of the statistical product of the DMDs is already proven and the system, which has been operating since 1992, is well established. The closure of the addicts index will assist in concentrating efforts on further strategic development of the DMDs; work is already being taken forward in this area. Doctors and others concerned in the treatment and support of drug addicts will also continue to be encouraged to report contacts to the DMDs.

It is recognised that doctors need to manage addict patients with particular care; this includes guarding against attempts to obtain dual prescriptions. There are guidelines on clinical management of drug misusers, published by the Department of Health, to assist doctors treating such patients. The guidance emphasises the need for a proper clinical assessment of drug dependence, including special measures such as urine analysis.

The Department of Health have in hand a revision of the guidelines which will further assist in the management of these patients.

Problems associated with diversion on to the illicit market will continue to be dealt with by the drugs inspectorate which will closely monitor prescribing of controlled drugs to drug addicts.

Doctors who use the index will shortly be individually informed of the closure. The relevant professional and interested bodies will also be notified.

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of

whether the new procedures for examining and checking category A inmates and their family visitors will allow him to grant more open visits; [20369]

(2) when his Department received recommendations on modifying the requirements for closed visits for families of category A inmates in prison; and what assessment he has made of the advantages of implementing the recommendations. [20368]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard tilt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about closed visits.

A policy of mandatory closed visits for all exceptional risk category A prisoners held in special secure units (SSUs) was introduced in June 1995. No new procedures for the searching of prisoners and their visitors have been introduced since that time.

In 1996, the Prison Service asked Sir Donald Acheson to examine what effect the regime in the SSUs at Belmarsh, Full Sutton and Whitemoor might have on the health of prisoners. The report was presented in June 1996 and included the recommendation that prisoners should have access to open visits with members of their immediate family. A copy of the report was recently placed in the Library.

Sir Donald Acheson's recommendation was considered in the light of the need to maintain the highest levels of security in SSUs and took into account humanitarian concerns. The recommendation was qualified by the assertion that it should be possible for the Prison Service to devise a system of open visits which prevented the passage of unauthorised items. The Prison Service concluded that closed visits are the only guaranteed means of preventing the passage of such items and therefore has not accepted the recommendation.

Holloway Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average proportion of the population at Her Majesty's prison Holloway *(a)* unconvicted awaiting trial and *(b)* convicted awaiting sentencing, in the most recent year for which figures are available. [20700]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the proportions of untried, and convicted unsentenced prisoners at Holloway prison.

No detailed daily records are kept, and it is therefore impossible to provide an accurate average figure. However, a biannual population monitoring exercise is conducted, and the average of the last three of these (30th June 1995, 31 January 1996 and 30 June 1996) are listed in the attached table.

Per cent.

	Untried	*Convicted unsentenced*
30 June 1995	30.7	12.8
31 January 1996	27.9	12.3
30 June 1996	32.5	12.2
Average	30.4	12.5

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average amount of time spent in custody by those convicted prisoners on remand awaiting sentencing at HMP Holloway who eventually received non-custodial sentences, in the most recent year for which figures are available. [20704]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average time spent in custody at Holloway prison by convicted prisoners on remand awaiting sentencing who subsequently received non-custodial sentences.

This information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average amount of time spent in custody by those unconvicted prisoners on remand at HMP Holloway while awaiting trial who *(a)* were acquitted and *(b)* had their charges dropped in the most recent year for which figures are available; [20702]

(2) what proportion of unconvicted prisoners on remand at HMP Holloway while awaiting trial *(a)* were acquitted and *(b)* had their charges dropped, in the most recent year for which figures are available; [20701]

(3) what proportion of convicted prisoners on remand awaiting sentencing at HMP Holloway received non-custodial sentences, in the most recent year for which figures are available. [20703]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about convicted and unconvicted prisoners on remand in Holloway prison.

The requested information is unavailable and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 March, *Official Report*, columns *403-04*, concerning strip searching of prisoners detained at HMP Holloway, when strip searching was introduced on the routine basis described in the reply; since that date, how many items of contraband have been discovered on *(a)* pregnant women, *(b)* remand prisoners and *(c)* convicted prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [21290]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about strip searching of prisoners at Holloway prison.

Strip searching of prisoners is part of our normal security procedures as set out in the Security Manual, a copy of which is in the Library. These procedures have been in use for many years at Holloway.

The detailed breakdown of figures you asked for are not available. I will write to you later giving those figures which are available.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of asylum seekers in February *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997. [21271]

Mr. Kirkhope: A total of 2,850 applications for asylum in the United Kingdom were lodged in February 1996. The number in February 1997 was 1,985.

Prisons (Staffing Levels)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) of 18 February, *Official Report*, column *531*, on prison staff ratios between 1970 and 1996, if he will estimate how much of the change in the ratio is due to *(a)* the changes to prison officers' overtime arrangements and *(b)* to other factors, indicating such other factors. [20708]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Chris Mullin, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question seeking further information about Prison Service staff:prisoner ratios.

As the Director General indicated in his reply to Sir Ivan Lawrence in February, the fall in the staff:prisoner ratio reflects the change in prison officer working practices and the reduction in their hours worked. I regret that it is not possible to estimate how much of the change in the ratio is due to any single factor.

Hampshire Constabulary

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the establishment of the Basingstoke division of the Hampshire constabulary in 1979; and what it is in the present year. [20689]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the chief constable that comparable figures for the Basingstoke division are available only from 1984. In 1984 there were 128 police officers in Basingstoke compared with 158 at March 1997, an increase of 23 per cent.

In the whole of the Hampshire constabulary there were 2,955 police officers in May 1979 compared with 3,362 in September 1996, an increase of 407 or 14 per cent.

Crimes (Hemsworth)

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many violent crimes were committed in the Hemsworth constituency in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1996; [20723]

(2) how many *(a)* thefts, *(b)* burglaries and *(c)* aggravated burglaries were committed in the Hemsworth constituency in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1996. [20724]

Mr. Maclean: The recorded crime statistics collected centrally are available only by police force area.

Departmental Outturn Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the outturn expenditure of his Department during the current financial year; how much of these costs he expended in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England; and how many staff are employed by his Department in (i) Wales and (ii) England. [20747]

Mr. Howard: The estimated outturn expenditure for 1996–97 is £6,625,588,000, of which it is estimated that £243,215,000 will be spent in Wales and £6,367,108,000 in England. The Home Office employs 1,189 people in Wales and 50,696 people in England.

War Crimes Unit

Sir Cyril Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the Metropolitan police spent on the war crimes unit in the last financial year; how much they plan to spend in the present financial year, and what is the proposed figure for the next financial year. [20813]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the table.

	£
1995–96	877,000
1996–97[1]	650,000
1997–98[1]	664,000

[1] Estimated costs.

Prison Escapes

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken to reduce the number of prison escapes from all establishment types; and if he will make a statement. [20731]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Irvine Patnick, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about prison escapes.

The number of escapes, expressed as a proportion of the prison population, is the first of the Prison Service's key performance indicators. The attached table shows that the rate of escapes is now less than one quarter of the level in 1992–93, the last year before the Prison Service became an executive agency.

The Service has taken a number of steps over this time to reduce escapes and has drawn on recommendations from a number of reports including more recently the Woodcock and Learmont reports written following the escapes of category A prisoners in 1994 and 1995. Measures taken include:

- undertaking regular and rigorous security audits
- use of new technology, such as closed circuit television, x-ray machines, metal detectors
- more intensive searching programmes for prisoners, visitors and the accommodation they occupy
- improvements to perimeter security
- improved security awareness and training

Our main priority for the future will be to continue to make every effort to prevent escapes by the most dangerous prisoners and we shall also continue to set rigorous targets for an overall decrease in escapes.

	Escapes		*Escapes excluding those previously the responsibility of police*[1]	
	Rate (per cent. of population)	*Number*	*Rate (per cent. of population)*	*Number*
1992–93	0.79	347	0.79	347
1993–94	0.65	296	0.60	273
1994–95	0.44	217	0.41	202
1995–96	0.24	122	0.17	88
1996–97	0.24	123	0.10[2]	52

[1] Excludes escapes from court escort and custody services, previously the responsibility of the police.
[2] Annualised rate.

Foxes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number and percentage of foxes *(a)* which perished in the last year and *(b)* which were killed by a fox hunt. [20814]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is not available.

Prisoners (Previous Covictions)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people currently in United Kingdom prisons have served a previous prison sentence for a different offence; and if he will make a statement. [21276]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many people currently in United Kingdom prisons have served a previous prison sentence for a different offence.

The information requested on current prisoners is not available centrally. The most recent, readily available, information relates to a sample of sentenced prisons in England and Wales at 30 June 1993.

It is estimated that 48 per cent of this sample had served a prison sentence for a previous "standard list" offence (this includes all indictable offences and some of the more serious summary offences). This figure is based on matching information on prisoners in the sample to records on the Home Office Offenders Index. Further details of the sample and the matching process are given on pages 607 of "Prison Statistics, England and Wales, 1993" (Cm 2893), a copy of which is in the Library.

Crime (Young People)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of recorded crimes were carried out in the United Kingdom by people under the age of *(a)* 25, *(b)* 21, *(c)* 18 and *(d)* 16 years in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [21272]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not available centrally for England and Wales. However, the readily available information for persons found guilty at all courts or cautioned for indictable offences is contained in table 5.26 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1995", copies of which are available in the Library. Information for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the respective Secretaries of State.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the arrangements for the forthcoming confinement of Roisin McAliskey within the Holloway prison arrangements. [20982]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Hugh Taylor to Mr. Hugh Dykes, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the arrangements for Roisin McAliskey's confinement.

Ms McAliskey will be taken to an outside hospital for the birth of her child. She will not be subject to any form of physical restraint (whether by handcuffs or escort chain) when she leaves Holloway prison in order to be admitted to hospital, nor whilst she is at the hospital. This includes the period when she is giving birth. She has asked for two birthing partners to be present, and this has been approved.

Ms McAliskey will be allowed to keep her baby with her following the birth. Her application to be accepted into Holloway's mother and baby unit was approved on 13 March.

Burglary (London)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what has been the trend in burglaries in Greater London since the start of Operation Bumblebee; [21047]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Operation Eagle Eye. [21048]

Mr. Maclean: The commissioner's Operation Bumblebee initiative against burglary was launched across London on 1 June 1993. The main aims of the initiative are to reduce the incidence of burglary, convict offenders and to shift the fear of crime from the victim to the burglar. Since June 1993, there has been a fall of 12 per cent. in the number of reported burglaries in the Metropolitan police district and the clear-up rate has increased from 12 per cent. to 21 per cent.

Operation Eagle Eye, launched in the summer of 1995, targets street crime, one of the crimes that Londoners fear most. Operation Eagle Eye uses the tools of surveillance and intelligence-led policing to target known and suspected offenders in key hotspot areas. The initiative, which is being introduced and monitored in selected divisions, has been effective in stemming the rise in the level of street crime. Between 1992 and 1995, street crime in the Metropolitan police district was rising at an average annual compound rate of over 13 per cent. In 1996, the increase was only 5 per cent. The clear-up rate for street crime has nearly doubled between 1994 and 1996.

There is no doubt that innovative policing methods such as Operations Bumblebee and Eagle Eye have made a real impact on crime levels in the capital.

Women Prisoners (Escapes)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each year since 1992, the number of women who *(a)* escaped from a prison, *(b)* escaped from an escort to or from prison, *(c)* attempted to escape from a prison, *(d)* attempted to escape from an escort to or from prison, *(e)* absconded from a prison, *(f)* escaped from custody while in a hospital undergoing medical treatment and *(g)* attempted to escape from custody while in a hospital undergoing medical treatment; and how many of *(f)* and *(g)* were (i) pregnant and (ii) in labour. [16867]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking if he will list for each year since 1992, the number of women who (a) escaped from a prison, (b) escaped from an escort to or from prison, (c) attempted to escape from a prison, (d) attempted to escape from an escort to or from prison, (e) absconded from a prison, (f) escaped from custody while in a hospital undergoing medical treatment and (g) attempted to escape from custody while in a hospital undergoing medical treatment; and how many of (f) and (g) were (i) pregnant and (ii) in labour.

The information is contained in the attached table with the exception of answer to (f) (i), (ii) and (g) (i), (ii). This information is not held centrally.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
(a) (b) (c) (d) Escapes and attempted escapes by female prisoners from establishments and escort					
Establishment	6	1	5	0	0
Escort	9	8	6	2	0
Establishment attempt	0	0	2	0	6
Escort attempt	4	2	6	1	1
(e) Absconds by female prisoners (including absconds from outside hospital)					
Absconds	84	99	144	103	91
(f) (g) Escapes and attempted escapes from hospital by female prisoners					
Hospital escape	8	5	0	0	0
Hospital attempt	0	0	1	0	0

1. Escape figures exclude recaptures within 15 minutes where no further offence has been committed.
2. Attempt figures include those recaptured within 15 minutes where no further offence has been committed.
3. All years are financial years—figures for 1996–97 show the position to the end of January 1997.
4. Escort escape and attempted escape figures include Court Escort Service escapes which would have been the responsibility of the police in previous years.
5. Improved arrangements for gathering data on absconds were introduced in Septemberr 1995 and a review of past records has altered earlier statistics by eradicating inaccuracies.

Prison (Travellers)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people, classified as travellers, are held in prisons in Great Britain. [21258]

(2) how many people classified as travellers are currently being held at Feltham remand centre. [21251]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions asking, how many people, classified as travellers, are held in prisons in Great Britain and at Feltham remand centre.

The information requested is not available centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Prison Transfers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of prison transfers in Great Britain in the last 12 months. [21256]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the cost of prison transfers in Great Britain in the last 12 months.

Information is not held centrally on the cost of transfers to and from prisons in England and Wales, other than the costs of contracted-out escort services which amounted to £47 million in 1995–96.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for their Secretaries of State.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been transferred from prisons in Great Britain to Northern Ireland since 1 November 1995. [21257]

Miss Widdecombe: Since 1 November 1995, 21 prisoners have been transferred, either on a permanent basis or for a temporary period, from prisons in England and Wales to prisons in Northern Ireland. Transfers from Scotland to other jurisdictions are a matter for the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prison transfers by United Kingdom region in the last three years. [21255]

Miss Widdecombe: The number of prisoners transferred, on either a permanent or a temporary basis, between England and Wales and other United Kingdom jurisdictions in the last three years, are given in the tables.

Prisoner transfers from England and Wales to other United Kingdom jurisdictions

	1994	*1995*	*1996*
Scotland	25	35	17
Northern Ireland	21	16	15
Jersey	8	7	7
Guernsey	1	1	1
Isle of Man	0	1	3

Prisoner transfers to England and Wales from other United Kingdom jurisdictions

	1994	1995	1996
Scotland	55	46	28
Northern Ireland	2	3	2
Jersey	6	24	21
Guernsey	2	5	8
Isle of Man	1	6	2

Information on transfers not involving England and Wales is not held centrally and is a matter for the relevant United Kingdom jurisdiction.

Prisoners (Regional Origin)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a breakdown by regional origin of prisoners held in prisons in Great Britain. [21252]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt, to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for a breakdown by regional origin of prisoners held in prisons in Great Britain.

No information is available centrally regarding the principle address of those committed to custody in England and Wales. The available information on where prisoners originate from is for the court first committing to custody. Such information, for the whole of the current prison population, could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Information for Scotland is a matter for the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners currently being held in prisons in Great Britain originate from Northern Ireland. [21254]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many prisoners currently being held in prisons in Great Britain originate from Northern Ireland.

No information is available centrally regarding the principal address of those committed to custody in England and Wales. The available information on where prisoners originate from is for the court first committing to custody. Provisional information shows that one person was recorded centrally as being received into a prison in England and Wales who had been first committed into custody by a court in Northern Ireland in 1996.

Information for Scotland is a matter for the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Irish nationals are currently held in prisons in Great Britain. [21253]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many Irish nationals are currently in prisons in Great Britain.

Provisional figures for 28 February 1997 (the latest date for which figures are available) indicate that there were 673 persons in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales claiming to be of Irish nationality. Figures for prisoners in Great Britain (ie: England, Wales and Scotland) are not held centrally.

Information for Scotland is a matter for the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Paul Hill

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when final compensation will be paid to Paul Hill. [21260]

Mr. Kirkhope: As no final claim for compensation has yet been received from Paul Hill, it is too early to speculate about any matters associated with payment of compensation.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the costs of the Government's defence in the case of Paul Hill. [21259]

Mr. Kirkhope: At the hearing in the High Court on 19 February 1997 between the chief constable of the Surrey Constabulary—judgement creditor—Paul Michael Hill—judgement debtor—and the Home Office—defendant—costs were reserved. In the light of this, no assessment for costs in this case has yet been made by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Defibrillators (Police and Fire Service)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the cost of ensuring all police cars and fire engines carry defibrillators. [21035]

Mr. Maclean: Using latest available figures, the estimated cost of equipping all police vehicles and fire service operational pump appliances with defibrillators is £69 million and £6.3 million respectively.

Animal Experiments (Primates)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many licence applications for experiments on non-human primates have been turned down on the grounds that the adverse effects endured by primates prior to arrival in the United Kingdom are too severe to be outweighed by the benefit of the research. [21249]

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account is taken under section 5(4) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 of the length of journey time by the Home Office inspectorate in determining whether to grant a project licence for experiments on non-human primates. [21248]

Mr. Sackville: The transport arrangements, including travel times, are taken into account when assessing the suitability of overseas sources to supply non-human primates for research use.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's policy on maximum time allowable for journeys of non-human primates to United Kingdom laboratories; and if he will make a statement. [21250]

Mr. Sackville: The Home Office does not specify maximum journey times. The welfare of animals in transit is regulated by the exporting countries, the International Airline Transport Association, the European Union and by regulations of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in this country.

Devon and Cornwall Constabulary

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the expenditure on the Devon and Cornwall constabulary in each of the past five years. [21343]

Mr. Maclean: The information is set out in the table:

Devon and Cornwall expenditure

	£ million
1992–93	128,271
1993–94	136,654
1994–95	139,381
1995–96	146,556
1996–97 (estimate)	153,502

Prison Barge

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his letter of 12 March, in respect of the purpose-built prison barge, if Crown immunity will apply to the operation of the barge; and if he will make a statement. [21231]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the application of Crown immunity to the purpose-built prison barge.

The floating prison will not be classed as an offshore facility. The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and all relevant health and safety regulations will apply to the floating prison in the same way as other prisons, and Health and Safety Executive inspectors and environmental health officers will have a right of access.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21205]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *613–14*. The additional information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Al-Fayed Brothers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the recent statement by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) on the applications for British citizenship by Mohammed and Ali Al-Fayed; and if he will make a statement. [21179]

Mr. Kirkhope: We do not appear to have received any representations as a result of any recent statement made by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle).

Polling Stations (Accessibility)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what monitoring his Department has undertaken of changes in access to polling stations for disabled people over the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [21182]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North (Ms Joan Walley) *Official Report* column *131*.

Pensions Misselling

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police investigations into the mis-selling of pensions; and how many people and what sums are estimated to be involved. [21146]

Mr. Maclean: I have been informed by the Metropolitan police that one specific allegation has been reported to its fraud department in relation to the mis-selling of pensions. The matter is currently under assessment. There is no investigation at this stage.

Ballot Papers (Braille Templates)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to consult organisations representing blind and partially sighted people over the possibility of introducing braille templates in which to insert ballot papers and if he will make a statement. [21462]

Mr. Sackville: Officials have been in correspondence with the Royal National Institute for the Blind and are meeting representatives of that organisation next week.

Buckley Hall Prison

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the 1996 board of visitors report from HMP Buckley Hall, if he will place a copy in the Library; and if he will make it his policy that all reports from boards of visitors are put in the public domain. [21470]

Miss Widdecombe: The 1996 annual report of the board of visitors at Her Majesty's prison Buckley Hall was received on 16 December 1996 and I responded on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend on 28 February

1997. The board's reports are not public documents and are not placed in the Library as a matter of course. They are made to the Secretary of State who permits the board to publish if it so wishes and boards are encouraged to do so.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many assaults there have been on *(a)* prisoners and *(b)* staff at HMP Buckley Hall since 29 October 1996; [21472]

(2) if he will list the incidents reported to the Prison Service in relation to HMP Buckley Hall since 29 October 1996. [21471]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 20 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about incidents at Buckley Hall prison.

The number of incidents reported to the Prison Service since 29th October 1996 to 19 March 1997 are as follows:

	Number
Assault	3
Concerted Indiscipline	1
Drugs	17
Fire	1
Recapture/Surrender	2
Tool Loss	4
Temporary Release Failure	1
Total	29

The breakdown of assaults from this date is 2 on inmates and 1 on a member of staff.

Religious Preachers

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many religious preachers were given clearance to live and work in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Leeds and *(c)* Bradford in each of the last 10 years. [21464]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information is available only on ministers of religion admitted to the whole of the United Kingdom since 1993 and is given in the table.

Admissions of ministers of religion[1] to the United Kingdom

	Numbers
1993	246
1994	558
1995	662
1996	493

[1] Including missionaries and members of religious orders, but excluding Mormon missionaries prior to October 1995.

Office of the Data Protection Registrar

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce the outcome of the second stage of the quinquennial review of the Office of the Data Protection Registrar. [21561]

Mr. Sackville: The second stage of the review examined the office's internal organisation and performance. I have placed a copy of the report in the Library. It endorses the registrar's programme of changes to improve efficiency, and suggests some further management improvements. We are inviting the registrar to consider these and prepare an implementation plan. Account will be taken of any relevant changes arising from implementation of the European Community data protection directive.

Criminal Justice Initiatives

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in implementing his programme of criminal justice initiatives announced at the 1993 Conservative party conference. [21563]

Mr. Howard: All 27 points have been taken forward. In the last three years, recorded crime has fallen by 10 per cent.

The 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act:

reformed the right of silence (1). The number of suspects refusing to answer police questions has nearly halved;

introduced faster court procedures for evicting squatters (2);

introduced new powers for the police to stop trespassers disrupting lawful activities like country sports (3);

introduced tougher new powers for the police to stop and search people suspected of terrorist activity (4);

created a new offence of gathering information for terrorist purposes (5);

created a new offence of possessing anything that gives reasonable suspicion of being connected to terrorist activities (6);

gave the police the power to take DNA samples in connection with all recordable crimes (7). Our national DNA database, the first of its kind in the world, now has over 113,000 samples on it. To date 3,400 matches have been made;

created a new crime of witness intimidation (8). In 1995, 500 people were charged with committing that offence and significantly more in 1996;

abolished judges' warnings to juries in rape trials about the truthfulness of women (9);

gave the police the power to arrest for breach of police bail (10);

banned those on bail from serving on juries (11);

ended the presumption in favour of bail for anyone accused of offending while on bail (12);

gave the police the power to attach conditions to bail (13);

allows the courts to revoke bail if new information comes to light (14);

introduced automatic custody for anyone convicted of rape, manslaughter or murder who is subsequently accused of the same category of crime (15);

allowed new prisons to be designed, constructed, managed and financed by the private sector (16);

gave the Prison Service the power to test prisoners' urine for drugs compulsorily (17). Mandatory drug testing had been introduced throughout the Prison Service by March 1996;

doubled the maximum sentence in young offender institutions for 15 to 17-year-olds to two years (18);

gave the courts the powers to order 12 to 14-year-old persistent offenders into secure training centres. These powers will be triggered once that accommodation is available (19). The first contract has just been signed.

The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 allowed retrials where juries have been nobbled or witnesses intimidated (20); and gave judges the power to prohibit the reporting of unsupported allegations made during a speech in mitigation (21).

The Criminal Appeal Act 1995 has enabled the Government to establish a criminal cases review commission to look at miscarriages of justice (22).

There are now 1,900 neighbourhood constables (23).

The Attorney General's right of appeal for unduly lenient sentenced was extended to all serious violent and sexual offences in March 1994 (24).

In March 1995, new national standards were published to toughen up community sentences (25).

In March 1994, new guidelines on cautioning were issued (26).

In 1993, all 16 recommendations by an internal inquiry to cut police paperwork were accepted (27).

Young Offenders

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for contractually managed prisons to hold sentenced young offenders. [21620]

Miss Widdecombe: The Prison Service intends to hold sentenced young offenders in the new prisons which will be built and managed through the private finance initiative at Bridgend and Fazakerley after these open during the coming financial year. This will give the service greater flexibility in its use of the contractually managed estate and help to meet its requirement for additional young offender places. My right hon. and learned Friend will today lay a statutory instrument before the House which makes the necessary consequential changes to the young offender institution rules.

Prisons (Drug Testing)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the present position the availability of information from the Prison Service mandatory drug testing programme. [21670]

Miss Widdecombe: As part of the programme of mandatory drug testing in prison establishments the Prison Service collects a range of statistical information, including information about the percentage of prisoners who test positive for drugs in the tests which are carried out at random. Since April 1996 the number of random tests that prove positive, expressed as a percentage of the total number of random tests carried out, has been one of the Prison Service's key performance indicators.

As a result of internal checking, a number of errors have been found in the information held centrally. The main problems are thought to relate to the recording of results of confirmation tests—carried out where a prisoner pleads not guilty at adjudication in response to an initial positive result—and to cases where an initial positive result should subsequently have been discounted because the prisoner concerned was on a course of prescribed medication.

The Prison Service has commissioned the national addiction centre to carry out an independent validation of a sample of the available statistical information on mandatory drug testing covering the period April 1996 to June 1996. This involves a detailed scrutiny of the information held in prison establishments and comparison with the information held centrally. The validation exercise, should provide a measure of the extent of the errors, the possible implications for performance against the key indicator and, more generally, of the reliability of data on mandatory drug testing held by the Prison Service. There is no reason to suppose, from the work completed so far, that the statistical information for the period from April 1996 is other than broadly accurate.

Once the exercise is complete, the Prison Service expects to be in a position to provide reliable information on performance against the key indicator for the period April 1996. However, until such information is available, all previously published figures relating to the percentage of prisoners who test positive for drugs should be regarded as provisional.

In addition, no firm conclusions, including conclusions on any apparent trends on the use of drugs in prison, should be drawn from data relating to the first phase of the mandatory drugs testing programme—February 1995 to March 1996—since not all establishments were involved and some differences in testing protocols were in place. We are not yet in a position to say whether the use of cannabis has declined since mandatory drug testing was introduced. It remains the case that there is no clear evidence of switching from cannabis to opiates or vice versa.

This answer should be taken as correcting any inadvertently misleading statements which may have been made in relation to mandatory drug testing statistics.

Curfew Orders

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to continue the trials of curfew orders with electronic monitoring after March 1997. [21671]

Mr. Howard: I have decided to continue the existing trials in Berkshire, Manchester and Norfolk until March 1998.

Dogs (Tail Docking)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what regulations govern the tail docking of dogs; and if he will make a statement. [20957]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 was amended in 1991 to remove the right of non-veterinarians to dock dogs' tails. Since July 1993, it has been an offence for a person other than a veterinary surgeon to dock a dog's tail for any reason.

DEFENCE

Security Vetting

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for personnel security vetting within his Department. [21674]

Mr. Soames: On 1 April 1997, the three single service vetting units and part of the Directorate of Headquarters Security will be brought together to form the Defence Vetting Agency. The aim of the agency is to provide an acceptable level of assurance as to the integrity of personnel in the armed forces, the MOD and defence industry who are given authorised access to sensitive Government information or valuable assets. In addition, the agency will undertake vetting work for other Government Departments on a repayment basis.

The DVA will have a staff of about 350, all civilians, located mainly in Portsmouth, Woolwich, Wiltshire and central London. The assistant under-secretary of state, security and support, will be the owner of the DVA on behalf of the Secretary of State. The owner will set the strategic direction of the DVA and the policy and standards to be followed.

The DVA chief executive, a member of the senior civil service appointed by open competition, will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the agency. The chief executive has been set the following key targets:

Quality

1. By internal validation, to show at least 95 per cent. compliance with quality standards and procedures.

2. By 31 March 1998, to have developed and agreed the means of externally validating the quality of the agency outputs, and determined and set targets for subsequent improvement.

Quantity

3. To meet all in-year requests for vetting, within the quantities represented in the defence vetting programme.

Timeliness

4. To complete 85 per cent. of security checks and counter terrorist checks within the six-week time scale set out in departmental instructions.

5. To complete 95 per cent. of requests for developed vetting clearances within the six month time scale set out in departmental instructions.

Service delivery

6. To meet 95 per cent. of target dates for developed vetting clearances agreed with customers.

Efficiency

7. To demonstrate a 3 per cent. improvement in efficiency on operating costs in financial year 1997–98.

Management

8. To implement the customer group concept as a basis for future financial and management planning, within financial year 1997–98.

9. To implement an initial agency management information system by 1 October 1997.

Investors in people

10. In financial year 1997–98, to commit formally to the Investors in People programme and to complete the necessary in-year preliminary activities to ensure accreditation by May 1999.

Planning for the future

11. By 31 March 1998, to have designed the future vetting processes of the agency, and to have in place the costed plans to reorganise and collocate to implement the re-engineered processes.

I have arranged for copies of the agency's framework document and corporate plan to be placed in the Library of both Houses.

Trident

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current estimate of the cost of acquiring the Trident strategic weapon system, and if he will make a statement. [21672]

Mr. Portillo: The current estimate of the total acquisition cost of the Trident programme, with all expenditure, including payments already made, brought up to current prices and the exchange rate assumed in the latest long-term costing of the defence programme, is £12,570 million. If payments already made are expressed at the prices and exchange rates actually incurred, with future spend at current economic conditions, the estimate is now £9,955 million. Expenditure on Trident acquisition to 30 September 1996 represented some 86 per cent. of the latter estimate.

The revised estimate of £12,570 million represents a real cost reduction of £29 million since last year. The figures show a cash increase of £417 million, but inflation since last year adds £377 million and exchange rate charges add £69 million. The new total therefore reflects increased efficiency in delivering the programme. The programme also continues to show an overall reduction in real terms on its original 1982 estimate. This reduction, including the savings resulting from the decision to process missiles at the United States facility at Kings Bay, Georgia now stands at over £3.6 billion.

The proportion of the estimate for work undertaken in the United Kingdom is around 70 per cent.

I am pleased to confirm that HMS Vigilant, the third of the four planned Vanguard class submarines, was commissioned on time toward the end of last year and is now engaged in work-up trials. Progress with the fourth submarine, vengeance, also remains satisfactory. I am, as in previous years, sending to the Chairmen of the Public Accounts Committee and of the Select Committee on Defence a more detailed report on the programme. I am also placing a copy of this report in the Library of the House.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the report of the Office for Public Management on ethnic minority employment initiatives in his Department; and if he will make a statement. [21673]

Mr. Soames: I have today placed a copy of the Office for Public Management report in the Library of the House. The report covers a six-month review of both service and MOD civilian recruitment practices and makes a number of recommendations which have now been considered within my Department.

We accept the broad thrust of the report. While there are different messages for the armed forces and the MOD civil service in what the consultants found, there is much common ground, primarily concerning the development of goals in which ethnic diversity is a central theme. It is clear that, while some advances have been made, more can and should be undertaken, if the Department is to see an increase in the numbers of ethnic minority personnel employed in both the armed forces and the civil service in MOD.

My Department is committed to reflecting more closely the ethnic balance of the United Kingdom. This is an issue which must be met positively and which requires unambiguous leadership from those at the top of the armed forces and the civil service to ensure that, in the armed forces and MOD, all can work and realise their full potential without fear of racial prejudice, discrimination or harassment. All personnel have responsibilities for ensuring that greater efforts are made to remove any unacceptable attitudes and must, individually, play their part in ensuring that the Department and the services are seen by all as organisations in which racial equality is fully embraced.

RAF Training Group Defence Agency

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the change of the boundary of the RAF Training Group Defence Agency. [21675]

Mr. Soames: On 1 April 1997, the boundary of the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency will be enlarged to incorporate all of Royal Air Force personnel and training command assets and functions at Royal Air Force Cranwell, together with the non-operational training policy function previously undertaken by the command's headquarters. The changes better focus the air officer commanding-in-chief's responsibilities for training policy, delivery of training, recruitment and selection.

The rebrigading of assets and functions under the chief executive of the Training Group Defence Agency will deliver more coherent management and improved use of resources across a wider range of activities than hitherto. The result of the changes is a single defence agency responsible for the recruitment and selection of all Royal Air Force personnel and the policy and delivery of all Royal Air Force non-operational training.

The chief executive of the agency has been set the following targets for financial year 1997–98:

Key Target 1—Quality

Achievement of customer satisfaction with the quality of graduate trainees as reflected in customer advisory committee reports to the air officer commanding-in-chief. Target for 1997–98—95 per cent.

Key Target 2—Efficiency

To deliver the savings that accrue from the efficiencies agreed in long-term costings 1997, together with full cost items. Target for 1997–98—£8.258 million.

Key Target 3a—Quantity of Output (Flying Training)

The percentage of trained aircrew delivered against RAF requirements. Target for 1997–98—96 per cent.

Key Target 3b—Quantity of Output (Ground Training)

The percentage of trained personnel delivered against RAF requirements. Target for 1997–98—97 per cent.

Key Target 4—Human Resources

To implement the investors in people initiative. Target for 1997–98 implement at RAF College Cranwell, No. 1 RS RAF Locking, TDSU RAF Halton.

Key Target 5—Development of Output Costings and Unit Cost Measures

To undertake a cost attribution exercise which will contribute to the development of full output costings and associated unit cost and efficiency measures for the agency by financial year 2000–01. Target for 1997–98—completion of cost attribution exercise.

Low Flying

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the analysis of low-flying activity in the United Kingdom has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [21676]

Mr. Soames: The analysis has been completed, from which it is clear that, although close attention has been paid to the need to balance military training demands against the avoidance of undue disturbance to the public, variations in the intensity of such activity across the country still exist. Although this is, in part, unavoidable because of operational and geographic factors such as the location of aircraft operating bases, aircraft range, avoidance areas, controlled airspace and weather conditions, we concluded that, even within these constraints, further efforts should be made to manage the activity as equitably as possible.

We therefore intend to improve the way in which the overall amount of low-flying activity is managed and the methods by which detailed statistics are recorded. This latter initiative will be a valuable tool in monitoring the effectiveness of the measures to try to redistribute this activity more equitably. In addition, the three services, individually and collectively, will pay greater attention to the areas that they choose in the UK for military exercises in an effort to spread the low-flying training aspects of them as evenly as practicable. Last summer, we announced measures to spread operational low-flying—that beneath 250 ft—more evenly between the three tactical training areas. Efforts will continue to reduce still further the amount of operational low-flying training. The scope for increasing the amount of low-flying training carried out overseas will be actively pursued. A statement on the distribution of military low flying in the UK low-flying systems will be published annually.

I have today placed in the Library of the House a paper giving a more detailed account of the analysis of the distribution of low-flying activity in the UKLFS. Further copies of the paper can be obtained from the following address:

Ministry of Defence (Room 8247)

Main Building

Whitehall

London SW1A 2HB

Animal Welfare Advisory Committee

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answers of 19 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *503*, and 5 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *730*, when the first report of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee will be published. [21677]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee has now delivered its first report and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Procurement Contracts

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which defence procurement contracts have been awarded to companies in Lancashire since 1992. [13273]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Data held centrally on the contracts database focus on accountability of financial matters and do not include details of titles or descriptions of individual contracts. Nor is an address held, although a "location of work" code is recorded. There is no location of work code that conveniently covers Lancashire and a search of records which could include Lancashire based companies revealed over 8,000 contracts. To give the information asked for would require each of these records to be researched, which would incur disproportionate costs.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the European Commission concerning his proposal to have the replacement royal yacht built in a British shipyard; and if his proposal extends to all fixtures and fittings. [13657]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No discussions have been held with the European Commission. Security considerations will preclude the replacement royal yacht being designed or constructed outside of the United Kingdom. Fixtures and fittings could be procured from outside of the United Kingdom if this were consistent with security considerations and obtaining best value for money.

Royal Hospital, Halar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what considerations he is taking into account in his review of laundry services at the Royal hospital, Haslar; and what is the timetable for the further steps in the decision-making process. [19092]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Secondary Care Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Smith to Mr. Peter Viggers dated 20 March 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the future of the laundry services at the Royal Hospital, Haslar as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA).

You may recall from my earlier letter that the DSCA has been conducting a review to determine the best long-term means of providing laundry services at the Hospital. We have considered a range of factors, uppermost of which is service quality and cost. During that time we have consulted closely with the Trade Unions in accordance with established procedures. We have now completed a feasibility study and we hope to be able to make a formal announcement in the near future. In the meantime we have written separately to the local Trade Unions.

Personnel Statistics

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military personnel employed by his Department for each year since 1979. [21028]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of Defence Analytical Services Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from P. Altobell to Mr. Frank Field, dated 20 March 1997.

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding the number of (a) civilian and (b) military personnel employed by his Department for each year since 1979, as this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Defence Analytical Services Agency.

The figures are presented in the accompanying table. Please refer to the notes appended to the table.

I hope you will find this information helpful.

MoD personnel 1979 to 1997

	Civilian personnel				*Service personnel*			
As at	*All personnel*	*Total civilians*	*UK based*[1]	*Locally engaged civilans*	*Total service*	*UK regular forces*	*Locally entered personnel*	*Royal Irish Regiment*[2]
1 April 1979	616,863.0	285,904.0	247,700.0	38,204	330,959	314,991	8,368	7,600
1 April 1980	612,456.0	276,242.0	239,800.0	36,442	336,214	320,625	8,189	7,400
1 April 1981	615,788.0	264,903.0	229,600.0	35,303	350,885	333,755	9,730	7,400
1 April 1982	596,623.0	251,695.0	216,900.0	34,795	344,928	327,647	10,081	7,200
1 April 1983	580,580.0	242,745.0	208,900.0	33,845	337,835	320,623	10,112	7,100
1 April 1984	575,179.0	232,461.0	199,100.0	33,361	342,718	325,909	10,109	6,700
1 April 1985	549,320.0	206,497.0	174,077.0	32,420	342,823	326,217	10,206	6,400
1 April 1986	540,815.5	201,704.5	169,462.5	32,242	339,111	322,510	10,101	6,500
1 April 1987	532,285.5	196,078.5	164,002.5	32,076	336,207	319,849	9,758	6,600
1 April 1988	507,767.5	175,145.5	143,394.5	31,751	332,622	316,895	9,427	6,300
1 April 1989	499,574.0	172,553.0	141,317.0	31,236	327,021	311,649	9,072	6,300
1 April 1990	493,241.5	172,311.5	141,372.5	30,939	320,930	305,711	9,019	6,200
1 April 1991	482,359.0	169,135.0	140,199.0	28,936	313,224	298,065	9,059	6,100
1 April 1992	474,909.0	166,494.0	139,454.0	27,040	308,415	293,444	8,971	6,000
1 April 1993	444,501.5	155,850.5	129,225.5	26,625	288,651	274,849	8,167	5,635
1 April 1994	409,413.0	142,289.0	121,558.0	20,731	267,124	254,488	7,238	5,398
1 April 1995	377,042.0	133,229.0	116,140.0	17,089	243,813	233,340	5,218	5,255
1 April 1996	359,152.0	126,734.0	109,858.0	16,876	232,418	222,417	5,035	4,966
1 January 1997[3]	351,592.0	126,508.0	109,632.0	16,876[4]	225,084	215,326	4,924	4,834

[1] Part time UK based civilians counted as 0.5 prior to 1995. Since 1995, they are counted as the proportion of full-time hours worked.

[2] Includes the Ulster Defence Regiment for figures up to 1 April 1992.

[3] January 1997 Army strengths include 95 reservist officers and 1,011 reservist soldiers currently mobilised for service in the former Yugoslavia.

[4] Figure unavailable for January 1997, April 1996 figure used.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the numbers of civilian personnel employed by his Department who were permanently attached to each of the British Army bases in the United Kingdom and engaged in their administration for each year since 1979; and if he will publish a breakdown for each base. [21029]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* Royal Navy and *(b)* Army bases and other establishments in Yorkshire and Humberside in April 1992, indicating for each the number of (i) service and (ii) civilian personnel employed (1) at that date and (2) currently; and if he will list the dates of all subsequent closures of those establishments. [21109]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available, based on 1 April 1996 data, is as follows:

Location	*Service*	*Civilian*
Royal Navy sites		
HMS Forestmoor, Harrogate		
Army Sites		
Albion Street, Hull		
Alanbrooke Barracks, Thirsk		
Bailey Barracks, Sheffield		
Borough Road, Middlesborough		
Brambles Farm, Middlesborough		
Catterick Garrison		
Churchill Barracks, Leeds		
Claro Barracks, Rippon		
Coldyhill Lane, Scarborough		
Deverell Barracks, Ripon		
Dishforth, Thirsk		
Fulford Road, York		
Harwewood Barracks, Leeds		
Hildebrand Barracks, Harrogate		
Londesborough Barracks, Hull		
Lumley Barracks, York		
Marne Barracks, Richmond		
Middleton Barracks, Hull		
Mona House, Hull		
Norbury Hall, Sheffield		
Normandy Barracks, Beverley		
Old Carlton Barracks, Leeds		
Queen Elizabeth Barracks, York		
Ridgeway Road, Middlesborough		
Ripon, Lavericks		
Rowlston Road, Hornsea		
Scarbrough Barracks, Doncaster		
Shelley House, York		
Somme Barracks, Sheffield		
Stockton Road, Middlesborough		
Thornbury Barracks, Pudsey		
Trinity Church Square, Richmond		
Wakefield Road, Pontefract		
Wathgill Camp, Richmond		
Wellesley Park, Halifax		
Wenlock Barracks, Hull		
Other Royal Navy and Army sites		
CIO Leeds		
CIO Sheffield		
CIO Hull		
TA Centre Barnsley		
TA Centre Batley		
TA Centre Bradford		
TA Centre Doncaster		
TA Centre Pontefract		
TA Centre Rotherham		
TA Centre Scunthorpe		
TA Centre Sheffield		
TA Centre Sheffield		
TA Centre Wakefield		
Total	8,219	3,087

1. MOD Service and civilian numbers exclude contractors personnel.
2. Recent site closures include: Colburn barracks, Catterick; district workshops, Strensall; Driffield camp, Nr Beverley; Uniacke barracks, Harrogate and Hildebrande barracks, Harrogate.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Ministers were first informed of the contents of the briefing note for researchers on "Pesticide Use in the Persian Gulf War" issued by Lieutenant John Graham of the medical services directorate. [19954]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* MOD Ministers were first made aware of the existence of the briefing note for researchers No. 3 entitled "Pesticide Use in the Persian Gulf War" on 26 September 1996.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Ministers were first informed of the evidence of Major Christopher Irven of the extent of the use of organophosphate pesticides during the Gulf war. [19956]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* I am not aware that my Department has received any evidence from Major Christopher Irven concerning the use of organophosphate pesticides during the Gulf war.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Ministers were first informed of the evidence of Major Christine Lloyd on the extent of use of organophosphate pesticides during the Gulf war. [19935]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* I am not aware that the Ministry of Defence has received any evidence from Major Christine Lloyd concerning the use of organophosphate pesticides during the Gulf war.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Ministers were first informed of the evidence of Staff Sergeant Anthony Worthington of the extent of use of organophosphate pesticides during the Gulf war. [19951]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* Ministers first became aware of the post-operational report dated March 1991, drawn up by Staff Sergeant Anthony Worthington, on 7 October 1996, following press reports on 6 October 1996.

Operation Granby

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Royal Army Medical Corps specialist environmental team served in Operation Granby; and what assessment he has made of the general health of these personnel. [19094]

Mr. Soames: A total of 38 Royal Army Medical Corps environmental health personnel were deployed to the Gulf during operation Granby. No specific assessment has been

made of their subsequent state of health. As with all Gulf veterans, if any of these environmental health personnel believe that they are ill as a result of their service in the Gulf, they are entitled to be examined by the MOD's medical assessment programme.

Departmental Documents (Vote Office)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many official documents published by his Department, including those published in co-operation with outside organisations, were not made available to hon. Members through the Vote Office in each of the last three years; and for what reasons the document "British Defence Doctrine" was not made available. [19111]

Mr. Soames: Details of all such documents are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is not therefore possible to give a number not placed in the Vote Office. Copies of "British Defence Doctrine" were placed in the Libraries of both Houses—including some additional copies—and separate copies were sent to those right hon. and hon. Members believed to have a particular interest in the document. A small number of copies was provided to the Vote Office in response to requests from individual hon. Members.

The normal minimum number of copies of documents provided to the Vote Office is 100. Our decision whether or not to place this number of any document in the Vote Office depends on a number of factors, including the relevance to parliamentary proceedings, the likely level of interest and thus potential waste, and previous practice in relation to similar documents.

Organophosphates

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* instances of disciplinary procedure have been initiated and *(b)* individuals have been informed that they may be subject to disciplinary action in (i) the civil service, (ii) defence or other agencies and (iii) the military as a result of the organophosphate pesticides investigation team report and further investigations. [19357]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *550*, if he will place in the Library copies of the documents on organophosphates then requested. [19203]

Mr. Soames: No, for the reasons states in my answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *550*.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Ministers were first informed of the contents of Health and Safety Executive guidance note MS17 on the biological monitoring of workers exposed to organophosphate pesticides. [19955]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* I am not aware of any occasion on which the contents of Health and Safety Executive guidance note MS17, on the biological monitoring of workers exposed to organophosphoros pesticides, have been specifically brought to the attention of Ministry of Defence Ministers.

British Defence Advisory Team

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which countries were visited by elements of the British defence advisory team in 1991. [20634]

Mr. Soames: During 1991, the United Arab Emirates was the only country visited by elements of the British defence advisory team.

Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to privatise the Army Base Storage and Redistribution Agency; and if he will make a statement. [20998]

Mr. Soames: There are no proposals at this present time to privatise ABSDA. However, as the hon. Member will be aware, ABSDA is required to make efficiencies and improve cost-effectiveness. To this end we have launched a programme of market testing under the Government's "Competing for Quality" initiative.

The CFQ programme embraces the activities of the three functional divisions of ABDSA which deal with vehicles and fuels, ammunition and stores. The programme is currently under way and its findings are as yet unknown but will be reported as soon as they are available.

Overseas Training and Advice (Costs)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to his Department in 1991 of providing overseas *(a)* short-term training teams, *(b)* advisory visits and *(c)* service personnel. [20999]

Mr. Soames: The costs of many of the short-term training teams and loan service personnel deployed overseas are met by the host countries or by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, while those of defence export advisory visits are met by UK companies on occasions when they specifically request military support. Records of costs are not maintained by calendar year. However, according to available records, in financial year 1991–92, the net cost to the Department of providing short-term training teams was £116,000 and of providing loan service personnel was £2.129 million. In 1991, detailed records of the cost of defence export advisory visits were not maintained. However, on the basis of the information available, costs to the Department are estimated to have been in the region of £146,080. All costs are at historic prices.

Ministerial Visits (Saudi Arabia)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the official visits to Saudi Arabia made by Ministers in his Department since May 1979, stating in each case the dates and purpose of the visit. [19560]

Mr. Soames: For the period April 1993 to February 1996, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) on 1 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *767*. According to our records, the following visits have since been made to Saudi Arabia:

Secretary of State Defence (Mr. Portillo) March 1996.

Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Soames) April 1996.

Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Soames) October 1996.

The purpose of these visits was the promotion of our important bilateral relations.

Records of ministerial visits prior to April 1993 are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Defence Co-operation Accord (United Arab Emirates)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the defence co-operation accord signed in November 1996 with the Government of the United Arab Emirates. [20274]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The defence co-operation accord is confidential between the two Governments. I am therefore withholding the document under exemption 1b of the code of practice on access to government information. However, the scope of the accord was outlined in the Secretary of State for Defence's answer to the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) of 28 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *388*.

Army Vehicle Depot, Ashchurch

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) if the present number of civilian staff will continue to be employed at the Army vehicle depot at Ashchurch, through to April 1998; [21172]

(2) how many vehicles are currently at the Army vehicle depot at Ashchurch. [21170]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Foxton to Mr. Paul Murphy, dated 20 March 1997:

I am replying to the recent questions you tabled to the Secretary of State for Defence as this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA). You asked if the present number of civilian staff will continue to be employed at the Army Vehicle Depot at Ashchurch, through to April 1998. You also asked how many vehicles are currently at the Depot.

At present 217 people are employed at the Base Vehicle Depot (BVD) Ashchurch. There will be retirements (both forecasted and unforecasted) and there may be small scale efficiency measures which reduce this figure somewhat but, according to the information I have to hand, the Ashchurch staffing level should remain at about its current level until April 1998.

Lastly, at 18 March 97, there are 6974 vehicles stored in BVD Ashchurch. I trust this has answered your questions satisfactorily.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will assess the extent of intelligence acquired by NATO from asylum seekers currently facing the threat of deportation from Germany to Russia, Belarus and Ukraine; and if he will discuss the value of that intelligence with his German counterpart. [21323]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no indication that any intelligence reports from asylum seekers were acquired by NATO.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will request that a search be made of NATO files to establish what promises of asylum were made to asylum seekers in Germany in the course of interrogations by intelligence officers reporting to NATO. [21315]

Mr. Soames: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the proportion of asylum seekers arriving in a NATO member state from *(a)* Eastern Europe and *(b)* elsewhere who are interrogated on behalf of NATO or one of its member states. [21325]

Mr. Soames: No such estimate has been made.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many asylum seekers now resident in Germany were interrogated for military information by officers of the British armed forces or officers of British military intelligence. [21324]

Mr. Soames: I am withholding this information under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to government information, in relation to defence security and international relations.

Hercules Aircraft

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training exercises in Wiltshire involving Hercules aircraft have been cancelled or postponed this month; and for what reasons. [21032]

Mr. Soames: The tactical air landing element of Exercise Lanyard 3, scheduled to take place at Keevil, Wiltshire between 15 and 16 March, was cancelled as a key participating unit of 5 airborne brigade was placed on operational standby. Hercules aircraft from RAF Lyneham are, however, supporting the land element of the exercise with re-supply drops.

Warrant Officer Ray Bristow

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each of the vaccinations given to Warrant Officer Ray Bristow, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, during his service in the Gulf conflict in 1991. [21140]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Menwith Hill RAF Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the agreements which will cover the United States military occupation of Menwith Hill station after 30 May; and if he will make a statement. [21185]

Mr. Soames: RAF Menwith Hill continues to be made available for the use of US visiting forces on the same basis as other RAF sites in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what branches of the United States military will continue to occupy Menwith Hill station after 30 May. [21184]

Mr. Soames: Personnel from all four branches of the US armed services—Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps—will continue to be based at RAF Menwith Hill.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what terms the United States army occupation of Menwith Hill station has been terminated. [21220]

Mr. Soames: The US army presence at RAF Menwith Hill has not been terminated, nor are there any plans for it to withdraw from the station.

Careers Information Offices

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Army careers information office in Micklegate, York to close. [21111]

Mr. Soames: The Army careers information office at Micklegate, York was due to close in April 1996. However, the office, together with a number of others, was retained as part of an initiative to increase recruiting. There are currently no plans to close the York office.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of each *(a)* Royal Navy and *(b)* Royal Air force careers information office functioning in Yorkshire and Humberside since 1990, indicating the dates on which they were opened and of subsequent closures. [21110]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Royal Navy

Office	*Date opened*	*Date closed*
Hull	8 February 1967	Still open
Leeds	25 March 1958	1995 (Now opened as a tri-Service AFCO)
Sheffield	1964	Still open

Royal Air Force

Office	*Date opened*	*Date closed*
Bradford	2 January 1959	1 December 1995
Grimsby	Pre 1989 (date u/k)	3 March 1995
Huddersfield	23 March 1960	31 March 1995
Hull	8 February 1967	Still open
Leeds	31 March 1950	1995 (Now opened as a tri-Service AFCO)
Sheffield	26 December 1964	Still open
York	30 September 1971	8 May 1996

AFCO = Armed Forces Careers Office.

Navy and Air Force Manpower

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the shortfall at 1 March in the manpower strengths of *(a)* the Royal Navy and *(b)* the Royal Air Force. [21144]

Mr. Soames: The shortfall in manpower strength of the Royal Air Force on 1 March 1997 was 1,588 trained personnel. Manpower figures for the Royal Navy for 1 March are not yet available. As at 1 February 1997 the naval service, including Royal Marines, had shortages of 1,586 trained personnel.

NATO Enlargement

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of his study on the costs of NATO enlargement, "Lines to Draw On"; and if he will make a statement. [21349]

Mr. Soames: It is not clear to me to which particular document the hon. Member's question refers. The position on the study of the resource implications of NATO enlargement was set out in my answer to the hon. Member of 11 February, *Official Report*, columns *90–91*.

Tri-service Resettlement Organisation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total amount paid to consultants for the tri-service resettlement organisation in the last two years; what firms have been employed to provide this consultancy advice; what is this year's budget for the tri-service resettlement organisation; how much of the organisation's New Oxford street headquarters is currently unoccupied; what is the annual rental cost for the New Oxford street site; and if he will make a statement. [21142]

Mr. Soames: Some £1.01 million—excluding VAT—has been paid for consultancy advice to the tri-service resettlement organisation in the last two financial years: £0.658 million to Marshall Tanous plc for corporate marketing advice and services aimed at generating awareness of service leavers' potential amongst employers; and £0.353 million to the PA Consulting Group for assistance with the competing for quality initiative to improve the long-term value for money of resettlement services. Figures relating to the TSRO's annual budget are restricted pending the outcome of negotiations in the current tendering exercise associated with the CFQ study. The TSRO HQ, located in St. George's court, New Oxford street, is a building occupied by a number of MOD units. The TSRO currently occupies all its allocated space. The building is in the process of vacation by the Department and the TSRO will shortly be moving to alternative accommodation at St. Giles court. The rental cost of St. George's court is commercial-in-confidence, but is at low historic lease levels.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21210]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *613–14*.

Contracts (American Companies)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was *(a)* the total value and *(b)* the number of defence contracts placed with American companies in each of the last five years. [21143]

Mr. Arbuthnot: For the years 1994 and 1995, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 February 1996, *Official Report*, column 559. For the years 1992, 1993 and 1996, the total value and number of contracts placed where the work has been carried out in the USA is as follows:

	Number	*Value (£)*
1992	241	136,947,249
1993	211	89,071,488
1996	180	215,408,837

The figures for 1996 are not yet complete. Additions are made to the database for three months after the end of the year in question.

Retired Service Personnel

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to change the level of support available for the after care of people who have retired from the armed services. [21311]

Mr. Soames: Those people who have left the armed forces and their dependants are eligible to receive the full range of services provided by the social security system, the national health service and local authorities. In addition, following representation from the ex-service community, the Government are considering a proposal to establish an ex-service affairs unit.

Skyship 600

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current operational state of his Department's airship, Skyship 600; when this airship was first purchased; what was its original cost; for what reasons the airship ended operational use; and if he will make a statement. [21141]

Mr. Soames: The Department's Skyship 600 was purchased in June 1993 at a cost of approximately £2.6 million. An incident, which resulted in rupture of the envelope, occurred during a masting operation at the Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation site at Boscombe Down in May 1995 following a day's trial flying. The envelope has now been replaced and the airship recommenced trials flying in November 1996. It is planned to continue flying against the current programme until July 1997.

Air-to-air Missile

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning his Department's plans for the future medium range air-to-air missile. [21285]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No final decision has yet been reached but work is continuing to enable an announcement to be made on the way forward as soon as practicable.

Domestic Rabbits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances domestic rabbits are used in Royal Marines training; and if he will make a statement. [21100]

Mr. Soames: The only use made of rabbits is that some 200 per annum, which are not domestic but bought from sources which breed them commercially for meat, are killed in the course of teaching necessary military survival techniques to personnel training at the commando training centre Royal Marines, Lympstone.

Loan Service Personnel

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list those countries where loan service personnel were deployed in 1991. [20174]

Mr. Soames: According to available records, in 1991, British loan service personnel were deployed in the following countries:

Antigua
Australia
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belize
Bermuda
Brunei
Colombia
Dominica
Fiji
Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Hong Kong
Jordan
Kenya
Lesotho
Malaysia
Mauritius
Namibia
New Zealand
Nigeria
Oman
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Swaziland
Turks and Caicos Islands
United Arab Emirates
Zimbabwe.

The full records of exercises involving British service personnel in 1991 are not available. According to available records, British service personnel exercised in, or with, forces from the following countries and dependent territories in 1991.

Ascension Island
Australia
Bahamas
Bahrain
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda

Botswana
Brunei
Canada
Colombia
Cyprus
Denmark
Dominica
Falkland Islands
France
Germany
Gibraltar
Greece
Hawaii
Hong Kong
Italy
Jamaica
Jordan
Kenya
Kuwait
Luxembourg
Malaysia
Namibia
United Kingdom
Netherlands
Netherlands Antilles
New Zealand
Norway
Oman
Portugal
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
Spain
Sweden
Thailand
Trinidad and Tobago
turkey
UAE
United States.

In addition, UK forces exercised with the states of the regional security system and the West Indies guardship, as part of her routine deployment, would have exercised with many of the Caribbean countries and dependent territories.

Operational Information Systems

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the armed forces future operational information systems; and if he will make a statement. [21664]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Accurate and timely information is crucial to the success of the armed forces in a wide range of operations, from humanitarian aid missions to major conflict. The BOWMAN combat radio system will provide a significant increase in the capability of all three services to exchange operational information. The airborne stand-off radar system—ASTOR—will provide a substantial enhancement of capability by supplying commanders with near real-time surveillance information.

Competitive contracts for project definition of BOWMAN were placed in 1993 with two consortia, Crossbow, led by ITT UK Ltd., and Yeoman, led by Siemens Plessey Systems and Racal. PD work is now largely complete and equipment is being tested in field trials, which are due to end in April 1997. Following an evaluation of BOWMAN procurement options, we have decided to issue a request for proposals for initial production and support to Archer, a joint venture company which is being formed by the leaders of Crossbow and Yeoman. This approach will enable us to procure a highly capable system combining the most cost-effective elements of the Crossbow and Yeoman solutions. It will also offer the most timely way of meeting the BOWMAN requirement. Subject to receipt of an acceptable tender from the company and agreement of suitable contractual conditions, we would aim to let a contract by 1999, in order to meet the in-service date of 2002. It is expected that the contract will be worth in excess of £1 billion.

ASTOR will use highly capable new radar systems installed on fixed wing aircraft to provide both a wide area of coverage and a high degree of resolution. Following successful completion in August last year of a competitive project definition phase, proposals were received from consortia led by Lockheed Martin and Raytheon E-Systems, and including UK sub-contractors. Following a thorough assessment of these proposals and a detailed analysis of a number of other options, we have decided to invite the two consortia to submit best and final offers for the full development, production and in-service support of ASTOR. We aim to place a contract with the winning consortium in 1998. It is estimated that the contract will be worth in the region of £750 million.

ASTOR and BOWMAN will provide key enhancements to the capability of our armed forces and will provide UK industry with valuable, high technology work.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

A-levels (Derbyshire)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total number of students in Derbyshire passing two or more A-levels for each year since 1979. [18212]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 27 February 1997]:* The information is not readily available in the precise form requested. However, the following figures show the numbers of pupils who achieved two or more GCE A-levels in maintained schools in Derbyshire for each year since 1979. The figures for 1979 to 1991 relate to school leavers of any age in maintained schools and those

from 1992 onwards related to pupils in maintained schools aged 17 at the start of the academic year.

Year	Number of school leavers of any age achieving two or more GCE A-levels (Thousands)	As percentage of school leavers aged 17 and over	Number of 17 year old pupils in maintained schools achieving two or more GCE A-levels (Thousands)	As a percentage of 17 year old pupils
1979	1.4	76	—	—
1980	1.1	69	—	—
1981	1.2	71	—	—
1982	1.4	70	—	—
1983	1.6	69	—	—
1984	1.3	64	—	—
1985	1.4	65	—	—
1986	1.2	63	—	—
1987	1.3	70	—	—
1988	1.3	70	—	—
1989	1.3	73	—	—
1990	1.7	79	—	—
1991	0.9	73	—	—
1992	—	—	1.5	75
1993	—	—	1.6	73
1994	—	—	1.6	71
1995	—	—	1.6	75

Free School Meals

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will commission research into the relationship between the proportion of children in schools eligible for free school meals and the academic achievement of schools. [20486]

Mr. Robin Squire: No. There is sufficient analysis of pupil attainment categorised by proportionate eligibility for free school meals, as exemplified by the information published in Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's annual report for 1995–96.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens' charter. [20945]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* The information requested is shown in the following table.

Name of body	Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration	Audit Commission	National Audit Office	Open Government	Performance Indicators	Citizen's Charter[1]
Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Construction Industry Training Board	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Education Assets Board	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Equal Opportunities Commission	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Funding Agency for Schools	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Further Education Funding Council for England	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Higher Education Funding Council for England	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Investors in People UK	[2]No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
National Council for Educational Technology	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
National Council for Vocational Qualifications	[2]No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Remploy Ltd.	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
School Curriculum and Assessment Authority	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Student Loans Company	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Teacher Training Agency	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

[1] Whilst none of the Department's NDPBs is required to apply for a Charter Mark, the Department does encourage all executive NDPBs which provide a public service to operate according to Citizen's Charter principles.

[2] In previous responses to this question on 22 February 1996 and 25 April 1995, the Department stated that both NCVQ and IIP UK were subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. The Commissioner's Office has taken the view, in particular cases in the past, that these bodies could be considered to be acting "on behalf of" the Department which is subject to investigation by the Commissioner and that therefore under section 5 of the 1967 Parliamentary Commissioner Act those actions were subject to investigation by the Commissioner. However, the formal mechanism for bringing bodies within the jurisdiction of the Commissioner is by Order in Council amending schedule 2 to the Act. No such order has been made in respect of NCVQ or IIP UK, so as bodies themselves, they are not formally subject to investigation by the Commissioner. The Government have, however, made a commitment formally to bring all executive NDPBs within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, unless there are valid reasons, specific to the particular circumstances of the body, for excluding it.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and ifthis is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement, or (ii) voluntary. [20902]

Mr. Squire *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* The information requested is shown in the following table.

Name of body	Annual reports	Annual accounts	Minutes of meetings	Agendas of meetings	Register of interests
Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research	Yes	Yes	[1]Yes	No	No
Construction Industry Training board	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	Yes
Education Assets Board	No	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	No
Equal Opportunities Commission	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	No
Funding Agency for Schools	Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
Further Education Funding Council for England	Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
Higher Education Funding Council for England	Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
Investors in People UK	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
National Council for Educational Technology	Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
National Council for Vocational Qualifications	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	No
Remploy Ltd.	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
School Curriculum and Assessment Authority	Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
Student Loans Company	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
Teacher Training Agency	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	[1]Yes	[1]Yes	[1]Yes

[1] Available for inspection at the NDPB's offices.
[2] Statutory.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will, after consultation with the relevant local authority organisations, estimate the additional administrative costs to local education authorities arising from the scheme of vouchers for pre-school education. [21224]

Mr. Robin Squire: The nursery education voucher scheme has been designed to keep administration costs for local education authorities to a minimum. It is not anticipated, therefore, that such costs will be significant or that information relating to such costs will be collected.

Training and Enterprise Funding

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what public funds were provided to training and enterprise councils and chambers of commerce, training and enterprise in 1996–97. [21016]

Mr. Paice: The public funds made available to training and enterprise councils and chambers of commerce training and enterprise in England by my Department for 1996–97 amounted to £1.484 billion. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment also provide TECS/CCTEs with additional Government funding.

The responsibility for TECs/CCTEs in Wales lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people were on *(a)* YT/youth credits and *(b)* modern apprenticeships, (i) on average in the last year for which figures are available and (ii) at the last date for which figures are available. [21018]

Mr. Paice: On average in 1996, there were 225,000 on youth training youth credits in England and Wales in December 1996, there were 232,000 people on youth training youth credits.

On average in 1996, there were 41,000 on modern apprenticeships in England and Wales. In December 1996, there were 67,000 people on modern apprenticeships.

Youth Training

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of youth training trainees currently have employed status. [21019]

Mr. Paice: In December 1996, there were 232,000 on youth training in England and Wales, of which 57 per cent. had employed status.

Primary Schools

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to allow parents of primary school children increased opportunities to view their child's school work and progress. [21023]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government's reforms have ensured that parents are better informed about the performance of primary schools, most recently through the publication of performance tables, and about their own child's progress at primary school. All parents must receive a written report on their child at least once a year. This must describe the arrangements for discussing the report with the teachers concerned.

Education Spending, Barnet

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will make a statement on the increase in Barnet's education standard spending assessment in 1997–98; [21078]

(2) if she will make a statement on the *(a)* amount and *(b)* percentage of Barnet local education authority's education budget spent centrally; and what are the average national figures. [21080]

Mr. Robin Squire: Barnet's 1997–98 education standard spending assessment is £119.1 million which, after adjustments are made to take account of the nursery voucher scheme, represents a year on year increase of some £5.3 million or 4.6 per cent.

It is up to local authorities to set their education budgets within the resources at their disposal, and capping limits. Barnet's 1996–97 education budget was £126.5 million, which was 8.1 per cent. above its education SSA—£117 million. Nationally, local authorities set their 1996–97 education budgets at an average of 4.0 per cent.

above their education SSAs. Details of local authorities' final expenditure on education in the current year are not yet available.

Pupil Costs

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was education spending per pupil in *(a)* 1975 and *(b)* currently expressed in (i) cash terms and (ii) constant price terms. [21292]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows in both cash and real terms—1996–97 prices—the net institutional expenditure per pupil in LEA-maintained schools, in 1979–80 and 1995–96, the latest year for which data are available.

	Pre-primary/primary		*Secondary*		*Combined*	
	Cash terms	*Real terms*	*Cash terms*	*Real terms*	*Cash terms*	*Real terms*
Year	£	£	£	£	£	£
1979–80	429	1,128	607	1,596	513	1,348
1995–96[1]	1,629	1,670	2,286	2,343	1,909	1,957

[1] These figures exclude grant-maintained schools.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the status of the report produced by the steering committee on the special educational needs initiative; what is her Department's policy in respect of each of the recommendations; and what action she *(a)* has taken to date and *(b)* proposes to take. [2117]

Mrs. Gillan: The SEN initiative is a consortium of local education authoritiess in England and Wales, established by the Society of Education Officers in order to facilitate a national study into the management of LEA budgets for pupils with special educational needs. The first phase report, prepared by Coopers and Lybrand in consultation with a wide range of interests, offers guidance to participating LEAs; the second phase, now under way, is focused on the management of SEN budgets at school level. The Department has contributed £5,000 in 1996 and 1997 towards the costs of the study, and is represented on the steering committee for the initiative. It is for LEAs to consider the implications of the report, but we welcome the way in which the initiative has highlighted important issues for LEAs seeking to maximise the effectiveness of the resources devoted to children with special educational needs.

National Learning Line

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) which organisations expressed an interest in tendering for the national learning line but were not invited to do so; [21286]

(2) which organisations were invited to tender for the national learning line. [21287]

Mr. Paice: The contract to run the national learning line is being competitively tendered. The commercial best practice adopted by the Government in such circumstances means that we cannot reveal details of the companies involved in the competition.

Expenditure, Devon

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the expenditure on *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* capital projects in Devon in each of the last five years. [21340]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows gross expenditure for LEA-maintained (a) pre-primary, primary and (b) secondary schools by Devon local education authority from 1991–92, to 1995–96; and capital expenditure by the LEA over the period 1991–92 to 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available. All figures are in cash terms, and have not been adjusted for any change of function.

£ million

	Pre-primary/primary	*Secondary*
Gross expenditure		
1991–92	108.246	121.895
1992–93	133.657	141.874
1993–94	123.575	130.781
1994–95	132.111	135.599
1995–96	132.679	133.933
Capital expenditure		
1991–92	19.370	9.779
1992–93	10.296	12.762
1993–94	9.691	13.499
1994–95	12.099	9.721

Hunting (Jobs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will estimate the number of jobs dependent on *(a)* fox hunting, *(d)* deer hunting and *(c)* hare coursing. [21113]

Mr. Paice: The sectors involved are very small. For that reason we can make no reliable estimates of the number of jobs dependent on fox hunting, deer hunting and hare coursing. Government statistics do not promote such detailed information. However, the Department of the Environment is a member of the standing conference on countryside sports. A study produced for SCCS estimates around 60,000 full-time jobs are directly dependent on all countryside sports and a further 30,000 indirectly.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the post-tax surplus or deficit for each training and enterprise council for 1995–96. [21310]

Mr. Paice: The following table lists the post-tax surpluses or deficits incurred by training and enterprise councils in 1995–96. The figures are those shown in the audited statutory accounts lodged at Companies House.

TECs are allowed to generate surpluses and create reserves by subcontracting training at a lower unit price than that negotiated with the Department. Surpluses are used by TECs on activities in support of their corporate and business plan objectives which are agreed with Government. Examples of the use of these funds include the provision of additional opportunities within existing DfEE programmes; matching funding for single regeneration budget or European-funded projects; training, enterprise or economic development initiatives agreed with TECs' local communities; and topping up reserves where they are insufficient to meet cash flow and other fluctuations.

TECs/CCTEs by region
Post tax operating surplus/(deficit)

	1995–96 £
Northern	
County Durham	(646,364)
Northumberland	475,842
Teesside	437,000
Tyneside	2,101,000
Sunderland (Wearside)	1,590,984
	3,958,462
Merseyside	
CEWTEC	897,592
Merseyside	(2,867,096)
St. Helens	(293,520)
	(2,263,024)
North west	
Bolton/Bury	(238,453)
Manchester	560,301
METRO	213,325
Oldham	102,240
Rochdale	138,448
South and East Cheshire	1,322,376
Stockport and High Peak	(48,248)
Cumbria	422,291
ELTEC	(74,614)
LAWTEC	(337,754)
NORMID	539,256
	2,599,168
Yorkshire and the Humberside	
Barnsley/Doncaster	2,552,000
Bradford	(436,245)
Calderdale and Kirklees	97,846
Humberside	419,280
Leeds	207,287
North Yorkshire	(132,000)
Rotherham	1,074,660
Sheffield	788,000
Wakefield	500,611
	5,071,439
Eastern	
Bedfordshire	392,006
Cambridgeshire	378,209
Essex	2,459,798
Greater Peterborough	(75,628)
Hertfordshire	520,000
Norfolk and Waveney	1,372,000
Suffolk	1,158,123
	6,204,508
East Midlands	
Greater Nottingham	817,000
Leicester	1,252,154
Lincolnshire	652,071
Northamptonshire	443,441

TECs/CCTEs by region
Post tax operating surplus/(deficit)

	1995–96 £
North Derbyshire	138,008
North Nottinghamshire	280,867
South Derbyshire	642,000
	4,225,541
West Midlands	
Birmingham	1,013,000
Central England	255,810
Coventry/Warwick	976,966
Dudley	(277,643)
HAWTEC	309,857
Sandwell	385,104
Shropshire	497,489
Staffordshire	385,000
Walsall	563,982
Wolverhampton	161,000
	4,270,565
South West	
Westec	341,000
Devon/Cornwall	(620,000)
Dorset	(264,911)
Gloucester	980,410
Somerset	(48,000)
Wiltshire	28,106
	416,605
London	
AZTEC	884,679
CENTEC	(22,482)
CILNTEC	54,123
LETEC	2,505,452
North London	802,634
North West London	1,051,535
SOLOTEC	2,575,000
West London	1,383,308
	9,234,249
South East	
Hampshire	(1,077,933)
Wight	140,565
Kent	1,385,448
Milton Keynes North Bucks	222,758
Heart of England	(352,446)
Surrey	(56,808)
Sussex	(960,000)
Thames Valley Enterprise	333,309
	365,107
Grand total	33,352,406

Secondary School Pupils

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each English local education authority, the expenditure per secondary school pupil for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [21312]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table sets out for each LEA in England the net institutional expenditure per pupil in LEA maintained secondary schools for the years 1991–92 to 1995–96, the latest year for which data are available.

Net Institutional Expenditure per pupil
LEA Maintained Secondary Schools

Cash terms

	1991–92 £	1992–93 £	1993–94 £	1994–95 £	1995–96 £
Corporation of London	0	0	0	0	0
Camden	2,432	2,726	2,716	2,790	2,888
Greenwich	2,296	2,497	2,583	2,772	2,768
Hackney	2,799	3,014	2,617	3,138	2,963
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,739	3,105	3,329	3,316	3,328
Islington	2,938	4,792	3,005	2,657	2,941
Kensington and Chelsea	3,200	3,061	3,266	3,327	3,602
Lambeth	2,978	2,800	3,296	3,782	3,859
Lewisham	2,376	2,534	2,614	2,677	2,765
Southwark	2,460	2,506	2,421	2,681	2,840
Tower Hamlets	2,946	3,352	3,157	3,194	3,206
Wandsworth	3,275	3,212	2,795	3,053	2,953
City of Westminster	2,444	2,486	2,739	2,825	2,863
Barking	2,254	2,347	2,355	2,353	2,473
Barnet	2,326	2,615	2,952	2,415	2,533
Bexley	2,058	2,121	2,341	2,232	2,291
Brent	2,490	2,425	1,835	2,033	2,418
Bromley	2,442	2,377	2,280	2,231	1,851
Croydon	2,373	2,369	2,309	2,165	2,543
Ealing	2,836	2,026	2,575	2,457	2,477
Enfield	2,321	2,267	2,531	2,359	2,367
Haringey	2,650	2,897	3,041	2,986	3,018
Harrow	2,373	2,614	2,439	2,598	2,660
Havering	2,255	2,364	2,290	2,570	2,622
Hillingdon	2,625	2,686	2,670	2,625	2,624
Hounslow	2,161	2,419	2,282	2,582	2,535
Kingston upon Thames	2,473	2,663	2,284	2,518	2,374
Merton	2,622	2,679	2,463	2,663	2,593
Newham	2,470	2,629	2,563	2,623	2,546
Redbridge	2,308	2,337	2,526	2,553	2,510
Richmond upon Thames	2,114	2,285	2,280	2,373	2,431
Sutton	2,161	2,036	1,978	2,514	2,480
Waltham Forest	2,622	2,454	2,526	2,395	2,736
Birmingham	2,151	2,341	2,330	2,356	2,555
Coventry	2,116	2,382	2,469	2,418	2,477
Dudley	2,126	2,072	2,098	2,205	2,175
Sandwell	2,277	2,340	2,349	2,244	2,362
Solihull	2,126	2,223	2,217	2,225	2,241
Walsall	2,108	2,216	2,281	2,314	2,158
Wolverhampton	2,354	2,407	2,300	2,341	2,460
Knowsley	2,296	2,298	2,243	2,227	2,259
Liverpool	2,356	2,375	2,613	2,603	2,406
St. Helens	2,104	2,357	2,315	2,247	2,063
Sefton	2,017	2,232	2,204	2,227	2,304
Wirral	2,113	2,418	2,299	2,294	2,323
Bolton	2,132	2,280	2,119	2,617	2,287
Bury	1,900	1,970	1,979	2,032	2,081
Manchester	2,285	2,426	2,328	2,435	2,305
Oldham	2,261	2,474	2,278	2,293	2,294
Rochdale	2,134	2,182	1,974	2,225	2,275
Salford	2,192	2,113	2,215	2,151	2,226
Stockport	2,135	2,288	2,310	2,152	2,225
Tameside	2,100	2,170	2,095	2,046	2,010
Trafford	2,107	2,279	2,156	2,319	2,433
Wigan	2,288	2,286	2,141	2,130	2,307
Barnsley	2,043	2,151	2,101	2,102	2,089
Doncaster	1,997	2,182	2,022	2,025	2,292
Rotherham	2,151	2,285	2,271	2,220	2,211
Sheffield	2,181	2,212	2,119	2,110	2,182
Bradford	1,796	1,822	1,969	2,041	2,030
Calderdale	2,010	2,163	2,162	2,104	2,485
Kirklees	2,056	2,200	2,207	2,256	2,258
Leeds	1,979	2,397	2,164	2,223	2,259

Net Institutional Expenditure per pupil
LEA Maintained Secondary Schools

Cash terms

	1991–92 £	1992–93 £	1993–94 £	1994–95 £	1995–96 £
Wakefield	2,113	2,073	2,150	2,046	2,055
Gateshead	2,117	2,283	2,252	2,257	2,250
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,066	2,133	2,187	2,314	2,346
North Tyneside	2,075	2,219	1,995	2,145	2,201
South Tyneside	2,041	2,197	1,948	2,062	2,096
Sunderland	2,047	2,137	2,114	2,142	2,228
Isles of Scilly	4,161	5,040	4,415	4,484	4,347
Avon	2,048	2,277	2,288	2,336	2,426
Bedfordshire	2,036	2,170	2,103	2,231	2,163
Berkshire	2,156	2,227	2,214	2,238	2,211
Buckinghamshire	2,095	2,118	2,286	2,256	2,288
Cambridgeshire	2,023	2,243	1,956	2,160	2,172
Cheshire	2,106	2,072	2,106	2,176	2,147
Cleveland	2,111	2,515	2,129	2,172	2,139
Cornwall	1,957	2,132	2,160	2,202	2,229
Cumbria	2,175	2,306	2,216	2,034	2,287
Derbyshire	2,199	2,310	2,214	2,290	2,234
Devon	2,004	2,164	2,157	2,203	2,187
Dorset	1,922	2,097	2,065	2,061	2,067
Durham	2,020	2,064	2,114	2,122	2,072
East Sussex	2,018	2,233	2,270	2,359	2,395
Essex	2,274	2,138	2,286	2,321	2,325
Gloucestershire	1,757	2,203	2,084	1,937	2,082
Hampshire	2,132	2,248	2,180	2,177	2,210
Hereford and Worcester	1,961	2,116	2,038	2,063	2,055
Hertfordshire	2,237	2,263	2,245	2,264	2,366
Humberside	2,065	2,228	2,257	2,304	2,313
Isle of Wight	1,937	2,081	2,027	2,030	2,085
Kent	2,075	1,999	2,079	2,276	2,343
Lancashire	2,225	2,320	2,347	2,345	2,268
Leicestershire	2,253	2,219	2,263	2,274	2,269
Lincolnshire	2,081	2,174	2,322	2,384	2,412
Norfolk	2,116	2,177	2,309	2,342	2,319
North Yorkshire	2,152	2,260	2,187	2,180	2,224
Northamptonshire	1,970	2,093	2,125	2,265	2,163
Northumberland	1,964	1,871	2,083	1,944	1,990
Nottinghamshire	2,492	2,346	2,381	2,396	2,333
Oxfordshire	2,108	2,212	2,191	2,285	2,199
Shropshire	2,349	2,509	2,354	2,413	2,384
Somerset	1,951	2,220	2,138	2,113	2,212
Staffordshire	2,045	2,088	2,078	2,104	2,061
Suffolk	1,698	2,393	2,190	2,182	2,165
Surrey	2,202	2,293	2,215	2,234	2,260
Warwickshire	2,090	2,126	2,420	2,349	2,225
West Sussex	2,085	2,125	2,467	2,240	2,239
Wiltshire	1,947	2,268	2,379	2,125	2,251

Musicians

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the relationship between the number of places for educating musicians in the United Kingdom and the job opportunities for musicians; and what plans she has to review the present position. [21115]

Mr. Forth: None. With the exception of a very small number of disciplines, the Government do not plan centrally the output of graduates. It is for individual universities and colleges to determine the allocation of places by subject in the light of demand from suitably qualified applicants, who in turn may be influenced by job opportunities.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he proposes to respond to the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee on the proposed changes to housing benefit regulations. [20954]

Mr. Lilley: I have received the Social Security Advisory Committee report. It recommended against proceeding without further research of the effects of existing measures on the housing market. In the event the Government do go ahead, the committee further recommended that the proposals should apply only to new claims and that certain accommodation for tenants who have been referred by the local authority or probation service should be exempt.

I have considered these recommendations carefully. I have decided not to accept them in the form in which they were presented, but to exempt from the single room rent determination severely disabled people who are entitled to severe disability premium and single claimants who have non-dependants residing with them.

I have today laid before Parliament the social security advisory committee's report and my response to it. I have also laid the regulations to give effect to the changes.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what projections his Department has made, and over what periods, of future levels of provision of accommodation matching the single room rent definition. [21130]

Mr. Roger Evans: The rental market is flexible and we believe it will respond to changes in demand arising from the application of the single room rent determinations. To encourage people who have spare rooms in their houses to let them out, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget, an increase to the current rent-a-room threshold of £3,250. From April, rental income of up to £4,250 will be exempt from tax.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the housing benefit costs in respect of the private rented sector in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97. [21132]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Estimated rent allowance expenditure

£ million

	1995–96	*'1996–97*
Housing association tenants	1,600	2,100
Other private sector tenants	3,850	3,900
Total rent allowance expenditure	5,450	5,900

Note:

' Figures are provisional and do not sum due to rounding.

Source:

1. Housing benefit management information system.
2. 1995–96 departmental report.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial and *(b)* other effects of (i) the Housing Benefit Regulations, S.I. 1996, No. 965, and (ii) the proposed housing benefit regulations restricting housing benefit for single people aged 25 to 59 years. [21129]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table:

	Year	*Estimated savings (£ million)*	*Numbers likely to be affected*
(i) Under 25 changes S.I. 1996 No. 965	1996–97	13	40,000
	1997–98	57	90,000
	1998–99	62	105,000
(ii) Proposed changes for most single claimants between 25 and 59 years	1997–98	6	72,000
	1998–99	47	210,000
	1999–2000	69	265,000

Pensioners

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the measures which have provided extra financial assistance to pensioners on low incomes since 1990. [18463]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information in relation to income support, housing benefit and council tax and community charge benefits, is as follows:

April 1991

The pensioner premium was increased above the normal uprating.

April 1992

The higher pensioner premium was increased above the normal uprating.

October 1992

All pensioner premiums were increased above the normal uprating.

April 1993

The rates of income support personal allowances were not adjusted to reflect the fact that the element previously included in recognition of the 20 per cent. contribution towards community charge liability was no longer needed due to the introduction of council tax.

April 1994

Compensation for VAT on fuel above average cost.

Customer Charters

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department and its executive agencies have spent drafting, publishing and circulating each of their customer charters and customer standard documents; and how many copies of each document have been issued. [19388]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

Benefits Agency

The Benefits Agency customer charter was last revised and published in December 1993. The cost of publication was £48,106; 250,000 copies were published and distributed to the agency's local offices. In addition, in 1996–97, 86 Benefit Agency units have published local charters at a total cost of £60,200. Each business unit received 2,000 copies of its own

charter statement. There are no figures available on the number of national and local charters issued to the public, because their distribution is controlled by Benefits Agency local offices and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

Contributions Agency

The employers charter was last revised and published in January 1994; 1,200,000 copies were printed and distributed to employers at a cost of £67,000. A further 250,000 copies were printed, stored and sent to local offices for distribution to customers, at a cost of £10,557; 74,621 remain in stock.

The contributors charter was last revised and published in April 1995; 1,000,000 copies were printed for distribution with national insurance cards to 16-year-olds at a cost of £64,655; 250,000 copies were printed, stored and sent to local offices for distribution to customers, at a cost of £14,586; 13,355 remain in stock.

Child Support Agency

The Child Support Agency customer charter was last revised and published in November 1996. A total of 7,600 copies were printed and distributed at a cost of £9,539. There are none currently in stock.

War Pensions Agency

A total of 218,500 copies of the War Pensions Agency charter standard statement were printed at a cost of £14,949; 174,515 remain in stock.

War Pensions

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *149–50*, if the War Pensions Agency consulted *(a)* the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment and *(b)* his Department when it was drawing up the sections on claims arising out of experiments at Porton Down in the 1993 and 1995 versions of the "War Pensions Manual". [19115]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Mr. Kevin Caldwell, chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 19 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if the War Pensions Agency consulted with the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE), and our own Department, when drawing up the 1993 and 1995 instructions for claims arising out of experiments at Porton Down.

I can confirm that we did not consult with the CBDE prior to publishing our 1993 version of the War Pensions Manual. We also consulted the CBDE in revising the instructions in 1995.

The War Pension Agency consults DSS HQ Policy Branch as a matter of course when preparing instructions. Again, I can confirm that we consulted with them on the 1993 and 1995 versions.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of claimants for a war pension are currently referred by the War Pensions Agency to *(a)* an independent specialist and *(b)* a regional consultant; for what reasons claimants are referred to *(a)* or *(b)*; and what rights claimants have to choose to whom they are referred. [19114]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Mr. Kevin Caldwell, chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 19 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the percentage of claimants for a War Pension currently referred by the Agency to independent specialists and regional consultants, for what reason, and what rights claimants have to choose to whom they are referred.

During 1996, the Agency cleared 81,170 claims to War Pension. During the same period, 13,409 appeals were processed and cleared to the Pensions Appeal Tribunal. We requested 9,193 medical Consultant (Specialist) reports and 590 Regional Consultant Reports during 1996. As a percentage of all cases cleared by the Agency in 1996 this equates to Consultant (Specialist)—19.7% and Regional Consultant—0.6%.

Claimants are referred to Consultants (Specialists) primarily to establish for the Secretary of State the definitive diagnosis of any medical conditions underlying a claimed disablement. Regional Consultant opinion is sought where there is conflict of opinion between Consultants or where the case is medically exceptionally complicated. The Agency holds a list of the Regional Consultants that it uses on a nationwide basis, reflecting the major medical specialities.

In Individual cases, the appropriate Regional Consultant is chosen by the Agency Medical Advisor dealing with the claim. Agency requests for Consultant (Specialist) reports are directed to the appropriate Benefits Agency Disability Benefits Centre who arrange appointments on our behalf and use local knowledge to request a report from a suitable Consultant in the locality concerned.

The Secretary of State may award a War Disablement Pension only when a certificate to the effect that disablement is due to service has been provided to him by a medical office or board of medical officers appointed or recognised by him for that purpose. He must be given the opportunity to satisfy himself on that issue. Should, exceptionally, a claimant object to being seen by any individual Consultant/Regional Consultant, or alternatively have in mind a particular Consultant, the Secretary of State will consider representations from a claimant as to the appointment. However, the decision as to appointment is for the Secretary of State to make, and not the claimant.

Should a claimant have been seen and treated by a particular Consultant, then efforts will be made to obtain any relevant casenotes, or factual reports from the Consultant concerned.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people lost their *(a)* invalidity benefit and *(b)* incapacity benefit in the first year of incapacity benefit in Wales; and how many have lost benefit since; [19055]

(2) how many people have lost their *(a)* invalidity and *(b)* incapacity benefit in each benefit district in Wales since the introduction of the incapacity benefit; and what are the estimated savings which have accrued. [19056]

Mr. Burt: The administration of incapacity benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ted Rowlands, dated 19 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking how many people lost their (a) Invalidity Benefit (IVB) and (b) Incapacity Benefit (IB) in the first year of IB in Wales; and how many have lost benefit since and; how many people have lost their (a) IVB and (b) IB in each benefit district in Wales since the introduction of the IB; and what are the estimated savings which have accrued.

Information is not available in the format requested. Statistics are not kept separately for customer's formerly in receipt of IVB and customer's claiming IB. The available information is shown in the attached tables.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Numbers of people losing their incapacity benefit from April 1995 to January 1997 for each benefits agency district in Wales

Reason	Cardiff and Vale	South Wales Valleys	Gwent Borders	South West Wales	Wrexham and North West Cost	Gwyneddigion and Maldwyn
Failed the Own Occupation Test	45	125	20	170	60	55
Failed to return All Work Test questionnaire without good cause	175	395	145	700	245	100
Failed to attend examination without good cause	30	140	10	240	60	20
Found capable of All Work[1]	2,190	6,115	1,620	8,490	2,425	1,145

Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 cases.
Credits Only cases that existed prior to April 95 are only included after 25 January 1997 as they were not available prior to this date.
[1]This figure includes a small number of Credits only cases disallowed due to failure to return their All Work Test questionnaire without good cause or failure to attend examination without good cause, no breakdown is available.
Figures are provisional and subject to change.
Information on savings is not available.
Source:
Incapacity Benefit computer system, figures exclude a small number of cases not held on the system.

Numbers of people in Wales losing their incapacity benefit

Reason	April 1995–March 1996	April 1996–January 1997
Failed the Own Occupation Test	205	260
Failed to return All Work Test questionnaire without good cause	960	805
Failed to attend examination without good cause	160	340
Found capable of All Work[1]	8,955	13,030

Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest five cases.
Credits Only cases that existed prior to April 1995 are only included in the figures after 25 January 1997 as they were not available prior to this date.
[1]This figure includes a small number of Credits only cases disallowed due to failure to return their All Work Test questionnaire without good cause or failure to attend examination without good cause, no breakdown is available.
Figures are provisional and subject to change.
Source:
Incapacity Benefit computer system, figures exclude a small number of cases not held on the system.

Child Care Allowance

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the exact budgetary provisions made for the extra child care allowance available for two of the public sector pilots in the parent plus scheme. [19833]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: On a provisional basis, £240,000 has been allocated from the parent plus budget to cover the cost of essential child care costs incurred during activities associated with the scheme. This amount is not cash limited and will be reviewed if necessary. There is no restriction on the number who claim it, or on the number of times an individual lone parent may claim. The total amount allocated has been apportioned based on the number of lone parents claiming income support in the two areas concerned: £95,700 has been allocated to north Worcestershire and £144,700 to Warwickshire.

Child Support Agency

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the progress to date of the Child Support Agency in obtaining child support payments from absent parents who were not previously paying maintenance. [19555]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 19 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the progress of the Child Support Agency in obtaining child support payments.

During 1995/96 the Agency was involved in the payment of over £301 million in maintenance arising from child support assessments. This included about £137 million arranged to be paid direct between parents, and over £164 million collected by the Agency. The amount collected was more than double that of 1994/95 (£76 million).

During the current financial year, the total collected and arranged was over £322 million as at 31st January. Achieving the target set by the Secretary of State of £380 million—£400 million will entail an increase of 27%–33% on the collected/arranged figure required last year, but the Agency is on course to succeed in meeting this challenge.

The Agency has also become increasingly successful in tracing absent parents. In 1995/96, over 55,000 specialist traces were successfully undertaken by the Agency, the vast majority of which referred to absent parents whose whereabouts were doubtful. In January, 7,361 were successful (the highest ever recorded), bringing the total so far this year to 53,047.

The Agency has continued to put an increased emphasis on the enforcement of maintenance payments. In 1995/96 53,000 deduction from earnings orders (DEOs) were issued, an increase of 65% on the 1994/95 figure. During the current financial year 47,814 DEOs have been issued as at 31st January.

The Agency is increasingly obtaining liability orders through the courts, mainly against non-compliant self employed absent parents. The number of liability orders applied for in this financial year as at the end of January was 1,702, an increase of 58% compared with the same period last year.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of outstanding cases in north Staffordshire currently being processed by the Dudley Child Support Agency office; what is the current waiting time for outstanding cases; and if he will make a statement. [20186]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Joan Walley, dated 19 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about cases being actioned by the Dudley Child Support Agency Centre (CSAC)

At the end of February, the Agency was dealing with a total of 418,369 cases in which action had not been fully completed; the Dudley CSAC has responsibility for 65,467 of these cases. Information is not available, however, on the number of these cases which originated from North Staffordshire. this could be obtained only by a special clerical exercise, the cost of which would be disproportionate.

The Agency measures its performance in relation to waiting times against its Secretary of State target to clear 60% of new maintenance assessments within 26 weeks, and for no more than 10% of cases to be outstanding for more than 52 weeks at 31 March 1997. As of 28 February 1997, 53% of maintenance assessments had been cleared within 26 weeks, and 13% were outstanding for more than 52 weeks.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. McAllion : To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what circumstances the CSA is permitted to pass on confidential information gained from claimants or absent parents to another person or body. [20161]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. John McAllion, dated 19 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about confidential information within the Child Support Agency.

This Agency only discloses confidential information to third parties in the following circumstances; with the consent of the person involved, to comply with a court order, or under legislative provision to meet statutory requirements.

In specific circumstances, the Child Support Act (1991) and associated Regulations, allows the Secretary of State and/or a Child Support Officer to disclose any information held for the purposes of the Act. For example, information may be disclosed to a Court, a Tribunal, an appropriate Authority in connection with Housing Benefit or Council Tax or to another party to the assessment where such information enables that party to understand how decisions, in relation to a maintenance assessment, were reached.

The Agency is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Registrar, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1984). Disclosure of personal information held by the Agency will only be made in accordance with our registration except where specific exemptions apply. For example, disclosure to the Police can be made where it is for the purpose of prevention or detection of serious crime or in an emergency where disclosure is required to prevent injury or damage to anyone's health.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time taken to process an application for child support up to the point where the absent parent is informed of his or her liability to pay; and what is the average amount of arrears owed by the absent parent at this point. [20163]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. John McAllion, dated 19 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about applications for child support to the Child Support Agency, but I am afraid I cannot give you precise information in the format you have requested.

The first part of your question asks for the average time taken to process an application up to the point where the absent parent is notified of their liability to pay. The Agency does not collect general information on average processing times, but measures performance against its Secretary of State target to clear 60% of new maintenance applications within 26 weeks. At the end of February, 53% of new maintenance applications were being cleared within 26 weeks, and 13% of all applications were over 52 weeks old.

The second part of your question relates to the average amount of arrears which accrue between an application being made and the point at which the absent parent is informed of liability; this is called the initial payment period. Information is not collected by the Agency's financial management system and debt management system on the average amount of arrears which accrue, during this period. There is no business need to do so, and as several major factors are involved a rough average figure at this stage would have little meaning. For example, an absent parent may have responded promptly to our enquiry form and thus qualified to defer the effective date of the claim for 8 weeks. They may also have been making voluntary payments to the parent with care during this period, and when these are reported and verified, the amount of arrears is reduced accordingly. Finally, either or both parents may ask for the assessment to be reviewed at this stage, which can lead to an adjustment in the original amount.

The Agency has, however, addressed the issue of debt accumulating in the interim pay period by establishing early contact with the absent parent to arrange voluntary payment of maintenance and has also introduced a facility to defer the effective date of a claim if an absent parent quickly returns his or her maintenance enquiry form. Encouraging the absent parent to co operate with the Agency shortens the time between application and assessment, thus minimising the build up of arrears.

These policies have proved to be effective as, since April 1996. the Agency has recorded over £24m in voluntary payments made during the initial payment period in cases subsequently using the collection service.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of child support appeals *(a)* being processed, *(b)* outstanding for more than 26 weeks and *(c)* determined in favour of (i) the Child Support Agency and (ii) the client at the end of each month since April 1994. [21473]

Mr. Mitchell: This is a matter for the Independent Tribunal Service.

Benefits Agency Appellants

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Benefits Agency appellants have been refused oral hearings at an appeal tribunal *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the West Pennine district and *(c)* in the Oldham district since the right to automatic oral hearings was restricted in October 1996. [20116]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for the Independent Tribunal Service.

Family Credit (Fife)

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families were in receipt of family credit in the Fife Benefits Agency office area in each quarter since February 1995. [19942]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Rachel Squire, dated 19 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many families were in receipt of Family Credit (FC) in the Fife Benefits Agency office area in each quarter since February 1995.

The information is not available in the format requested. It may be helpful if I explain that FC is administered centrally by the Family Credit Unit. Statistics are produced on a national basis and provide the number of families in receipt of FC within a particular Benefits Agency (BA) office area at a given date. Such details are not produced on a regular monthly or quarterly basis. The information available only serves as a "snap-shot" of the position at that date and does not provide details of the number of families in receipt of FC over a given period.

There are 4 benefit offices within the Fife District, these are Cowdenbeath, Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and Leven. FC statistics relating to each of these offices produced since February 1995 have been provided in the attached annex.

I hope you find this information useful.

Annex: The number of families in receipt of family credit within the Fife benefits agency office area, at the date indicated, are as follows:

Date of scan	*Cowdenbeath*	*Dunfermline*	*Kirkcaldy*	*Leven*	*Total*
10 February 1995	596	1,084	1,593	677	3,950
13 July 1995	653	1,163	1,704	738	4,258
10 November 1995	647	1,188	1,781	736	4,352
16 February 1996	643	1,201	1,782	728	4,354
12 April 1996	650	1,178	1,760	755	4,343
7 June 1996	668	1,226	1,829	777	4,500
10 October 1996	699	1,276	1,645	814	4,434
3 January 1997	697	1,254	1,802	799	4,552

Social Security and Medical Appeals Tribunals

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what operational problems in the analytical services division of the Independent Tribunal Service prevented figures being given for social security and medical appeals tribunals in 1995. [19296]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Department's analytical services division is responsible for producing and publishing statistical information regarding social security and medical appeal tribunals. It obtains data relating to social security appeals from the Independent Tribunal Service's computer systems. Due to problems with the computer system serving the Independent Tribunal Service's north-west region, data for the final quarter of 1995 were not available for inclusion in the annual publication "Social Security Statistics 1996". Figures for the final quarter are contained in the "Quarterly Social Security Appeal Tribunal Statistics December 1995", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Data relating to medical appeal tribunals were not affected by the computer problem. However, owing to competing work priorities, the data for the final quarter of 1995 had not been fully processed by analytical services division when "Social Security Statistics 1996" was due for publication. Figures for the final quarter of 1995 are contained in "Quarterly Medical Appeal Tribunal Statistics", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Personal Pensions

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will calculate the total reduction in future expenditure on the state earnings-related pension scheme, at net present value, arising from membership of appropriate personal pensions, assuming the social discount rate used by his Department. [19949]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) on 24 February, *Official Report*, column 90.

Attendance Allowance (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people living in the London borough of Wandsworth are waiting for a decision to be made regarding their claim for attendance allowance. [20180]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 19 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how many people living in the London Borough of Wandsworth are waiting for a decision to be made regarding their claim for Attendance Allowance (AA).

The information is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Statistics are not kept for the number of people waiting for a decision to be made on a claim

for AA or for individual regions. I am however able to provide the Secretary of State targets for clearing AA New Claims and the year to date clearance rates for Sutton Disability Benefit Centre (DBC) which covers the Benefits Agency Districts shown in the attached annex.

The information is set out in the table below:-

1996–97 Secretary of State targets	*Sutton DBC 1 April 1996 to 28 February 1997*
68 per cent. in 30 days	79.70 per cent. in 30 days
85 per cent. in 53 days	95.49 per cent. in 53 days

Figures are provisional and subject to change. I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex: Benefits agency districts covered by Sutton Disability Benefit Centre

Bankside

Berkshire

Canterbury and Thanet

Channel

East Sussex

Hampshire North

Hounslow and Kingston

London Central

North Kent

North Surrey

Palace

Solent and Forest

South Circular

South Downs

South East Hants and Wight

South West Thames

Surrey Downs

Tameside

West Kent

West Sussex.

Reduced Benefits Directions

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a breakdown, by ethnic origin, of parents with care against whom reduced benefits directions were issued in 1994–95. [21022]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available.

National Insurance

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of (i) men and (ii) women of working age in each year since 1978–79 had a national insurance contribution record for the year with contributions equivalent to less than 25 times the lower earnings limit; and what proportion of these *(a)* had a similar contribution record for two or more years running and *(b)* were in receipt of contribution credits in each year. [21027]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables:

Men

Thousands

	Number with class 1 earnings below 25 x LEL	*Number with two or more years*	*Proportion with similar record for two years or more (per cent.)*	*Number with class 1 earnings below 25 x LEL and credits*
1978–79	479	88	18	368
1979–80	447	148	33	337
1980–81	457	140	31	360
1981–82	524	147	28	421
1982–83	561	166	30	467
1983–84	603	182	30	514
1984–85	666	164	25	525
1985–86	433	130	30	377
1986–87	490	146	30	420
1987–88	673	197	29	542
1988–89	666	226	34	502
1989–90	659	235	36	473
1990–91	639	237	37	456
1991–92	689	256	37	487
1992–93	718	280	39	506
1993–94	787	304	39	551
1994–95	842	—	—	580

Women

Thousands

	Number with class 1 earnings below 5 x LEL	*Number with two or more years*	*Proportion with similar record for two years or more (per cent.)*	*Number with class 1 earnings below 25 x LEL and credits*
1978–79	651	165	25	340
1979–80	691	298	43	342
1980–81	745	337	45	356
1981–82	831	378	45	394
1982–83	909	437	48	427
1983–84	1,013	490	48	471
1984–85	1,082	495	46	482
1985–86	914	467	51	371
1986–87	1,023	506	49	423
1987–88	1,201	578	48	475
1988–89	1,272	624	49	458
1989–90	1,246	621	50	416
1990–91	1,191	614	52	406
1991–92	1,219	637	52	421
1992–93	1,220	653	53	413
1993–94	1,274	679	53	440
1994–95	1,322	—	—	442

1. Source: 1 per cent. sample of national insurance recording system taken in February 1996.

2. Figure are United Kingdom.

3. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

4. Analysis is based on people with Class 1 contributions below 25 times the weekly LEL in the year.

5. Figures for 1994–95 are provisional.

6. Figures for the number with two or more consecutive years are not available for 1994–95.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what liability is placed on (i) training providers and (ii) employers providing work placements for young

people with non-employed status on youth credits/youth training for national insurance payments for young people aged *(a)* 16 to 17 years and *(b)* 18 years and over.[21020]

Mr. Heald: Neither training providers nor employers providing work placements have any national insurance contribution liability in respect of any young people with non-employed status on youth training.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of Stae for Social Security what credits in respect of national insurance contributions awarded to young people aged 18 years and over who are on youth credits/youth training with non-employed status. [21021]

Mr. Heald: Young people aged 18 years and over may be awarded a class 1 national insurance credit for each week in which they attend an approved training course, provided that they had reached age 18 before the beginning of the tax year in which the period of training occurs and that the course, as its outset, is not expected to continue for more than 12 months. If their contribution record for the tax year in which they reached age 18 and for subsequent tax years does not enable them to satisfy the contribution conditions for entitlement to jobseeker's allowance and incapacity benefit, they may also be awarded special credits for those years.

Class 3 credits for pension purposes are available to all young people for the contribution year in which they reach age 18 and the two preceding years.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what would be the level in 1997–98 of the national insurance lower earnings limit and contribution ceiling if they had been uprated in line with earnings since 1979; [21092]

(2) if he will estimate the cumulative effect on Government revenues since 1979 of the change in indexation from earnings to prices of *(a)* the national insurance lower earnings limit and *(b)* the national insurance contribution ceiling for employees and employers; and if he will provide figures for the net revenues. [21073]

Mr. Heald: The lower and upper limits for class 1 national insurance contributions are linked to the level of the basic retirement pension. If the basic retirement pension had been uprated since 1980 in line with the higher of earnings or prices, the lower and upper earnings limits for 1997–98 would be £86 and £645 respectively. The estimated full-year effects of limits set at these levels for 1997–98 are shown in the table. Information for earlier years is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Estimated full-year effects of lower and upper earnings limits for class 1 national insurance contributions set at £86 and £645 per week respectively in 1997–98

£ million

	LEL £86	*UEL £645*
Employees		
Gross	–1,900	+1,900
Rebate	–250	+200
Net	–1,650	+1,750
Employers		
Gross	–150	0
Rebate	–500	+350
Net	+350	–350
Total		
Gross	–2,000	+1,900
Rebate	–700	+550
Net	–1,300	+1,400

Notes:
1. Figures assume no change in the earnings brackets for employers' contributions.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest £50 million; totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source:
Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information in his answer to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) of 2 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *411*, on the value of unpaid national insurance contributions. [21057]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

A random survey of employers known to the Contributions Agency estimated that underpayments of class 1 national insurance contributions by employers for 1995–96 were £93 million. The survey was not undertaken for 1994–95 and no figures are available.

The self-employed pay class 2 and 4 contributions. Class 2 contributions are collected by the Contributions Agency by direct debit payments or in response to the issue of quarterly bills. Estimates of unpaid class 2 could be given only at disproportionate cost.

Class 4 contributions are collected by the Inland Revenue. The Inland Revenue accounts which were used to provide details in the reply to the hon. member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) of 2 July 1996 have not yet been finalised and no later information is available.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the effect on national insurance revenues of each *(a)* increase and *(b)* decrease of £1 up to £10, in the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions. [21067]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

The table shows the estimated full-year effects of a £10 increase or decrease of the lower earnings limit for class 1 national insurance contributions in 1997–98. The effects of smaller changes would be roughly pro rata.

Estimated full-year effects of a £10 increase or decrease of the lower earnings limit for class 1 national insurance contributions in 1997–98

£ million

	LEL increased by £10	*LEL decreased by £10*
Employees		
Gross	–800	+850
Rebate	–100	+100
Net	–700	+750

Estimated full-year effects of a £10 increase or decrease of the lower earnings limit for class 1 national insurance contributions in 1997–98

£ million

	LEL increased by £10	*LEL decreased by £10*
Employers		
Gross	–50	+50
Rebate	–200	+200
Net	+150	–150
Total		
Gross	–900	+900
Rebate	–300	+300
Net	–600	+300

Notes:

1. Figures assume no change in the earnings brackets for employers' contributions.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest £50 million; totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information in his answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) of 24 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *562*, concerning the number of people paying voluntary class 3 national insurance contributions. [21090]

Mr. Heald: The information remains the most recent available.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information in his answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury of 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *167*, concerning estimated levels of contributions needed to achieve balance in the national insurance fund. [21093]

Mr. Heald: The requested information is in the table.

Estimated level of combined employer and employee contributions necessary to achieve balance in the national insurance fund

Year	*Contribution level (main rates)*[3] *(per cent.)*
1996–97[1]	19
1997–98[1]	18.4
2025[2]	16.9
2035[2]	16.7

Notes:

1. Based on the estimates underlying the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98".

2. Based on the national insurance funded long-term financial estimates (Report by the Government Actuary on the third quinquennial review under section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975 (HC160–31 January 1995).

3. Estimate level (excluding employee and employer national health service allocations of 1.05 per cent. and 0.9 per cent. respectively) for there to be no Treasury grant and for the minimum level of the fund to be maintained at the recommendation one sixth of annual benefit expenditure.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information in his answer to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) of 2 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *411*, on the number of people in each year in receipt of national insurance credits; and if he will provide such figures for the years from 1979 to 1989. [21056]

Mr. Heald: The information in the tables.

Number of people claiming benefit due to medical incapacity (sickness benefit and incapacity benefit) receiving national insurance credits only (no benefit in payment): Great Britain

Thousands

	Total claimants
2 June 1979[1]	57
31 May 1980[1]	66
30 May 1981[1]	58
29 May 1982[1]	76
2 April 1983[1]	69
31 March 1984[1]	57
30 March 1985[1]	45
5 April 1986[1]	59
4 April 1987[1]	78
2 April 1988[1]	110
1 April 1989[1]	157
31 March 1990[1]	205
30 March 1991[1]	262
4 April 1992[1]	320
3 April 1993[1]	387
2 April 1994[1]	440
12 April 1995[1]	512
29 February 1996[2]	580
30 November 1996[2]	608

[1] Figures taken from a 1 per cent. sample of all claims to sickness benefit in Great Britain.

[2] Figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample of claims for incapacity benefit, excluding a small number of cases not held on the computer.

Number of unemployed claimants in receipt of national insurance credits only (Great Britain).

Thousands

Total claimants	
May 1979	188
May 1980	225
May 1981[1]	—
May 1982	390
May 1983	359
May 1984[1]	—
May 1985[1]	—
May 1986	469
May 1987	442
May 1988	374
May 1989	274
May 1990	220
May 1991	280
May 1992	313
May 1993	335
May 1994	281
May 1995	231
May 1996	206

Sources:

1. May 1994 and before: 100 per cent. count of unemployed claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of May.

2. From May 1995: 5 per cent. sample of unemployed claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of May.

Notes:

1. Figures not available due to industrial action.

2. Figures include a small number who will not receive credits, but cannot be identified separately.

Number of people receiving at least one credit in the financial year given; by type of credit—Great Britain

Thousands

Financial year	*ICA credits*	*Man aged between 60 and 64*
1978–79	9	—
1979–80	9	—
1980–81	11	—
1981–82	12	—
1982–83	12	—
1983–84	11	1,437
1984–85	62	1,385
1985–86	68	1,332
1986–87	101	1,310
1987–88	118	1,294
1988–89	127	1,294
1989–90	142	1,301
1990–91	165	1,319
1991–92	194	1,337
1992–93	232	1,360
1993–94	275	1,356
1994–95	316	1,336

Source:

One per cent. sample of national insurance recording system taken at February 1996.

Notes:

1. National insurance credits for men aged between 60 and 64 were introduced in October 1983.

2. ICA = invalid care allowance.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information in his answer given to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon, of 1 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *324*, on the numbers in receipt of family credit and disability working allowance with earnings below the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions. [21058]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon on 25 February, *Official Report*, column *207*.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have received payments under the earnings top up scheme to date; how many of these are employees; and what proportion have had earnings below the level of the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions. [21068]

Mr. Roger Evans: At 28 February 9,000 awards of earnings top up had been made. Some 8,346 awards were to employees and, of these, 27 per cent. were to people with earnings below the lower earnings limit. These figures are provisional and based on a 100 per cent. count of the live cases at 28 February.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the effect on the number of employees who *(a)* are paying national insurance contributions and *(b)* have earnings above the contribution ceiling of the change in indexation from earnings to prices of the national insurance contribution limits since 1979. [21091]

Mr. Heald: If the level of the basic retirement pension, to which the lower and upper limits for class 1 national insurance contributions are linked, had been uprated since 1980 in line with the higher or earnings or prices, an estimated 1.2 million fewer employees would be liable to pay contributions in 1997–98, and some 2.1 million fewer employees would have earnings above the upper earnings limit.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information contained in the answer to the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) of 7 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *354*, on national insurance contributions. [21101]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Gross Class 1 National Insurance Contributions in Great Britain at 1996–97 prices

£ billion

	1996–97	*2000–01*	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*
(a) Employers					
Current Structure	29.0	36.4	44.4	51.7	57.8
(i) Extended to all earnings[1]	29.1	36.5	44.5	51.8	57.9
(ii) Extended to earnings below LEL[1]	29.1	36.5	44.5	51.8	57.9
(iii) Extended to earnings above UEL[2]	29.0	36.4	44.4	51.7	57.8
(b) Employees					
Current Structure	21.9	26.9	30.8	33.2	33.9
(i) Extended to all earnings[3,4]	25.3	32.7	39.7	46.4	[5]51.9
(ii) Extended to earnings below LEL[3]	22.0	27.0	30.9	33.3	[5]33.9
(iii) Extended to earnings above UEL[4]	25.2	32.6	39.6	46.3	51.9

Notes:

1. Assumes the current 3 per cent. contribution rate would apply to earnings below the lower earnings limit.

2. There is no upper earnings limit on employers' contributions.

3. Assumes the current 2 per cent. contribution rate would apply to earnings below the lower earnings limit.

4. Assumes the current 10 per cent. contribution rate would apply to earnings above the upper earnings limit.

5. The additional yield from contributions on earnings below the lower earnings limit is estimated to be negligible.

6. The figures for 2000–01 and later years are based on the assumptions contained in the "National Insurance Fund Long Term Financial Estimates" (HC160) published in January 1995. All figures exclude the effects of contracted-out rebates.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information in the answer to the hon. Member for Stratford on Avon of 26 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *176*, on the cost of removing employer national insurance contributions below the lower earnings limit. [21059]

Mr. Heald: If employers were not required to pay national insurance contributions on the portion of their employees earnings below the lower earnings limit, contribution revenue for 1997–98 would be reduced by about £5.2 billion.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information contained in the answer given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) of 26 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *559*, on the cost of raising the lower earnings limit to the level of the personal tax allowance, giving figures also for employer contributions. [21103]

Mr. Heald: The information remains the most recent available and includes the effect on revenue from employers' NICs.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information contained in the answer given to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) of 12 March 1996, *Official Report*, column 592, on national insurance revenues. [21102]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Year	*Employee national insurance rates*[1] *(percentage)*	*Estimated change in*[2] *contribution revenue (£ million)*
1996–97	2.0	—
	10.0	—
1997–98	2.0	—
	10.0	—

Notes:

[1] Not contracted-out rates shown.

[2] Figures show the change in revenue for the tax year in which the change in contribution rate was made.

[3] If the employees' contribution structure, rates and level of contracted-out rebates in force in 1979–80 had applied in 1996–97, employees would have paid about £5.5 billion less in national insurance contributions for that year; if they were to apply in 1997–98, employees would pay an estimated £6 billion less in national insurance contributions for that year.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were *(a)* the amounts of national insurance contributions paid by (i) employers and (ii) employees and *(b)* any Exchequer supplement, and the proportion of the NI fund accounted for by each, in today's prices for each year since 1979; and what estimate he has made of future revenues. [21062]

Mr. Heald: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information contained in the answer given to the hon. Member for Gordon of 26 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *559*, on extending employer national insurance contributions to taxable benefits in kind; and if he will provide figures for employee contributions. [21104]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that extending employer national insurance contributions to those taxable benefits in kind not already subject to an employer charge would raise £250 million in 1997–98. Extending employee NICs to cover the same benefits in kind would yield a further £300 million a year.

Source:

Inland Revenue.

Departmental Budgets

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of his Department's annual budget was spent in Wales in each of the last five years; and how much that proportion was in *(a)* 1997 prices and *(b)* cash terms for each year. [20706]

Mr. Burt: The Department does not routinely collect information on expenditure by country.

However, based on figures published in the "Statistical Supplement to the Financial Statement and Budget Report", previously "The Statistical Supplement to the Autumn Statement", it is estimated that about 6 per cent. of all social security expenditure is in respect of Wales.

Basic Pension Plus

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated pension fund and weekly pension on retirement of a person on average earnings under basic pension plus using the Government Actuary's assumptions on investment returns. [21476]

Mr. Heald: Based on the Government Actuary's prudent assumptions for real investment returns of +4.25 per cent. per annum, it is estimated that people on average earnings for most of their working lives should accumulate a pension fund of some £130,000, equivalent to a pension of £175 a week in today's prices. In practice, funds could do much better than this; over the past 45 years or so, investments in equities have enjoyed returns averaging 7.7 per cent. a year in real terms.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of basic pension plus on charges by pension providers; and if he will make a statement; [21480]

(2) what steps he is taking to keep down pension charges under basic pension plus. [21481]

Mr. Heald: Basic pension plus will apply to everyone and its security is guaranteed, therefore marketing costs will be lower than for existing personal pensions. We are also confident that the pensions industry would respond to the economies of scale by designing low cost products, but we would not hesitate to use legal powers to impose a ceiling on charges, in particular transfer charges, should it prove necessary.

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the risks of mis-selling under the basic pension plus proposals; and if he will make a statement. [21482]

Mr. Heald: Basic pension plus will apply to everyone and its security is guaranteed, so the sort of alleged mis-selling that occurred in the late 1980s is not directly relevant. Moreover, any company that failed to compensate for past mis-selling would not be eligible to manage a basic pension plus fund.

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to consult on the proposals under basic pension plus; and if he will make a statement. [21520]

Mr. Heald: Representatives of the pensions industry and other interested parties will be invited to join a working group to discuss the proposals and how they might be implemented. A Green Paper will then be published inviting views more generally.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has under basic pension plus to ensure the maintenance of full records of contributors' rebates, credits and home responsibilities protection. [21525]

Mr. Heald: It is proposed that the Contributions Agency would maintain full records of people's rebates, credits and home responsibilities protection as it does now.

Mr. Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the rebates under basic pension plus may be paid into occupational pension schemes. [21478]

Mr. Heald: Yes.

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on survivors' benefits under basic pension plus. [21518]

Mr. Heald: Funds of those in the new scheme who die before drawing any money purchase benefits[1] would be inherited in full by the surviving spouse, or the estate where there is no spouse. Some or all of these funds would have to be used by a surviving spouse to purchase an annuity, or income could be withdrawn. The state would also guarantee the basic pension rights of widows. In cases where the individual dies after purchasing an annuity, the surviving spouse would get an annuity equal to 50 per cent. of the annuity in payment to the deceased.

Note:

[1]Under basic pension plus, the £9 per week payments will always provide money purchase benefits. The payments on 5 per cent. of earnings between the lower earnings limit and the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions purposes will also provide money purchase benefits, except in a contracted-out salary-related scheme—COSR. In the case of a COSR, the scheme will be required to provide a pension to a surviving spouse equal to half of the pension in payment to the member at the time of death. If death occurs before retirement, half the pension accrued by the member at the date of death would be payable to the surviving spouse.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated pension fund and weekly pension on retirement of a person on average earnings under basic pension plus assuming investment returns equivalent to those since 1979. [21523]

Mr. Heald: The real return on pension fund investments from 1979 to 1994 was 9.6 per cent. in real terms. Assuming that rate of investment growth, it is estimated a person on average earnings paying in the minimum contributions over a working lifetime would accumulate a fund worth £553,000 by retirement, paying a pension of £745 a week in today's money.

Source

Government Actuary's Department/Bacon and Woodrow pensions pocket book 1996.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the cost of state pensions after 2040 assuming the introduction of basic pension plus. [21396]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that, assuming the introduction of basic pension plus, expenditure on state pensions will fall rapidly after 2040, eventually relieving the taxpayer of a cost of some £40 billion a year.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he plans to take to ensure that prudent investment principles are adopted by scheme managers under basic pension plus. [21397]

Mr. Heald: We would discuss with the pensions industry regulators and others any appropriate restrictions to guard against exploitation of the Government guarantee on the basic pension. We may introduce legislation to require scheme managers to publish, and be liable for adhering to, a statement of investment principles based on the "prudent person" principle; to prescribe rules on the amounts of funds to be allocated to different types of asset, and to require pension providers to disregard the existence of the Government guarantee in investment decisions.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement on the effect on the estimated future income related benefits claimants level of the introduction of basic pension plus; [21398]

(2) what estimate he has made of the reduction in future income related benefits claimant levels in the event that investment returns on basic pension plus exceed those used by the Government Actuary by *(a)* 1 per cent. and *(b)* 2 per cent. [21399]

Mr. Heald: It is not possible to provide such estimates given that, under basic pension plus, no-one will retire before 2040 or later.

However, the number of pensioners reliant on income-related benefits could be lower than under the present scheme, even if there were no increase in the number making voluntary additional provision.

Mr. Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the impact on the public finances of basic pension plus; and if he will make a statement. [21475]

Mr. Heald: Under basic pension plus, the value of the new rebates, less the impact of the proposed tax changes, will grow by a net average amount of about £160 million a year, reaching a peak of about £7 billion or $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of GDP around 2040—substantially less than the net costs of rebates from SERPS, which peaked at almost $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of GDP.

The starting cost of the new scheme will depend on the precise age limit chosen. Expenditure on state pensions will fall rapidly after 2040 and savings in public expenditure will build up reaching some £40 billion a year.

Mr. Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated pension fund and weekly pension on retirement of a person on average earnings under basic pension plus assuming investment returns equivalent to those over the last 50 years. [21477]

Mr. Heald: The average annual increase in the ordinary industrial share index in real terms from 1950 to 1995 was 7.7 per cent. Assuming that rate on investment growth, it is estimated that a person on average earnings paying in the minimum contributions over a working lifetime would accumulate a fund worth £320,000 by retirement, paying a pension of £435 a week.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department/Bacon and Woodrow pensions pocket book 1997.

Note

Pension amount is rounded to nearest £5.

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the proposals under basic pension plus affect the accrued rights of existing contributors to the state pension scheme; and if he will make a statement. [21521]

Mr. Heald: Basic pension plus will be phased in over a generation. Current pensioners and all but the youngest national insurance contributors, will be unaffected. The rights already built up under the existing state pension scheme by young people covered by the new scheme when it is first established will be respected.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to ensure that the value of the basic pension guarantee and the £9 rebate under basic pension plus rises in line with the basic state pension under the present pay-as-you-go system. [21526]

Mr. Heald: Our intention is that the basic pension guarantee would go up in line with basic state pension. Rebates would also be increased to reflect a higher basic pension.

Mr. Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated pension fund and weekly pension on retirement of a person on average earnings under basic pension plus assuming investment returns *(a)* 1 per cent. and *(b)* 2 per cent. higher than those used by the Government Actuary. [21479]

Mr. Heald: Estimated pension funds of £166,000 and £216,000 respectively by retirement, paying pensions of £225 and £290 a week respectively.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Note:

Pension amounts are rounded to the nearest £5.

Mr. Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each year from 2020 to 2040 the impact on public expenditure of the equalisation of state pension age at 65 years and the reforms of the state earnings-related pension scheme 1995; and what is the projected revenue forgone as a result of basic pension plus in these years. [21484]

Mr. Heald: Information relating to every year from 2020 to 2040 is not available. The measures in the Pensions Act 1995[1] will produce public expenditure savings of over £6 billion in 2020, over £9 billion in 2030, and over £10 billion in 2040[2].

Under basic pension plus, the value of the new rebates less the impact of the proposed tax changes will grow by a net average amount of about £160 million a year, reaching a peak of about £7 billion or ½ per cent. of GDP around 2040. The starting cost of the new scheme will depend on the precise age limit chosen.

Note

[1] These measures include equalisation of state pension age, annualisation of SERPS, breaking the links between SERPS and contracting-out, and the introduction of age-related rebates for appropriate personal pensions and contracted-out money purchase schemes. [2] The savings in expenditure for the national insurance fund will be £7 billion in 2020, over £10 billion in 2030 and £12 billion in 2040.

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if an individual's pension fund under the basic pension plus proposals goes to his estate on his death. [21519]

Mr. Heald: Yes. If an individual dies before drawing any benefits from his fund and there is no surviving spouse, then the funds built up under the proposals would form part of the estate. Similarly, if the individual dies while withdrawing an income from his fund, but before annuity purchase, then the residual fund would form part of the estate.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the proposals under basic pension plus would retain home responsibilities protection and national insurance contribution credits; and if he will make a statement. [21524]

Mr. Heald: The proposals under basic pension plus would retain home responsibilities protection and national insurance contribution credits. They would contribute towards building up entitlement to the guaranteed basic pension, as they do now towards the current basic state pension. For those contributors not in the new scheme, credits and HRP would continue as now.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumption underlay his forecasts that the £175 pension payable to those on average earnings under his basic pension plus proposal would represent *(a)* 26 per cent. and *(b)* 21 per cent. of average earnings. [21099]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to my letter of 13 March to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), which was copies to the hon. Member and placed in the Library.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated value of the pension payable to the average earner under his basic pension plus proposals assuming 1.5 per cent. per annum real earnings growth. [21098]

Mr. Heald: Assuming real-earnings growth of 1.5 per cent. per annum, a person on average earnings paying in the minimum contributions to basic pension plus should, over a working lifetime, accumulate a fund sufficient to pay a pension of £173 a week.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Family Credit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families claimed family credit

in the constituencies of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale and of Roxburgh and Berwickshire in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [21529]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Number of family credit claims by Benefits Agency offices

BA office	April 1993	April 1994	April 1995	April 1996	January 1997
Edinburgh East	1,298	1,432	1,487	1,599	1,632
Edinburgh South	1,283	1,493	1,573	1,748	1,860
Galashiels	1,127	1,262	1,372	1,511	1,549

1. Family credit is a national benefit administered by the family credit unit in Preston. As such statistics are prepared on a national basis.
2. A periodic scan of the computer system is conducted which identifies the number of families in receipt of FC, at that given date, within the area covered by individual Benefits Agency office areas. Such scans do not produce accurate details with regard to the number of families receiving FC within such an area during any particular year, as each FC award is payable for 26 weeks and the figures serve only as a "snap-shot" of the situation at that particular date.
3. The above offices service the said constituencies.

Pensions Act 1995

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the impact to public funds of the measures contained in the Pensions Act 1995. [21483]

Mr. Heald: The measures in the Pensions Act 1995 will reduce tax and national insurance revenue by about £0.5 billion in 1997–98, rising gradually to around £1.0 billion in 2050. The effect on expenditure in the first few years will be broadly neutral. The measures will produce expenditure savings of over £6 billion per annum in 2020 and over £10 billion in 2050.

Habitual Residence Test (Appeals)

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what requests he has received from local authorities for compensatory payments to cover unplanned expenditure under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to families with children who have failed the habitual residence test and have expressed their intention to appeal to the Independent Social Security Appeals Tribunal against those decisions. [21522]

Mr. Roger Evans: None. Expenditure under section 17 of the Childrens Act 1989 is a matter for the Secretary of State for Health.

Council Tax and Housing Benefits

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in the constituencies of Roxburgh and Berwickshire and of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale claimed *(a)* council tax benefit and *(b)* housing benefit for each of the past five years for which figures are available. [21527]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Council tax benefit and housing benefit recipients in Scottish Borders

	May 1992	May 1993	May 1994	May 1995	May 1996
Council tax benefit	—	8,440	8,840	8,900	8,860
Housing benefit	7,500	7,620	7,540	7,580	7,710
Roxburgh	3,080	3,100	3,050	3,070	—
Berwickshire	1,330	1,360	1,340	1,360	—
Tweeddale	910	940	930	930	—
Ettrick and Lauderdale	2,170	2,220	2,210	2,220	—

Source:
Housing Benefit Management Information System 100 per cent. case load counts at the end of May each year.
Notes:
1. Information is by local authority.
2. Benefit recipients may be a single person or a couple.
3. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
4. Following local government reorganisation in April 1996, individual district councils were abolished and incorporated within the new Scottish Borders council.
5. Council tax benefit, introduced in April 1993, is the responsibility of Scottish Borders council and district figures are not collected centrally.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of people claiming *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance and *(c)* invalid care allowance in the constituencies of Roxburgh and Berwickshire and of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale for each of the most recent five years for which figures are available. [21533]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefit Fraud Hotline

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many calls have been received by the national benefit fraud hotline. [21617]

Mr. Heald: The number of calls to the national benefit fraud hotline up to 20 March 1997 was 195,891.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many calls per day were received by the national benefit fraud hotline in the most recent period for which figures are available. [21618]

Mr. Heald: The national benefit fraud hotline receives, on average, 1,512 calls per day.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the estimated savings to date from action arising from calls to the national benefit fraud hotline. [21619]

Mr. Heald: The national benefit fraud hotline has achieved savings of £23.2 million up to the end of February 1997. There are also further potential savings of £12.3 million from referrals being currently investigated, which shows a potential overall benefit saving in the region of £35.5 million.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to provide the independent living fund with greater flexibility in managing their finances. [21608]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The independent living fund trustees have requested that they be given the power to obtain bank overdrafts, should they be required in the future. I am pleased to announce that the ILF trust deeds have therefore been amended to give them power to borrow, subject to the written approval of the Secretary of State for Social Security. It is proposed that a Government guarantee be provided for any loan, and parliamentary approval for the guarantee is sought. Further information is contained in a parliamentary minute, "Class XII, Vote 2 Department of Social Security: Independent Living Funds", Cm 3590, which has been laid before the House today.

Appeals

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce amending regulations in respect of appeals to the Social Security and Child Support Commissioners. [21604]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have today laid regulations to make changes in relation to applications for leave to appeal against a tribunal decision. These regulations require any application for leave to appeal to a commissioner against the decision of a tribunal to be accompanied by a copy of the full statement of the tribunal's decision. A notice of appeal must also be accompanied by a copy of this statement. Arrangements will be made to ensure that appellants are aware of the need to request a full statement of the tribunal's decision.

The regulations also amend the time limit for making an application to the appeal tribunal chairman for leave to appeal to a commissioner so that it begins with the date on which the full statement of the tribunal's decision is given or sent to the appellant. I have consulted the council on tribunals on these proposals and copies of the letter to them and their response have been placed in the Library

All-work Test

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who were on invalidity benefit have *(a)* failed the all-work test for incapacity benefit and *(b)* appealed against the decision (i) successfully and (ii) unsuccessfully; and how many have subsequently been (1) awarded and (2) refused jobseeker's allowance. [21183]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available.

Benefit Recipients (Study Hours)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people aged *(a)* 16 to 17 years and *(b)* 18 to 24 years have been disqualified from benefit due to the rule forbidding more than 16 hours study in each of the last three years in (i) Scotland, (ii) Wales, (iii) England and (iv) each English region. [21180]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of bills to his Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21201]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

	Percentage
Departmental headquarters	89
Benefits agency	98
Contributions agency	96
Child support agency	91
War pensions agency	98
Information technology services agency	99
Resettlements agency	92
Departmental total	96

1. It is not possible to disaggregate the information between payments which were subject to contractual agreements and those which were not.

2. The figure for the Resettlement Agency relates to the period April to October 1995.

3. Figures for departmental headquarters includes payments made by the Independent Tribunal Service in the period to December 1995 which cannot be separately identified.

Home Responsibilities Protection

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information contained in his answer to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) of 29 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *709-10*, relating to home responsibilities protection. [21064]

Mr. Heald: The information available is given in the table:

Thousands

	1993–94	*1994–95*
Total with entitlement[1]	2,769	2,758
Number ceasing due to increased contributions	199	218
Number ceasing due to retirement pension	—	—
Number ceasing due to other reason	147	168

1. Entitlement—HRP used where earnings or credits are not sufficient for a qualifying year for pension purposes.

2. Figures are for U.K.

3. Figures for 1994–95 are not complete as some employers tax returns may not have been received at the time of the extract.

4. Excludes women with a reduced rate option.

5. The sample only includes people who have been allocated a national insurance number and excludes some people who did not have a NINO at the time of the child benefit award.

Source:

1 per cent. sample of national insurance recording system records taken at February 1996—home responsibilities protection statistics 1994–95.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of women with earnings below the lower

earnings limit in the most recent available year whose circumstances would qualify them for home responsibilities protection. [21061]

Mr. Heald: The information required to make such an estimate is not available.

The national insurance recording system holds details of eligibility for home responsibilities protection for those who meet the relevant criteria. However, it is not possible to identify separately women who are in employment and have earnings below the lower earnings limit for payment of national insurance contributions because neither they nor their employers are required to provide details of such earnings.

Contributions Agency

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans there are for the feasibility study being conducted by the Contributions Agency into the formation of a national inquiry centre to include consideration of *(a)* research, *(b)* policy, *(c)* other pro-active work and *(d)* the processing of telephone inquiries; and if he will make a statement. [21188]

Mr. Heald: The Contributions Agency is currently examining the work that might be included in an inquiry centre. This includes unsolicited telephone calls and correspondence. No decision has yet been made about the scope of the inquiry centre.

State Pensions

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the basic retirement pension and *(b)* state earnings-related pension scheme for male and female contracted-in employees on average and half average earnings assuming pensions are uprated in line with (1) prices and (2) earnings in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 2025 and (iii) 2035, based on the Government Actuary's assumptions for annual increases in (A) retail prices index, (B) the Rossi index and (C) earnings expressed in current prices and as a percentage of average earnings. [21063]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables:

Retirement pension uprated in line with prices
Benefit rates at award given in 1996–97 prices rounded to the nearest £0.01

	1998 £	2025 £	2035 £
Basic RP	61.15	61.15	61.15
SERPS on average male earnings	85.86	109.95	117.13
SERPS on average female earnings	53.40	78.25	92.23
SERPS on half average male earnings	35.70	50.58	61.82
SERPS on half average female earnings	19.47	29.46	38.73

Benefit rates expressed as a percentage of individual's earnings in the tax year state pension age is reached, rounded to the nearest 1 per cent.

		1998	2025	2035
Average male earnings	Basic RP	15	9	7
	SERPS	21	16	14
Average female earnings	Basic RP	21	12	10
	SERPS	18	15	15
Half average male earnings	Basic RP	30	17	14
	SERPS	17	14	14
Half average female earnings	Basic RP	41	24	20
	SERPS	13	12	13

Basic retirement pension uprated in line with earnings
Benefit rates at award given in 1996–97 prices rounded to the nearest £0.01

	1998 £	2025 £	2035 £
Basic RP	62.37	106.46	129.78
SERPS on average male earnings	85.86	118.13	137.50
SERPS on average female earnings	53.40	75.90	91.32
SERPS on half average male earnings	35.70	47.91	56.36
SERPS on half average female earnings	19.47	26.80	33.37

Benefit rates expressed as a percentage of individual's earnings in the tax year state pension age is reached, rounded to the nearest 1 per cent.

		1998	2025	2035
Average male earnings	Basic RP	15	15	15
	SERPS	21	17	16
Average female earnings	Basic RP	21	21	21
	SERPS	18	15	15
Half average male earnings	Basic RP	30	30	30
	SERPS	17	14	13
Half average female earnings	Basic RP	42	42	42
	SERPS	12	11	11

1. Actual 1995–96 earnings derived from 1996 new earnings survey (revised) data.
2. Earnings increases for 1996–97 and 1997–98 are as in the report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1997 and the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order 1997 (CM 3547). Actual earnings revaluation figures have been used up to 1995–96, a provisional 1996–97 earnings revaluation has been used.
3. Uprating in line with prices (whether RPI or Rossi) is assumed to be at 5 per cent. per annum.
4. It is assumed that there is real average earnings growth of 2 per cent. per annum and that individuals have constant (non-age specific) earnings in each year of their working life.
5. Individuals are contracted in throughout their working life.
6. The actual levels of retirement pension, lower earnings limit, and upper earnings limit, are used up to 1997–98. The links between RP and the LEL and the UEL are maintained.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated value of the SERPS pension that would be earned by a woman on average female earnings throughout her time in work, assuming that she benefited from *(a)* five, *(b)* 10, *(c)* 15 and *(d)* 20 protected years due to caring responsibilities. [20465]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The information is in the table.

Home responsibilities protection period	*Weekly additional pension £*
None	106.10
5 years, age 25–29	105.00
10 years, age 25–34	103.35
15 years, age 25–39	100.85
20 years, age 25–44	98.10

1. Figures are in 1996–97 prices and rounded to the nearest 5p.
2. It is assumed that the woman retires in 2044–45 aged 65 and she has been contracted in throughout her working life. In each year from age 16, except those years covered by home responsibilities protection, she earns average female adult earnings (£290 per week in 1996–97).
3. Real average earnings growth of 2 per cent. per annum is assumed.

Source:
The Government Actuary's Department.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated value of the SERPS pension that would be earned by a woman on half average female earnings in receipt of maximum family credit, assuming that she benefited from *(a)* five, *(b)* 10, *(c)* 15 and *(d)* 20 years of SERPS credits for those on family credit. [20466]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 27 March 1997]:* The information is in the table.

Family credit period	*Weekly SERPS (£)*	*Of which extra SERPS in respect of family credit (£)*
None	50.55	None
5 years, age 25-29	51.45	0.90
10 years, age 25-34	52.45	1.90
15 years, age 25-39	53.20	2.65
20 years, age 25-44	53.95	3.40

Source:
The Government Actuary's Department.

Notes:
1. Figures are in 1996–97 prices and rounded to the nearest 5p.
2. Employment and earnings assumptions are as follows:

— the woman retires in 2044–45 aged 65;

— half average female adult earnings of £145 per week gross and £126 per week net in 1996–97 earned in each year from age 16;

— any family credit received is taken into account as earnings in the SERPS calculation;

— real average gross and net earnings growth of 2 per cent. per annum;

— the woman is contracted in throughout her working life.

3. Each hypothetical case assumes that the woman is a lone parent working for at least 30 hours per week throughout her period of FC receipt, with an eldest child born at the start of the FC period, a middle child born at the start of the third year of FC and a youngest child born at the start of the fifty year of FC.
4. Maximum FC refers to the total amount of any adult and child premiums to which the claimant is entitled where the claimant's earnings are less than the applicable amount and so the taper does not bite. The 1996–97 applicable amount is £75.20, which is less than half average female adult earnings. It has therefore been assumed that each hypothetical case receives the full amount of FC to which it is entitled after the operation of the taper. This amount of FC will vary as children are born and age, thus entitling the claimant to different premiums, but it has been assumed that each of the premiums and the applicable amount remains constant in real terms.

Discretionary Social Fund

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what gross budget will be set for the discretionary social fund in 1997–98. [21652]

Mr. Roger Evans: The social fund gross discretionary budget for 1997–98 will be £467.5 million. Some £97 million will be allocated to community care grants, £370 million to loans and the remaining £0.5 million will be set aside as a contingency reserve. The new allocations represents an increase of £27 million over the total gross budget for 1996–97.

Details of individual district budgets allocations are in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 21 March 1997

DEFENCE

Armed Forces (Equipment)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* tanks, *(b)* artillery pieces, *(c)* RAF fighter aircraft, *(d)* frigates and destroyers and *(e)* infantry were in the possession of United Kingdom armed forces in (i) 1979, (ii) 1990 and (iii) 1997. [14067]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* Since 1979, the circumstances in which we envisage British armed forces being deployed have changed dramatically. In particular, with the end of the cold war, and the dissolution of the Warsaw pact, we have been able to reduce the size of the front line while spending a higher proportion of the defence budget on new equipment for the services to enhance significantly their military capabilities. Each of the three services has taken delivery of new, advanced equipment including the Challenger 2 tank, AS90 howitzer, the Duke class type 23 frigate and advanced air-to-air missiles. In addition, orders have been placed for military equipment including the Apache attack helicopter and amphibious ships which will further enhance the fighting capability and mobility of the armed forces. The Government are, of course, also committed to the procurement of the Eurofighter 2000 aircraft.

Our forces are robustly configured to face the challenges of the post-cold war world and are the envy of their counterparts around the globe. The Government's forward procurement programme illustrates our commitment to ensuring that this remains the case.

The figures requested by the hon. Gentleman, which are set out in the table, should be considered in this context.

Details of Army equipment holdings are not available in the form requested or across the period concerned. The overall unit establishments for Regular armoured and field artillery regiments have therefore been given to indicate their required front-line strength in the designated years. The figures exclude equipment held by training and research establishments, in store as the war maintenance reserve or awaiting disposal.

United Kingdom holdings of tanks, artillery, fighters, frigate and destroyers and infantry numbers, 1979 to 1997[1]

Year	*Tanks*[2]	*Artillery pieces*[3]	*Fighters*[4]	*Frigates and destroyers*	*Infantry*[5]
1979	640	282	126	69	45,600
1990	699	298[6]	157	48	46,900
1997	388	240	100	35	31,900

[1] Figures are for 1 April except for 1997, where they reflect the situation at 1 January.
[2] Figures are for main battle tanks only and exclude armoured reconnaissance vehicles and armoured vehicles royal engineers.
[3] Figures are for field artillery pieces only and exclude air defence artillery, anti-tank guided weapon systems and, in 1979 and 1990, Lance sub-strategic nuclear missile launchers.
[4] Defined as those aircraft established in the air defence role, as indicated by statements on the Defence Estimates.
[5] Figures include British and Gurkha soldiers but exclude Royal Marines, and troops of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service) battalions. Figures include soldier trainees.
[6] Includes the unit establishments for both M107 self-propelled guns and MLRS which was replacing them.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21450]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21734]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21683]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [21690]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Advisory Bodies (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21378]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Organophosphates

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will update his answer of 11 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *436*, on the use of organophosphate insecticides in Operation Granby, in light of the memorandum submitted by his Department to the Defence Select Committee on 26 February. [21593]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the briefing material prepared by his Department in support of the appearance by the then Minister for the Armed Forces, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), on BBC2's "Newsnight" programme on 5 July 1993 in respect of Gulf War illness. [18378]

Mr. Soames: No. The briefing material has been withheld under the terms of the internal discussion and advice exemption in part 2 of the code of practice on access to Government information.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Crown Agents

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the transfer of Crown Agents to the Crown Agents Foundation has now been completed. [21789]

Dr. Liam Fox: Vesting of Crown Agents under the provisions of the Crown Agents Act 1996 into The Crown Agents for Overseas Governments and Administrations Ltd. and the transfer of ownership of that company to the Crown Agents Foundation took place today.

Global Environment Facility

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received copies of the second annual report of the Global Environment Facility; and if he will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library. [21788]

Dr. Liam Fox: Copies of the second annual report of the Global Environment Facility have recently been received. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Aid Donors

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the 20 largest overseas aid donors in descending order, indicating the total amount of aid given by each donor country. [21494]

Dr. Liam Fox: In 1995, total flows of official assistance from 21 members of the OECD's development assistance committee to developing and other countries on parts I and II of the DAC list were as follows, in descending order:

Donor	*US$ million*
1. Japan	14,739
2. Germany	12,038
3. France	9,191
4. USA	8,647
5. UK	3,563
6. Netherlands	3,531
7. Canada	2,317
8. Italy	1,909
9. Denmark	1,904
10. Sweden	1,809
11. Spain	1,348
12. Norway	1,244
13. Australia	1,198
14. Switzerland	1,186
15. Belgium	1,123
16. Austria	1,080
17. Finland	464
18. Portugal	293
19. Ireland	155
20. New Zealand	123
21. Luxembourg	65

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in descending order the 20 largest overseas aid donors on a per capita basis indicating the amount of aid per capita given by each donor country. [21495]

Dr. Fox: In per capita terms, the 21 members of the OECD's development assistance committee provided the following levels of official assistance to developing and other countries on parts I and II of the DAC list in 1995:

Donor	*Total assistance per capita (US$ millions)*
1. Denmark	363
2. Norway	285
3. Netherlands	228
4. Sweden	205
5. Switzerland	168
6. Luxembourg	167
7. France	158
8. Germany	147
9. Austria	134
10. Japan	117
11. Belgium	112
12. Finland	91
13. Canada	78
14. Australia	66
15. UK	61
16. Ireland	43
17. New Zealand	34
18. Spain	34
19. Italy	33
20. USA	33
21. Portugal	29

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his Department's policy to provide aid to Indonesia for projects of general application which treat East Timor as a province of Indonesia. [21405]

Dr. Liam Fox: While it is not our policy to provide aid on a Government-to-Government basis for projects in East Timor, we do not consider it necessary, or indeed practicable in most cases, to exclude East Timor from projects of general application within Indonesia. This does not imply support for or recognition of Indonesian sovereignty over the territory.

ENVIRONMENT

Packaging Waste

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish *(a)* the recommendations of the advisory committee on packaging for statutory guidance to be made by the Environment agencies under section 94(4) of the Environment Act 1995 and on accreditation of reprocessors and *(b)* the background analysis to his decision to adopt shared producer responsibility approach as the basis for the Producer Responsibility Obligation (Packaging Waste) Regulations made under the Environment Act 1995. [21826]

Mr. Gummer: I am today placing in the Library of the House copies of Sir Peter Parker's letter to me of 7 March setting out the recommendations of the advisory committee on packaging on statutory guidance to be made by the environment agencies under section 94(4) and on accreditation of reprocessors. I am also placing in the House copies of the background analysis to the decision to adopt shared producer responsibility as the basis for the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations made under section 93(10) of the Environment Act 1995.

I am also placing in the Library of the House a list of responses to the 1996 consultation papers and arranging for copies to be available for inspection. I will be making similar arrangements for the 1995 consultations responses.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many members of the current staff of the Building Research Establishment he estimates will leave its service through *(a)* retirement and early retirement and *(b)* (i) voluntary and (ii) involuntary redundancy, before the sale of the BRE is completed; and what are the estimated costs. [21363]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Of the 660 staff employed at BRE at close of play on 14 March, none left its service through retirement, early retirement or redundancy before the completion of the sale of BRE on 19 March.

Development Corporations

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many jobs have been created by development corporations since their inception; and if he will make a statement. [21364]

Mr. Curry: Up to 31 March 1996, the urban development corporations have created 187,277 gross jobs in new developments.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Water Services which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter; [21452]

(2) which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Water Services have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21436]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 22 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *29*.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21710]

Sir Paul Beresford: Details of the advisory non-department public bodies sponsored by my Department are listed in the Cabinet office publication, "Public Bodies 1996". A copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on Tuesday 12 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *518*. The information contained in that answer remains correct.

Since then, three new advisory non-departmental public bodies have been established: the Advisory Committee on Building Materials Exports; the Advisory Committee on Plant and Machinery and the Water Regulations Advisory Committee. None of these bodies has been set up on a statutory basis. There is no requirement for them to publish their advice to government, to publish an annual report or to lay an annual report before Parliament.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21736]

Sir Paul Beresford: Details of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department are listed in the Cabinet office publication. "*Public Bodies 1996*". A copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on Thursday 21 March 1996, *Official Report*, columns *273–74*. The information contained in that answer remains correct.

Since then, three new advisory non-departmental public bodies have been established: the Advisory Committee on Building Materials Exports; the Advisory Committee on Plant and Machinery and the Water Regulations Advisory Committee. The Government are under no obligation to consult these bodies on legislative proposals or to publish any response to advice from them.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21693]

Sir Paul Beresford: Details of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department are listed in the Cabinet office publication, "*Public Bodies 1996*". A copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on Wednesday 20 March 1996, *Official Report*, columns *213-14*. The information contained in that answer remains correct.

Since then three new advisory non-departmental public bodies have been established: the Advisory Committee on Building Materials Exports; the Advisory Committee on Plant and Machinery and the Water Regulations Advisory Committee. All three bodies conduct public consultation exercises and conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests. These are not a statutory requirement. These bodies do not carry out any of the other activities specified in the question.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those of the Office of Water Services advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21749]

Mr. Clappison: None.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Water Services *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21726]

Mr. Clappison: The Office of Water Services national consumer council is a non-statutory advisory body established by the Director General of Water Services. Accounts of the council's activities are published in its annual report, copies of which are in the Library. There is no statutory requirement on the council to publish or lay any papers.

Advisory Bodies (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21379]

Mr. Gummer: Non-departmental public bodies responsible to my Department for providing advice or services in London are listed below:

£ million

	1996–97		*1997–98*		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*	
Body	*Budget*	*Running costs (estimate)*	*Budget*	*Running costs (estimate)*	*Budget*	*Running costs (estimate)*	*Budget*	*Running costs (estimate)*
London Docklands Development Corporation[1]	84.7	23.9	97.4	23.7	—	—	—	—
Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust[2]	31.1	3.9	32.4	2.8	20 rent[2]	2.2	18.5 rent[2]	2.1
Tower Hamlets Housing Action Trust[2]	12.5	2.8	13	3	10 rent[2]	3.1	10 rent[2]	3
Stonebridge Housing Action Trust[2]	9.5	3.6	12.9	2.8	11 rent[2]	3	16 rent[2]	3.3

[1] London Docklands Development Corporation wound up on 31 March 1998.
[2] HAT budgets for 1998–99 to 1999–2000 do not include rental income, which will cannot yet be estimated with accuracy being dependent on progress in redevelopment.

In addition, a number of national bodies responsible to my Department, including the Housing Corporation, the Health and Safety Executive, English Partnerships and the Environment Agency, are responsible for delivery of services in London. Expenditure and running costs associated with these activities are not readily separable from overall national expenditure. I refer the hon. Member to my Department's annual report, published yesterday, copies of which are available in the Library.

Water Charges

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the increase or decrease in real terms since privatisation in water charges. [21493]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Between 1989–90, the year of privatisation, and 1996–97, average domestic water and sewerage charges in England and Wales increased by 35 per cent. in real terms. Since privatisation, the water

industry has invested over £18 billion and in 1994 the Director General of Water Services allowed for investment of £24 billion over the 10-year period to 2005.

Prison Ships

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what planning guidance he has issued which relates to applications in respect of prison ships; what considerations are material to such applications; and if he will make a statement. [21413]

Sir Paul Beresford: Planning guidance is issued to local planning authorities for them to take into account, inter alia, in decisions on planning applications. In the case of the proposed temporary mooring of a prison ship in Portland harbour, Dorset, the local planning authority accepts that planning permission is not required. Proposals by the Prison Service for shore-based facilities to serve the ship, which are Crown development, fall to be dealt with under the procedures set out in DOE Circular 18/84.

Tyne and Wear Development Corporation

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to extending the life of the Tyne and Wear development corporation; and if he will make a statement. [21420]

Mr. Curry: I refer to my reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury, (Mr. Baldry), then the Under-Secretary of State in this Department, on 22 April 1994 *Official Report* column *680*.

Planning Inquiries

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines his Department has issued in respect of decisions by planning inquiries which might bind an incoming Government. [21575]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State has a statutory responsibility to decide any planning case before him taking into account all material considerations, including the inquiry report. Guidance for an incoming Government on this issue does not therefore arise.

Marine Nature Conservation

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the results so far of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's marine nature conservation review; [21579]

(2) what proportion of the British coast is due to be assessed by the time the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's marine nature conservation review ends in March 1998; and what steps his Department will take to ensure that the rest of the British coast will be assessed for its marine nature conservation importance; [21580]

(3) which marine regions of Great Britain have been assessed for their marine nature conservation importance by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's nature conservation review. [21581]

Mr. Clappison: The two major review publications—the rationale and methods volume and the first of the regional reports series, MNCR sector 6: inlets in eastern England—are in the Library already. I have arranged for a list of the 160 limited circulation reports also to be placed in the Library.

By March 1998, if work in hand is completed, approximately 60 per cent. of the inshore coastal area of Great Britain will have been described and assessed. After the marine nature conservation review team finishes its work in March 1998, information collected by country nature conservation agencies and others using the review techniques will continue to be added to the MNCR database by the joint nature conservation committee, and will therefore be available to assist in management of marine resources.

Assessments of marine conservation importance have been made or are in draft for the Shetland voes, south-east Scotland and north-east England, marine inlets in eastern England, marine inlets in south-west Britain, Liverpool bay and the Solway Firth and the Scottish lagoons. Assessments for Orkney, Cardigan bay and north Wales and the Scottish sea lochs will also be undertaken.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to respond to the second annual report of the United Kingdom Round Table on Sustainable Development published on 12 March. [21592]

Mr. Clappison: We announced in "This Common Inheritance" annual report 1997 that we would publish a response to this report within three months.

Housing Associations

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if housing associations publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* minutes of meetings, *(d)* agendas of meetings and *(e)* registers of members' interests; and in each case whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21685]

Mr. Clappison: Registered social landlord are required by statute to provide a copy of their audited annual accounts to the Housing Corporation which holds them available for inspection. All other requirements are non-statutory. The main ones are:

The tenants guarantee, which requires registered social landlords to keep their tenants informed about their housing management performance.

Housing Corporation performance standards, under which associations are required to conduct their affairs in an open and accountable way, disseminating widely information about their housing provision and activities.

The National Housing Federation's code of governance, which requires board members to declare conflicts of interest and registered social landlords to maintain records of interests of board members and senior staff and to make them available for public inspection.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the statutory basis of housing associations; and if they *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21768]

Mr. Clappison: Registered social landlords are independent non-profit making bodies, of which two-thirds are charities. There is no statutory requirement

to admit members of the public to board or committee meetings, nor is there a statutory requirement to hold open meetings for the public.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if housing associations are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [21765]

Mr. Clappison: Registered social landlords are not subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, the Audit Commission, or the National Audit Office. However, the Housing Corporation, which has a statutory responsibility to regulate all registered social landlords is subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner and scrutiny by the National Audit Office. Furthermore, under powers granted in the Housing Act 1996, the Audit Commission may undertake value for money studies for, and provide advice on audit matters to, the Housing Corporation.

The corporation's statutory duties include the requirement to publish information about the performance of registered social landlords in the form of performance indicators.

There are no statutory provisions for open government which apply to registered social landlords.

Registered social landlords are eligible to apply for charter mark awards, and last year nine received awards.

"Environment News"

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange for copies of his Department's newsletter, "Environment News", to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. [21597]

Mr. Clappison: The latest copy of "Windoe", the Departmental newsletter and successor to "Environment World", has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent on the current energy conservation advertising campaign; how many calls have been received by the contact number; and what is the average cost per call to date. [21786]

Mr. Clappison: I will write to the hon. Member.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Anglo-Irish Secretariat

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what briefings have been requested by his Department from the Irish side of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat since 1 January 1990. [17701]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: This information is not available. It is, however, open to both sides of the secretariat to seek or offer briefings on subjects relevant to the operation of the Anglo-Irish agreement.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which Minister in his Department is responsible for the oversight of fair employment legislation and personnel matters. [20405]

Sir Patrick Mayhew *[holding answer 20 March 1997]:* Baroness Denton, by virtue of her responsibility for the Department of Economic Development, has ministerial responsibility for the fair employment legislation in Northern Ireland. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) is the Minister responsible for the Department of Finance and Personnel and hence for the general management and control of the Northern Ireland civil service. In that capacity he has a responsibility to oversee how the Northern Ireland civil service, as an employer, complies with good personnel practice including the relevant provisions of fair employment legislation.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case under a statutory requirement. [21433]

Mr. Moss: The information is as follows:

	Publish annual reports	*Publish annual accounts*	*Publish the minutes of meetings*	*Publish the agendas of meetings*	*Publish register of members' interests*
Health and Social Services Boards	[1]Yes	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	[1]Yes
Health and Social Services Councils	[2]Yes	[1]Yes	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	[1]Yes
Health and Social Services Trusts	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Agency	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
Northern Ireland Health Promotion Agency	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	[1]Yes
Northern Ireland Regional Medical Physics Agency	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
Northern Ireland Central Services Agency	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes
Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency	[2]Yes	[2]Yes	No	No	[1]Yes

[1] On a voluntary basis.

[2] A statutory requirement.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the pubic to all board committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21442]

Sir John Wheeler: I will write to the hon. Member.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement; [21721]

(2) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary; [21762]

(3) if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21744]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; and if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21761]

Mr. Moss: The information is as follows:

	Statutory base	*Admit public to board committee meetings*	*Open meetings for the public*
Health and Social Services Boards	Yes	No	[1]Yes
Health and Social Services Councils	Yes	No	No
Health and Social Services Trusts	Yes	No	[1]Yes
Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Agency	Yes	No	No
Northern Ireland Central Services Agency	Yes	No	No
Northern Ireland Health Promotion Agency	Yes	[1]Yes	No
Northern Ireland Regional Medical Physics Agency	Yes	No	No
Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency	Yes	No	No

[1] A statutory requirement.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [21727]

Mr. Moss: The information is as follows:

	Investigation by parliamentary commissioner	*Scrutiny by the audit commission*	*Scrutiny by the national audit office*	*Statutory provisions for open government*	*Performance indicators*	*Provision under the citizens' charter*
Health and Social Services Boards	Yes	not relevant in Northern Ireland	[1]No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Health and Social Services Councils	Yes		[1][2]No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Health and Social Services Trusts	Yes		[1]No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Agency	Yes		[1]No	Yes	Yes	No
Northern Ireland Central Services Agency	Yes		[1]No	Yes	Yes	No
Northern Ireland Health Promotion Agency	Yes		[1]No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Northern Ireland Regional Medical Physics Agency	Yes		[1]No	Yes	Yes	No
Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency	Yes		[1]No	Yes	Yes	No

[1] These bodies are scrutinised by the Northern Ireland Audit Office.
[2] Health and Social Services Councils expenditure is identified in Health and Social Services Boards accounts.

Sectarian Harassment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when *(a)* he and *(b)* the Under-Secretary first learned that a sum of money had been paid to a civil servant formerly in her private office for sectarian harassment; and if he had to approve the payment. [20402]

Sir Patrick Mayhew *[holding answer 20 March 1997]:* I was not required to approve this payment, but I was advised of the key elements of the proposed settlement, and agreed that the case should be settled in January 1997. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State was advised at the end of December 1996 of the key elements of the proposed settlement.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Hayes inquiry into allegations of sectarian harassment in the office of the Economy Minister will be in public. [20403]

Sir Patrick Mayhew *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* No. Dr. Hayes has been invited to undertake a review, not a public inquiry. The nature of the personnel issues to be examined by Dr. Hayes are unsuitable for public hearings.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the report of the Hayes inquiry will be published in full. [20404]

Sir Patrick Mayhew *[holding answer 20 March 1997]:* Yes, subject to such matters as may derive from security and personal confidentiality considerations.

Safari Park

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money his Department has made available to the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for the purchase of a safari park in County Antrim; and if he will make a statement. [21790]

Mr. Ancram: I will write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Public Appointments

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *721*, if he will make it his policy to keep and make available records of the religious breakdown of those public appointments made on the proposal of the Irish side of the Anglo-Irish secretariat at Maryfield; and for what reasons they are not currently made available. [21791]

Sir John Wheeler: I will write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Orders in Council

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the Orders in Council made in 1995 and 1996, indicating which were taken *(a)* on the Floor of the House and *(b)* in Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation, giving in the latter case the names of the hon. Members from Northern Ireland who were nominated to each Committee. [21792]

Sir John Wheeler: I will write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Departmental Private Offices

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff and what grades are in the private offices of (i) the Northern Ireland Office and (ii) each of the departmental private offices. [21794]

Sir John Wheeler: I will write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Government Legislation

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on present Government policy in relation to the inclusion of Northern Ireland in the extent of appropriate Bills; and what changes he has made to this policy since he became Secretary of State. [21793]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I will write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Personnel Documents

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the powers of the inquiry set up to investigate the improper copying of restricted Department of Agriculture personnel documents to the media; and if civil servants will be obliged to answer questions about the matter. [21795]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I will write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Citizens Charter

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list those national citizens charters which *(a)* provide complaints procedures in line with recommendations of the complaints task force and *(b)* provide financial compensation for users when particular standards have not been met; and if he will publish for each the figures for compensation paid out in each financial year since the charter was implemented; [21796]

(2) how many citizens charters adopted by national public services *(a)* have their performance indicators validated and verified by an external body and *(b)* specify enforceable rights for particular standards of service; and if he will identify those services under *(a)* and *(b)*; [21803]

(3) if he will list all national citizens charters, indicating which involved consumer consultation in *(a)* the setting of their performance standards and *(b)* their preparation; [21801]

(4) how many of the national citizens charters are available *(a)* in an appropriate form for the visually impaired and *(b)* in two or more languages other than English; and if he will identify those charters under *(a)* and *(b)*. [21815]

Sir John Wheeler: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Social Fund

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the Northern Ireland social fund discretionary budget will be for 1997–98. [21806]

Mr. Moss: I am pleased to announce that the social fund gross discretionary budget for 1997–98 will be £40.34 million. £9.76 million will be allocated to grants; £30.48 million to loans and £0.1 million will be held as a contingency reserve. The new allocations represent an increase of £3.63 million over the gross budget set at April 1996.

This increase in the social fund budget will ensure that more people receive help and that the fund continues to play an important role in targeting resources to those most in need. Details of the individual district budget allocations; together with a note explaining the basis on which they have been made, have been placed in the Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Budget

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of his annual departmental budget was spent in Wales in each of the last five years; and how much that proportion was in *(a)* 1997 prices and *(b)* cash terms for each year. [20705]

Mr. Howard: The available information is contained in the table. Other Home Office expenditure benefiting Wales, for example, crime prevention publicity campaigns and research, cannot be broken down beyond the global spend for England and Wales. In addition, for 1992–93, total Home Office expenditure cannot be broken down at all between England and Wales.

Year	*Home Office expenditure in Wales (£000's)*	*Percentage of total Home office expenditure*	*Home Office expenditure in Wales (at 1997 prices)*
1992–93	n/a	n/a	n/a
1993–94	203,929	3.4	218,114
1994–95	214,039	3.4	224,946
1995–96	230,813	3.6	236,583
1996–97[1]	243,215	3.7	243,215

[1] Estimated.

Citizens Charters

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will develop and implement a citizens charter for *(a)* the Immigration and Nationality Service and *(b)* the Prison Service. [21781]

Mr. Howard: I will write to the hon. Member.

Prison Building

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department is he will list *(a)* the prison building projects for which contracts have been signed, *(b)* the estimated date of completion and *(c)* their planned capacity once opened. [21784]

Miss Widdecombe: I will write to the hon. Member.

Prison Ship

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the countries with which his Department competed to purchase the prison ship Weare. [21785]

Miss Widdecombe: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about progress with the planning application for the prison ship in Portland; and what permissions have been granted for its continued mooring there. [21412]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 21 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the planning application for the prison ship in Portland.

Portland Port Limited has leased to the Prison Service a temporary berth until a decision is reached by the Secretary of State for the Environment on the notice of proposed development. A meeting to consider the issues has been arranged by the Department of Environment for 20 March.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what expenses have been incurred preparing shore facilities in Dorset for the prison ship Weare; when such expenditure was first authorised; and when such expenditure first began to be incurred. [21576]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Hugh Taylor to Mr. George Howarth, dated 21 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your question about expenses incurred preparing shore facilities in Dorset for the prison ship.

I will write to you when the information is available.

Police Authorities (Expenditure)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the gross public spending on police authorities for each year since 1990–91, in 1996–97 prices. [21812]

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the statutory basis of police authorities and if they *(a)* admit members of the public to board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and whether in each case this is under statutory requirement. [21769]

Mr Maclean: Police authorities, free-standing of local government, were established by provisions in the Police and Magistrates Courts Act 1994, now consolidated in the Police Act 1996. They, their committees and sub-committees, continue to be bound by provisions in the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, requiring meetings to be open to the public.

Reginald Dudley and Robert Maynard

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received

concerning *(a)* the safety of the conviction and *(b)* the case for parole, of Reginald Dudley and Robert Maynard; and if he will make a statement. [21378]

Mr. Kirkhope: Representations about the cases of Reginald Dudley and Robert Maynard have been received from a variety of sources. The latest representations that they were wrongfully convicted, and that they should be granted parole stem from an article in *The Guardian* alleging that a key prosecution witness wished to withdraw his evidence. These are being considered.

Both cases have been considered at the appropriate times by the Parole Board; neither has yet been recommended for release on life licence.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Data Protection Registrar on *(a)* the use by the Security Services of the exemptions in section 28 of the Data Protection Act 1984 and *(b)* the use by the police of the exemptions in section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984; and if he will make a statement. [21416]

Mr. Howard: I have had no such discussions.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the implementation of the data protection directive, EC/95/46, on the problems associated with enforced subject access; and if he will make a statement. [21417]

Mr. Sackville: I will write to the hon. Member.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21445]

Mr. Howard: The following executive non-departmental public bodies have a statutory base:

Alcohol Education and Research Council

Commission for Racial Equality

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Data Protection Registrar

Gaming Board for Great Britain

Horserace Betting Levy Board

Horserace Totalisator Board

Parole Board

Police Complaints Authority.

None of the NDPBs for which I am responsible admits members of the public to all board or committee meetings either under a statutory requirement or voluntarily.

The Commission for Racial Equality holds conferences and seminars on race relations issues, but none of the NDPBs for which I am responsible is under a statutory requirement to hold open meetings.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21719]

Mr. Howard: The following advisory non-departmental public bodies are sponsored by my Department:

(a) are on a statutory basis

Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs

Animal Procedures Committee

Firearms Consultative Committee

Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England

Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales

Poisons Board

Police Negotiating Board.

(b) publish their advice to Government

Animal Procedures Committee

Firearms Consultative Committee[1]

Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England[1]

Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales[1].

(c) publish an annual report and lay it before Parliament

Animal Procedures Committee[1]

Firearms Consultative Committee[1]

Metropolitan Police Committee.

[1] In these cases, the bodies concerned meet a statutory requirement. In other cases, the bodies act voluntarily.

In my reply of 14 March 1996 at column *711*, I indicated that the Poisons Board and the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs published their advice to Government. I regret that was incorrect.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if police authorities are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [21767]

Mr. Maclean: Police authorities established under the provisions of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 now incorporated in the Police Act 1996 are not open to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, but by the Commissioner for Local Administration. Similarly, they are subject to scrutiny by the Audit Commission, not the National Audit Office. Also, the Audit Commission's citizens charter performance indicators include a range of indicators that apply to the police service, and police authorities are required to publish these annually. As regards statutory provision for open government, police authorities are bound by rules similar to those that apply for local government.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21741]

Mr. Howard: The Government are required to consult the following advisory non-departmental public bodies before relevant legislative proposals:

Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs;
Animal Procedures Committee;
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England;
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales;
Poisons Board.

In addition, the Government's response to advice supplied by the following bodies must be published:

Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England;
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21696]

Mr. Howard: The following advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department:

(a) hold public meeting
Metropolitan Police Committee
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales.
(b) conduct public consultation exercises
Animal Procedures Committee
Firearms Consultative Committee
Metropolitan Police Committee
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales.
(c) conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interest
Animal Procedures Committee
Crime Prevention Agency
Firearms Consultative Committee
Metropolitan Police Committee.

The activities listed are undertaken voluntarily by the bodies concerned.

None of the advisory non-departmental public bodies which my Department sponsors publishes a register of members' interests, agendas for meetings or minutes of meetings.

Crime (London)

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the crime rate in each of the London boroughs; and if he will publish this in the *Official Report* giving details of each category of reported crime. [21491]

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

Advisory Bodies (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21381]

Mr. Howard: Available information on the bodies requested is given in the table:

£000

	Budgeted expenditure		*Estimated running costs*	
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Metropolitan Police	1,713,494	1,738,884	1,663,829	1,705,000
Metropolitan Police Committee	399	405	399	405
Inner London Probation Service	46,144	45,555	40,619	40,042
North-east London Probation Service	10,693	10,348	9,636	9,521
South-east London Probation Service	7,003	6,910	6,403	6,326
South-west London Probation Service	5,733	5,820	4,894	4,797
Middlesex Probation Service	19,174	18,972	17,421	17,133

Budgets for subsequent years are not yet determined.

WPC Yvonne Fletcher

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with *(a)* Lieutenant Colonel George Styles and *(b)* Dr. Hugh Thomas, former chief consultant surgeon to the British Army in Northern Ireland, and *(c)* Professor Bernard Knight, on the circumstances of the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher. [21600]

Mr. Howard: None. The investigation of crime is a matter for the police.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the actions taken by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Metropolitan police in respect of the contents of the Channel 4 film, "Murder in St. James", broadcast in April 1996 concerning the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher. [21599]

Mr. Howard: My officials viewed the programme and had various consultations about its contents. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State responded to the allegations made in it in the Adjournment debate initiated by the hon. Member on 8 May 1996, and he and I have answered various questions asked by the hon. Member and letters from other hon. Members and members of the public. The metropolitan police reviewed the contents of the programme as part of their continuing investigation into the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher. They remain satisfied with the findings of the inquest that the shot that killed her was fired from the Libyan People's Bureau.

Albanian Nationals

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions he has given to the immigration authorities for discretionary treatment of Albanian nationals currently present in the United Kingdom; what estimate he has made of the number of Albanian nationals who are currently in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [21772]

Mr. Kirkhope: We are urgently reviewing the situation in Albania, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Pending the outcome of this review, instructions have been given that action on all outstanding Albanian asylum claims should be frozen and that any removal directions for Albanians to Albania should be suspended.

Statistics on the number of Albanians currently present in the United Kingdom are not available.

Prison Service (Expenditure)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total expenditure on the Prison Service in each of the last five years; what is projected expenditure for the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [21584]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 21 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent question about total expenditure on the Prison Service in each of the last five years and projects expenditure for the next three years.

Expenditure for the years 1991–92 to 1995–96 was as follows:

1991–92 £1,462.1 million
1991–93 £1,470.3 million
1993–94 £1,508.8 million
1994–95 £1,597.9 million
1995–96 £1,666.9 million.

For the current and the next three years the projected expenditure is:

1996–97 £1,642.3 million (voted provision)
1997–98 £1,756.8 million
1998–99 £1,707.3 million
1999–00 £1,829.3 million.

Prison Population

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the percentage increase in the prison population for each of the last 60 months for which figures are available; what increases he estimates will take place in each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [21585]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 21 March 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent question about the prison population.

I will write to you later.

Crime (Conviction Rates)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* number of convictions, *(b)* conviction rate and *(c)* clear-up rate, for each category of crime, in each region, for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [21586]

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of convictions and the conviction rate for the years 1991, 1993 and 1995—latest available—is given in tables A, B and C. The provision of data for other years would involve disproportionate cost.

Information on clear-up rates for 1995 and 1996 is given in tables D and E. Figures for earlier years are published annually in chapter 9 of "Regional Trends"; copies of which are available in the Library.

Table A: Number of offenders convicted and conviction rate[1] for indictable offences by offence group and region 1991

Region		Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Burglary	Robbery	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Drug offences	Other excluding motoring offences	Motoring offences	Total indictable offences
North	Convictions	3,389	346	3,759	255	9,224	1,109	553	862	1,793	746	22,038
	Rate (per cent.)	56.5	61.7	64.7	66.6	69.9	70.7	56.5	80.0	58.0	78.3	65.5
Yorkshire and Humberside	Convictions	5,615	576	5,739	459	14,273	2,112	1,047	1,583	3,404	1,108	35,916
	Rate (per cent.)	60.3	64.1	71.2	64.5	74.6	79.7	68.9	78.9	63.5	82.4	70.4
East Midlands	Convictions	4,804	462	4,174	362	10,057	1,611	648	920	2,179	1,245	26,462
	Rate (per cent.)	54.4	59.1	66.3	61.1	70.6	69.7	52.8	76.1	58.1	74.6	64.7
East Anglia	Convictions	1,731	186	1,571	119	4,657	775	496	754	913	643	11,845
	Rate (per cent.)	63.5	60.4	72.7	55.3	78.1	74.0	78.2	83.3	65.1	89.3	73.7
South East	Convictions	12,070	1,848	11,795	1,802	41,378	7,510	3,204	10,619	9,732	2,746	102,704
	Rate (per cent.)	53.6	64.0	70.0	61.5	74.1	75.9	63.9	84.9	65.6	76.4	69.9
Greater London[2]	Convictions	5,780	1,064	5,008	1,190	19,904	3,877	1,495	6,521	5,288	1,045	51,172
	Rate (per cent.)	52.0	64.4	71.9	61.8	78.1	80.7	62.6	89.5	68.7	85.5	72.5
Rest of South East	Convictions	6,290	784	6,787	612	21,474	3,633	1,709	4,098	4,444	1,701	51,532
	Rate (per cent.)	55.2	63.4	68.6	61.0	70.8	71.3	65.1	78.4	62.3	71.8	67.5
South West	Convictions	3,629	402	3,431	240	10,110	1,611	641	1,499	2,158	996	24,717
	Rate (per cent.)	55.6	55.4	67.4	54.5	71.8	72.4	62.4	81.5	63.9	77.5	67.5
West Midlands	Convictions	6,160	687	5,180	665	13,129	2,043	1,756	1,634	4,110	1,378	36,742
	Rate (per cent.)	56.5	64.6	69.9	61.6	71.7	77.7	61.8	85.0	58.2	80.9	66.9
North West	Convictions	6,225	658	7,377	749	21,749	3,093	861	4,179	7,610	1,644	54,145
	Rate (per cent.)	55.9	58.7	72.9	60.5	77.1	80.1	82.2	81.0	68.2	82.9	72.2

Table A: Number of offenders convicted and conviction rate[1] for indictable offences by offence group and region 1991

Region		Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Burglary	Robbery	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Drug offences	Other excluding motoring offences	Motoring offences	Total indictable offences
England	Convictions	43,623	5,165	43,026	4,651	124,577	19,864	9,208	22,050	31,899	10,506	314,569
	Rate (per cent.)	56.0	61.9	69.6	61.3	73.7	75.8	64.4	82.8	63.8	79.3	69.1
Wales	Convictions	3,528	360	3,063	190	8,967	1,308	990	1,405	2,471	757	23,039
	Rate (per cent.)	55.4	63.6	66.8	67.1	72.0	75.2	61.2	85.0	64.0	82.3	67.7

[1] Number of offenders convicted at all courts as a proportion (per cent.) of defendants prosecuted at magistrates' courts.

[2] Includes the Metropolitan and City of London police force areas.

Table B: Number of offenders convicted and conviction rate[1] for indictable offences by offence group and region 1993

Region		Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Burglary	Robbery	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Drug offences	Other excluding motoring offences	Motoring offences	Total indictable offences
North	Convictions	3,139	292	3,323	302	9,667	1,106	610	1,219	2,356	826	22,850
	Rate (per cent.)	50.7	58.5	60.8	58.9	69.5	72.5	52.7	79.4	59.9	70.2	63.6
Yorkshire and Humberside	Convictions	4,626	422	5,093	538	13,042	1,572	1,457	2,185	3,989	853	33,777
	Rate (per cent.)	54.7	56.5	64.7	61.2	69.7	70.4	58.5	79.2	58.5	72.8	64.8
East Midlands	Convictions	4,047	379	3,636	376	9,124	1,522	558	1,182	2,165	1,182	24,171
	Rate (per cent.)	47.5	49.8	60.3	52.7	69.1	73.0	54.2	79.6	53.7	73.9	61.2
East Anglia	Convictions	1,635	166	1,440	120	4,505	776	382	755	1,025	621	11,425
	Rate (per cent.)	56.6	65.4	69.9	71.9	76.5	80.6	75.3	85.1	62.5	83.1	71.4
South East	Convictions	8,830	1,327	10,296	1,753	35,963	6,025	2,816	8,854	11,159	3,173	90,196
	Rate (per cent.)	41.1	52.3	64.0	51.2	70.4	70.4	56.3	79.9	57.9	65.9	69.9
Greater London[2]	Convictions	3,889	648	4,699	1,197	17,558	3,111	1,312	5,232	7,108	1,691	46,445
	Rate (per cent.)	34.5	47.3	64.1	48.6	70.6	69.2	52.6	79.6	60.2	63.9	61.7
Rest of South East	Convictions	4,941	679	5,597	556	18,405	2,914	1,504	3,622	4,051	1,482	43,751
	Rate (per cent.)	48.3	58.1	63.9	58.0	70.2	71.6	60.1	80.3	54.4	68.4	64.3
South West	Convictions	2,563	331	2,900	244	8,685	1,301	609	1,440	2,061	780	20,914
	Rate (per cent.)	47.7	57.1	62.5	55.7	71.9	75.2	62.6	84.6	48.6	75.5	68.8
West Midlands	Convictions	5,122	513	4,519	646	11,308	1,490	1,408	1,417	4,472	1,134	32,029
	Rate (per cent.)	50.5	58.8	63.4	55.5	67.7	73.3	58.7	76.9	55.7	70.4	61.7
North West	Convictions	5,418	554	6,272	899	20,852	2,507	731	3,519	7,912	1,528	50,192
	Rate (per cent.)	49.8	52.5	70.1	59.7	78.3	75.2	74.5	85.0	62.3	81.8	69.7
England	Convictions	35,380	3,984	37,479	4,878	113,156	16,299	8,571	20,571	35,139	10,097	285,554
	Rate (per cent.)	47.9	54.5	64.4	55.4	71.5	72.6	59.0	80.9	57.9	72.0	64.4
Wales	Convictions	3,496	344	2,793	216	8,481	1,207	804	1,330	2,639	720	22,030
	Rate (per cent.)	47.6	56.3	60.7	61.9	70.8	72.0	55.2	80.8	59.9	70.9	62.6

[1] Number of offenders convicted at all courts as a proportion (per cent.) of defendants prosecuted at magistrates' courts.

[2] Includes the Metropolitan and City of London Police Force Areas.

Table C: Number of offenders convicted and conviction rate[1] for indictable offences by offence group and region 1995

Region		Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Burglary	Robbery	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Drug offences	Other (excluding motoring offences)	Motoring offences	Total indictable offences
North	Convictions	2,646	342	3,421	352	9,876	1,126	659	1,536	2,871	830	23,659
	Rate (per cent.)	50.2	66.8	65.2	53.7	72.3	72.4	58.2	79.6	56.6	75.5	65.5
Yorkshire and Humberside	Convictions	3,327	525	4,563	483	12,548	1,779	1,382	3,164	4,345	961	33,077
	Rate (per cent.)	53.0	70.5	67.1	55.5	71.5	69.2	59.7	78.9	55.9	76.8	66.0
East Midlands	Convictions	2,104	405	3,070	383	7,909	1,300	551	1,739	2,408	1,161	21,030
	Rate (per cent.)	42.2	60.4	64.6	53.3	67.4	66.9	55.2	80.4	51.0	73.8	61.4
East Anglia	Convictions	894	161	1,142	93	3,733	610	475	1,076	1,034	777	9,995
	Rate (per cent.)	52.8	64.4	68.4	64.6	75.9	72.8	72.1	91.3	59.4	86.3	71.4
South East	Convictions	7,886	1,346	9,035	1,952	35,010	5,881	2,915	12,468	12,712	3,001	92,206
	Rate (per cent.)	46.4	62.2	67.8	47.6	73.2	69.3	57.2	84.2[2]	56.6	67.5	66.0
Greater London[3]	Convictions	3,769	601	4,212	1,416	16,471	3,095	1,474	6,786	7,869	1,394	47,087
	Rate (per cent.)	42.9	55.7	67.4	45.5	73.3	68.2	53.9	82.6	58.0	63.7	64.6
Rest of South East	Convictions	4,117	745	4,823	536	18,539	2,786	1,441	5,682	4,843	1,607	45,119
	Rate (per cent.)	50.1	68.6	68.2	54.2	73.0	70.6	61.1	86.2	54.3	71.1	67.5
South West	Convictions	1,876	382	2,502	232	8,590	1,317	637	2,331	2,373	889	21,129
	Rate (per cent.)	48.6	62.8	65.2	53.8	71.5	69.1	63.2	84.9	45.9	77.4	64.6
West Midlands	Convictions	3,316	474	3,799	663	10,387	1,461	1,359	2,075	4,813	1,284	29,631
	Rate (per cent.)	50.2	62.0	66.3	53.0	69.6	69.0	57.1	83.2	53.4	72.1	63.0
North West	Convictions	4,603	714	5,437	819	20,399	2,630	718	5,050	8,860	1,477	50,707
	Rate (per cent.)	48.7	64.5	69.5	58.5	77.4	74.4	69.4	84.5	51.0	80.8	66.8
England	Convictions	26,652	4,349	32,969	4,977	108,452	16,104	8,696	29,439	39,416	10,380	281,434
	Rate (per cent.)	48.3	63.7	67.0	52.0	72.8	70.2	59.5	83.4	53.8	74.0	65.5
Wales	Convictions	2,476	333	2,377	190	7,646	1,126	869	2,145	2,762	819	20,743
	Rate (per cent.)	42.9	71.8	61.1	55.6	70.6	68.3	55.0	81.1	51.6	76.0	61.7

[1] Number of offenders convicted at all courts as a proportion (per cent.) of defendants prosecuted at magistrates' courts.

[2] Includes the Metropolitan and City of London Police Force Areas.

Table D: Notifiable offences cleared up by the police[1,2]: clear up rate by offence group, 1995

England and Wales

	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Burglary	Robbery	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Other	Total
North	78	81	17	30	27	54	21	98	26
Yorkshire and Humberside	79	79	16	25	20	50	14	101	21
East Midlands	82	81	22	33	23	46	18	98	26
East Anglia	82	76	20	33	23	57	20	99	26
South East	72	66	21	20	22	47	22	91	26
Greater London	65	57	22	18	18	46	31	87	25
Rest of South East	80	77	20	30	25	49	18	95	27
South West	84	83	19	29	22	54	22	98	26
West Midlands	77	75	29	20	23	35	15	94	26
North West	73	82	21	24	25	63	18	99	27
England	76	74	21	22	23	50	19	96	26
Wales	89	89	28	48	33	51	23	96	34

[1] Excluding criminal damage value £20 and under.
[2] Some offences cleared up may have been initially recorded in an earlier year.

Table E: Notifiable offences cleared by the police[1,2]: clear up rate by offence group, 1996

England and Wales

	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Burglary	Robbery	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Other	Total
North	76	80	18	31	25	53	22	100	26
Yorkshire and Humberside	80	82	18	35	21	47	15	103	23
East Midlands	85	98	23	34	27	50	20	104	30
East Anglia	86	83	24	45	24	57	20	97	29
South East	72	64	22	24	23	47	18	92	27
Greater London	64	55	21	23	19	46	16	88	24
Rest of South East	81	77	23	36	26	50	19	96	29
South West	84	83	20	27	21	54	21	97	26
West Midlands	78	77	24	22	24	39	16	95	26
North West	73	82	17	23	23	60	17	98	25
England	76	75	21	26	23	49	18	96	26
Wales	86	92	31	52	35	53	23	101	37

[1] Excluding criminal damage value £20 and under.
[2] Some offences cleared up may have been initially recorded in an earlier year.

Crime (Sentences) Bill

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the additional expenditure required by the Crime (Sentences) Bill has been included in his Department's projected spending; what are the figures per year; and if he will make a statement. [21591]

Mr. Howard: The public expenditure survey 1996 produced a baseline settlement for my Department up to the end of the financial year 1999–2000, which is set out in the Home Office Annual Report 1997 published on 20 March (Cm 3608). The only provisions in the Crime (Sentences) Bill which are likely to have a significant financial impact before the end of that survey period are the provisions relating to automatic life sentences for repeat serious sexual or violent offenders and to minimum sentences for drug traffickers. The cost of implementing these provisions can be met from within current Home Office resources.

The White Paper "Protecting the Public", made clear that provisions for honesty in sentencing and minimum sentences for burglars could be implemented in 1999, but that implementation will be dependent on the availability of prison places and securing the necessary provision in subsequent public expenditure survey rounds.

It is not possible to identify the costs to the Prison Service of the additional prisoners likely to be accommodated as a consequence of the implementation of the automatic life sentences and of the minimum sentences for drug traffickers separately from the costs of accommodating other new prisoners in accordance with the prison population projections.

Audio Alarms

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has given to police authorities with regard to their policy on responding to audio alarms; and what steps he has taken to monitor local policies on responding to audio alarms. [21603]

Mr. Maclean: The response to audio alarms and monitoring of that response is an operational matter for the chief police officer of each force to decide.

Police Authorities (Public Information)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if police authorities publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* minutes of meetings, *(d)* agendas of meetings and *(e)* registers of members' interests; and in each case whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21686]

Mr. Maclean: Police authorities established under the provisions of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 now incorporated in the Police Act 1996 are required to publish an annual report on local policing for that year and to copy that report to the Home Secretary. Under the 1996 Act, they are also bound by provisions in the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, which require agendas, minutes of proceedings and accounts to be open to inspection during reasonable hours and also requires members to declare any direct or indirect pecuniary interest in business which is under discussion. Additionally, regulations made under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 require councillor and independent members of police authorities to declare information about their pecuniary interests in a register which is open to public inspection.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her latest estimate of the number of places for four-year-olds created under phase 1 of the voucher scheme in each of the four pilot areas in *(a)* the maintained sector, *(b)* the voluntary sector and *(c)* the private sector. [21505]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information available in the autumn of 1996 was set out at page 56 of the report on phase 1 of the nursery education voucher scheme, copies of which are in the Library. In the four phase 1 areas as a whole, 346 more children redeemed vouchers in the autumn term 1996 than in the summer term 1996.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list those local education authorities which are planning to make less than £1,100 available to providers in the maintained sector, in respect of places for four-year-olds under the national voucher scheme; indicating in each case the expected level of funding per four-year-old. [21550]

Mr. Squire: This information is not yet available.

Class Sizes

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the proportion of children in classes of more than 31 in 1979; and what is the proportion currently for *(a)* all schools, *(b)* primary schools and *(c)* secondary schools. [21504]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is shown in the following table.

Percentage of pupils[1] in one teacher classes of 31 or more pupils in maintained primary and secondary schools in England

Position in January each year

	1979	*1996*
Primary schools	35.3	31.8
Secondary schools	16.0	8.5

[1] Pupils in one teacher classes of size 31 or more pupils expressed as a percentage of all pupils in one teacher classes.

Information for nursery, special and independent schools is not collected centrally.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of the executive non-departmental bodies sponsored by her Department have a statutory base; if she will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21448]

Mr. Squire: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Name of body	*Statutory base*	*Admit public to all meetings*		*Hold open meetings*	
		Statutory	*Voluntary*	*Statutory*	*Voluntary*
Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research	No	No	No	No	No
Construction Industry Training board	Yes	No	No	No	No
Education Assets Board	Yes	No	No	No	No
Engineering Construction Industry Board	Yes	No	No	No	No
Equal opportunities Commission	Yes	No	No	No	No
Funding Agency for Schools	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Further Education Funding Council	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Higher Education Funding Council for England	Yes	No	No	No	No
Investors in People UK	No	No	No	No	No
National Council for Educational Technology	No	No	No	No	No
National Council for Vocational Qualifications	No	No	No	No	No
Remploy Ltd.	No	No	No	No	No
School Curriculum and Assessment Authority	Yes	No	No	No	No
Student Loans Company	No	No	No	No	No
Teacher Training Agency	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is the statutory basis of (i) career service companies, (ii) city technology colleges, (iii) further education corporations, (iv) higher education corporations, and (v) training and enterprise councils; and of those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public, showing whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement; [21766]

(2) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultations exercises,

(c) conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement; [21692]

(3) if she will list those of her Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from; [21735]

(4) if (i) career service companies, (ii) city technology colleges, (iii) further education corporations, (iv) higher education corporations, and (v) training and enterprise councils are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter; [21763]

(5) what *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* minutes of meetings, *(d)* agendas of meetings and *(e)* registers of member's interests are published by (i) career service companies, (ii) city technology colleges, (iii) further education corporations, (iv) higher education corporations and (v) training and enterprise councils; and in each case whether it is under a statutory requirement; [21728]

(6) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if she will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [21691]

Mr. Squire: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the gross public spending for each year since 1990–91, in 1996–97 prices on *(a)* grant-maintained schools, *(b)* city technology colleges, *(c)* training and enterprise *(d)* career service companies. [21811]

Mr. Paice: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Secondary Schools

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of children got their first preference in allocation of secondary school in each local education authority in England in the most recent year for which figures are available. [21313]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 20 March 1997]:* Data on the number of parents securing their first choice of school is not collected centrally. However surveys commissioned by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities in 1992 and *The Times* in 1993 showed that some 90 per cent. of parents gained a place at their first choice of secondary school.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of bills to her Department for the financial year 1995 to 1996 were paid *(a)* in accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice where no contractual conditions applied. [21214]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 20 March 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *613–14* which answered part *(b)* of the above question. An answer to part *(a)* could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Jobseekers

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if a jobseeker's allowance claimant could be referred to a (i) jobplan workshop, (ii) workwise course, (iii) restart course, (iv) 1-2-1 and (v) jobfinder if he *(a)* is attending a jobclub, *(b)* will start a full-time education or training course in the near future and *(c)* will be starting work in the near future. [21373]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert Horne to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 21 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to write to you direct to respond to your question about claimants in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and referrals to Jobplan, Workwise and Restart Courses 1-2-1 and Jobfinder caseloading.

It may help if I explain that Jobplan, Workwise and Restart Courses are short programmes which help people compete more successfully for jobs and opportunities by allowing them to establish clear job goals and review their strengths and skills and the way they sell themselves to prospective employers. They are delivered on the Employment Service's (ES) behalf by organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

In the main, jobseekers are referred to Jobplan and Workwise when they have been unemployed for at least 12 months and to Restart Courses when they have been unemployed for two years or more.

1-2-1 and Jobfinder (from April 1997) offer a series of caseload interviews, with an ES adviser, for jobseekers who have been unemployed for one year or two years or more, respectively. Through the interviews ES advisers are able to offer jobseekers concentrated help to encourage more effective job search; develop self-motivation; and help set clear goals for jobseekers to achieve.

Where a jobseeker is attending a Jobclub, they would still be expected to attend Jobfinder caseload interviews. However arrangements would be made so that the jobseeker could continue to attend the Jobclub, in addition to attending a caseload interview. Indeed, the caseload interviews will complement the activity in Jobclub. However, Jobclub members would not normally be directed to attend 1-2-1, Jobplan, Workwise or a Restart Course, whilst still actively and regularly attending the Jobclub.

If a jobseeker is due to start full-time education, a training course or a job in the near future, it is at the discretion of ES advisers as to whether they refer the individual to any of these programmes. However, where there is a firm offer (usually in writing) and the course or job is due to start shortly, we would not normally expect the jobseeker to be referred to a programme. However, if they do not subsequently take up the course or job they will in most cases be referred to the relevant programme.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which groups of claimants are given priority access to jobclubs and jobsearch plus. [21374]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert Horne to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 21 March 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to write to you direct to respond to your question about priority access to Jobclubs and Jobsearch Plus.

To be eligible to join these programmes jobseekers will normally have been registered unemployed for 26 weeks for Jobclub and 13 weeks for Jobsearch Plus. There are however a number of exemptions to the eligibility criteria which allow people in special groups to join the programmes immediately they become unemployed. These include people with disabilities, people with literacy or numeracy difficulties, labour market returners, people needing basic training in English (and Welsh/Gaelic), jobseekers affected by large scale redundancies, ex-offenders and people who have served in HM Forces.

Some jobseekers will have priority status for entry into the two programmes. These include unemployed people with disabilities and 18 to 24 year olds who have been unemployed for a year or more who have never worked since leaving full time education. In addition people who have been directed to and have completed a Jobplan, Workwise or Restart course also enjoy priority consideration.

I hope this is helpful.

School Budgets

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her letter of 17 March on school budget deficits, if she will list the schools running a budget deficit indicating in each case the amount. [21410]

Mr. Robin Squire: I regret that the effort and cost entailed in compiling such a list would be disproportionate.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her letter of 17 March on school budget deficits, what estimate she has made of the number of local education authorities which plan to take back delegated budgets from schools in deficit. [21411]

Mr. Squire: My right hon. Friend has made no such estimate.

Advisory Bodies (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the non-elected bodies responsible to her Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21387]

Mr. Paice: The information available is given in the following table.

Non-elected bodies	*Overall budget 1996–97 (£)*	*Running costs 1996–97 (£)*
Training and Enterprise Councils:		
West London TEC	20,658,317	1,740,682
AZTEC	13,238,824	1,223,209
CENTEC[1]	40,029,172	3,813,735
CILNTEC[1]	20,358,066	1,998,662
London East TEC	34,416,844	3,059,632
North London TEC	22,415,495	1,804,767
North-west London TEC	11,089,213	1,223,121
SOLOTEC	32,644,320	3,108,208
Careers Services:		
Capital Careers	2,564,865	2,139,336
Careers Enterprise	1,639,851	1,374,336
CFBT West London Careers	3,295,607	2,734,336
Futures Careers	4,783,974	4,264,336
Lifetime Careers	1,851,033	1,544,336
London South Bank Careers	1,899,373	1,606,690
Prospects Careers	4,105,950	3,414,336
Search Careers	1,956,431	1,629,336
Microdec Careers	500,000	n/a
Greenwich Careers[2]	511,760	346,000
Lewisham Careers[2]	528,784	419,944
Lambeth Careers[2]	445,510	394,528
Southwark Careers[2]	492,689	396,000

[1] As of 1 April 1997 CILNTEC and CENTEC will merge to form Focus Central London TEC.

[2] These Careers Services operated from 1 April 1996 to 30 September 1996, after which (from 1 October 1996) London South Bank Careers took over.

n/a = information not available.

TEC and Careers Service total budget and running costs for 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 have not yet been determined.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what are the criteria for deciding whether BSE-infected and suspected BSE-infected bovine offal is *(a)* disposed of in landfill sites and *(b)* incinerated; [20219]

(2) if BSE-infected or suspected BSE-infected bovine offal has been dumped in landfill sites in Warrington; [20220]

(3) if it is Government policy to continue to dump BSE-infected offal in landfill sites. [20221]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* The Animal By-Products Order 1992, which implements EC animal waste directive 90/667 in Great Britain, requires animal waste to be rendered, incinerated or buried.

There is no legal requirement for the carcases of cattle slaughtered as affected with, or suspected of being infected with, BSE to be destroyed specifically by incineration. However, it has been the Ministry's practice to use incineration whenever feasible. No BSE suspects have been disposed of other than by incineration since 1995.

In the case of specified bovine material removed on a precautionary basis from non-BSE suspects, the SBM order of 1996, as amended, requires that it be processed in dedicated rendering lines or incinerated. Where the SBM is rendered, the order provides for the resultant meat and bone meal to be incinerated, disposed of at a landfill site for which there exists a current waste management licence granted under section 35 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, or disposal as specified by the Minister in the plant's approval. At present, however, SBM removed from cattle aged under 30 months and sheep and goats is rendered with over-30-months scheme material and is, therefore, all destined for destruction.

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which advises Ministers on BSE, has considered the current and proposed methods of dealing with waste material from the slaughter of cattle and concluded that these are safe. A press release reporting its conclusions was issued by MAFF on 7 June 1996 and a copy is available in the Library of the House.

The Department's records indicate that BSE suspect cattle were disposed of by landfill in Warrington during 1990 and 1991. The sites were licensed under part I of the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

The Department's records also indicate that approximately 15 tonnes of unrendered SBM were consigned, contrary to SBM rules, to a landfill site in Warrington just prior to Christmas 1995. The matter was drawn to the attention of Tameside metropolitan borough council, as the appropriate local authority with enforcement responsibility under the order. Whilst the incident is regrettable, investigation revealed that the site is a "total containment site" and of the highest standard. In the unlikely event that the SBM contained any infectivity, it is thought that the resultant risk should be very small.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) for what reasons the Rowley landfill site was selected for the burial of BSE-infected cows; [20419]

(2) how many BSE-infected cows are buried at the Rowley landfill site near Burnley. [20420]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* In the early years of the BSE epidemic, incineration capacity was insufficient to deal with all the cattle involved. Therefore, in July 1988 this Department approached Lancashire county council seeking licensed landfill facilities for disposal of BSE suspect cattle. At that time, the county council was responsible as a waste disposal authority for the granting and supervision of licences under part I of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. Following an assessment by the authority of the landfill sites then in its ownership, Rowley was identified by the authority as suitable for the disposal of waste of this kind.

The Ministry's records, cross checked with those available to the Environment Agency, indicate that the carcases of just over 30 cattle affected, or suspected of being affected with, BSE—their heads having been removed for incineration—were disposed of at the Rowley landfill site.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he intends to remove the remains of the cattle buried at Rowley for disposal by incineration; [20417]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure the BSE-infected cows buried at Rowley do not contaminate the water supply. [20418]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* In May last year a sub-group of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which advises Ministers on BSE, considered the issue of BSE and the environment, including the question of disposal to landfill sites. It considered that, although the spongiform encephalopathy agent was not yet fully characterised, there was good evidence to believe that individual molecules were not infectious and that infectivity was associated with macro molecular agglomerations, indeed possibly with tissue fragments, albeit small ones. On this basis, it concluded

"it was unlikely that leachate from landfill sites would present a significant risk and there was certainly no justification for taking heroic measures to excavate sites, even those which had previously been used for material such as BSE-confirmed cattle".

The Environment Agency as the regulatory body responsible for supervising the operation of landfill sites, is in possession of SEAC's advice. The agency monitors groundwater quality in the vicinity of licensed landfill sites as a check for any leachate contamination.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which landfill sites in the United Kingdom were used for the disposal of cattle reported as having BSE. [18134]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 March 1997]:* I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations his Department has received from the Environment Agency in respect of the disposal of BSE-infected carcases to landfill sites; and if he will make a statement; [20471]

(2) if he will instigate an inquiry into the safety of all sites where BSE-infected carcases have been disposed of during the past eight years; and if he will make a statement. [20472]

Mrs. Browning: Prior to the formation of the Environment Agency in April 1996, regulatory responsibility for the operation of landfill sites rested with waste regulation authorities. The Environment Agency inherited the responsibility for the safe regulation of landfill sites in England and Wales under part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and for this purpose monitors ground water quality in the vicinity of licensed landfill sites as a check for any leachate contamination.

This Department is in regular contact with the Environment Agency in view of its responsibility for supervising the waste management licensing system in respect of landfill sites.

Pig Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the two consignments of pigs

exported on 19 February 1996 via the port of Hull were accompanied by the approved journey plans and export health certificates required under EU and United Kingdom law. [20617]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 March 1997:]*: Without further details of the consignments to which the hon. Member refers, it is not possible to give an answer.

Slaughterhouses

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all prosecutions of abattoirs for breaches of hygiene legislation that have *(a)* taken place and *(b)* succeeded, in each year since 1985. [21679]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In Great Britain, local authorities were responsible for the enforcement of hygiene regulations in abattoirs until 1 April 1995, when responsibility was transferred to the newly established Meat Hygiene Service. Information on any prosecutions of abattoirs which may have been brought between 1985 and 1 April 1995 is not held centrally. Since 1 April 1995, whilst there have been several prosecutions on BSE-related matters, there have, to date, been no prosecutions of abattoirs for failure to comply with the hygiene requirements of the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995, as amended.

In Northern Ireland, no prosecutions have been brought against operators of abattoirs for failure to comply with the hygiene requirements of the relevant regulations in the period 1985 to date.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all those persons who are permitted to make unannounced visits to abattoirs in the United Kingdom to ensure that health and hygiene standards are upheld. [18866]

Mrs. Browing: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many slaughterhouses are currently operating in the United Kingdom; of those how many do not have EU approval but are operating under a United Kingdom Government derogation; and how many were operating in April 1995 and of those how many were operating under a United Kingdom derogation. [20517]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 March 1997]*: For slaughterhouses licensed in Great Britain under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 and in Northern Ireland under the Agricultural Produce (Meat Regulation and Pig Industry) Act (Northern Ireland) 1962, the available information is as follows:

Type of approval	*End March 1995*	*1 March 1997*
Export approved	133	244
National market only		
Permanently derogated low throughput[1]	211	205
Temporarily derogated low throughput[2]		7
Temporarily derogated full throughput[2]	174	[3]26
Total	518	482

Information on the position in other member states is not available.
[1] Premises which meet the EC structural requirements for low throughput plants.
[2] Premises subject to a temporary derogation from structural requirements.
[3] Of which 9 licences revoked for failure to comply with temporary derogation but operating under appeal provisions.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many abattoirs are currently *(a)* EC approved and *(b)* non-approved but operating with a derogation. [20728]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) today.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the derogations to continue slaughtering animals expire for each of the non-EC approved abattoirs. [20758]

Mrs. Browning: Under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 as amended, non EC export approved premises (permanently derogated low throughput) are required to meet less onerous structural requirements than those with EC export approval (full throughput).

At 1 March 1997, the number of slaughterhouses and cutting premises in England subject to a temporary derogation was as follows:

Licensed premises[1]	*Full throughput*		*Low throughput*	
	Slaughterhouse	*Cutting premises*	*Slaughterhouse*	*Cutting premises*
Total numbers by type	202	226	180	126
Of which subject to temporary derogation	[2]22	[3]13	7	[4]7

[1] Some of these are combined premises. For combined slaughterhouse/cutting premises the numbers are included under slaughterhouse, for combined cutting premises/cold stores the numbers are included under cutting premises.
[2] Including one premises with an extension of time in principle to end December 1997 (subject to review in September 1997) and one request for a further extension of time under consideration; nine licences revoked for failure to comply with temporary derogations operating under appeal provisions.
[3] Including one premises with an extension of time to end December 1997; three licences revoked for failure to comply with temporary derogations operating under appeal provisions.
[4] Including one licence revoked for failure to comply with temporary derogation operating.

Of those temporary derogations not subject to an extension of time or where licences have not yet been revoked, approximately half the premises could complete the necessary work to comply with the structural requirements of the Regulations within the next four to six weeks. Licence revocation action will be taken against

those who do not. For the remainder, urgent action is in hand to revoke the premises licences with the minimum of further delay.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many abattoirs in each member state of the European Union are *(a)* EC approved and *(b)* non-approved but operating under derogations. [20833]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) today.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the abattoirs and cutting plants which have derogations will be required to comply fully with EC requirements. [20832]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* unsuccessful and *(b)* successful prosecutions were brought against operators of abattoirs and cutting plants for infringements of the relevant hygiene regulations in the period 1979 to 1995. [20956]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* In Great Britain, local authorities were responsible for the enforcement of hygiene regulations in abattoirs and cutting plants until 1 April 1995, when responsibility was transferred to the newly established Meat Hygiene Service. Information on prosecutions which may have been brought between 1979 and 1995 is not held centrally.

In Northern Ireland, no prosecutions were brought against operators of abattoirs or cutting plants for infringements of the relevant hygiene regulations in this period.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the extent to which derogations granted to abattoirs for structural shortcomings impinge on hygiene requirements. [20830]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* For premises operating under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995, detailed requirements for structure are laid down in schedules 1 to 6 of the regulations and, for hygiene, in schedules 7 to 11 and 13 to 15. Irrespective of any structural requirements, fresh meat produced in premises subject to derogations has to satisfy the hygiene requirements laid down.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* statutory instruments, *(b)* circulars and *(c)* other official guidance from Ministers to local authorities between 1979 and 1995 concerning the duties and responsibilities of environmental health officers towards abattoirs and cutting plants. [20831]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Meat Hygiene

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he was notified about the data relating to E. coli contamination arising from poor animal hygiene at abattoirs, contained in the report prepared by Mr. Swann for the Meat Hygiene Service. [20038]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 13 March 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 20 March 1997, *Official Report*, column 715. [19571]

Sir Colin Shepherd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department collates data on the professional qualifications of meat hygiene inspectors. [20734]

Mrs. Browning: The Department does not hold any data on the professional qualifications of meat inspectors.

Meat hygiene inspectors are employed by the Meat Hygiene Service and I have asked the chief executive to reply to your question direct.

Sir Colin Shepherd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the veterinarians who carried out the assessment of standards in slaughterhouses, commissioned by the Meat Hygiene Service, agreed with Mr. Bill Swann's summary of their findings. [20738]

Mrs. Browning: The assessment of standards you refer to was part of the hygiene advice team exercise carried out by the Meat Hygiene Service. I have asked the chief executive to reply to you direct.

Sir Colin Shepherd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many of the employees of the general secretary of the Association of Meat Inspectors have been offered a contract by the Meat Hygiene Service; [20733]

(2) when Mr. Bill Swann applied for the position as head of operations of the Meat Hygiene Service; [20737]

(3) when the general secretary of the Association of Meat Inspectors tendered for a meat hygiene service contract; and what was the outcome. [20739]

Mrs. Browning: Staffing matters are the responsibility of the Meat Hygiene Service and I have asked the chief executive to reply to you direct.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Sir Colin Shepherd, dated 21 March 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) your Parliamentary Questions to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries enquiring a) whether details of the professional qualifications of Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHIs) are collated; b) whether the veterinary surgeons who carried out an assessment of standards in slaughterhouses agree with Bill Swann's findings; c) about the number of the employees of the General Secretary of the Association of Meat Inspectors (AMI) who have been offered a contract by the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS); d) when Bill Swann applied for the position of Head of Operations, and e) when the General Secretary of the AMI tendered for an MHS contract and what was the outcome, have been passed to me for reply.

[20734] [20738] [20733] [20737] [20739]

To take each of your questions in turn:

a) All MHIs must be qualified by gaining, through examination, in the Certificate in Meat Inspection approved by the Royal Society of Health for England and Wales and the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland for Scotland. Copies of the appropriate Certificates in Meat Inspection are held on the individual's personnel files by the MHS.

b) The Hygiene Advice Teams (HAT) completed a detailed analysis of the operational hygiene and animal welfare standards at all licensed slaughterhouses (approximately 615 plants). As part of this exercise, Bill Swann undertook many visits (although in a limited area of the country) and wrote HAT reports on a number of plants. These reports were specific to the plants concerned and the recommendations therein may or may not have agreed with recommendations in reports on other plants. An editorial committee was set up to produce a final report of the HAT exercise. This included a number of veterinarians who had been heavily involved in the exercise. Bill Swann provided a first draft summary of the overall findings of the HAT exercise in respect of red meat plants. The final report was intended to give a summary of the important issues relating to hygiene operation and animal welfare, an indication of the level of industry compliance overall and to include the most important recommendations made by the HAT teams. Mr. Swann's draft was rejected by his colleagues as it gave little indication of the level of compliance, repeated a great deal of material covered by the MHS Operations Manual and provided a long list of deficiencies, many of which only related to a small number of plants.

c) The MHS is aware of 26 employees who worked for the Meat Inspection Agency run by the General Secretary of the AMI who have been offered a contract by the MHS.

d) Bill Swann applied for the position of MHS Head of Operations in September 1995.

e) The MHS is staffed mainly by Meat Hygiene Inspectors who transferred to the agency from their local authority employers under TUPE arrangements on 1 April 1995. Operating without the constraints of local authority boundaries the MHS has the opportunity to deploy its permanently employed staff to the best effect. Where employed staff are not available MHS Regional Managers have the option of contracting staff through a small number of Agencies, one of which includes the General Secretary of the AMI, Mr Comrie.

An invitation to tender for the provision of meat inspection services was issued in December 1994 and the information received was made available to the MHS's Regional Managers to assist in their task of ensuring that meat inspection and relief cover would be available at all licensed establishments at Agency launch via the most cost effective means.

Subsequent to the launch of the MHS, Mr Comrie has provided some relief meat inspection cover to the MHS.

Sir Colin Shepherd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received from the vice-president of the Association of Meat Inspectors regarding hygiene standards in abattoirs. [20735]

Mrs. Browning: I held a meeting on 19 March with representatives of the Association of Meat Inspectors. Two of the vice presidents of the association have disassociated themselves from the sentiments expressed in recent correspondence from the General Secretary of the association, and confirmed their total support for the work of the Meat Hygiene Service in driving up standards in abattoirs.

BSE-infected Material (Land Burial)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations cover the land burial of *(a)* BSE-infected carcases and *(b)* BSE-infected rendered meat and bonemeal, or material suspected to the BSE-infected; what inspections measures are in place to ensure compliance with the regulations; and if he will make a statement. [20770]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The Animal By-Products Order 1992 (SI 1992/3303), which implements the EC animal waste directive 90/667 in Great Britain, requires animal waster to be rendered, incinerated or buried. It has been the Ministry's practice to use incineration whenever feasible for the disposal of cattle displaying clinical signs suggestive of BSE.

The landfilling of controlled waste is subject to the waste management licensing provisions of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994. The Environment Agency is responsible for the administration and enforcement of the licensing system. Amongst other matters, licences issued by the Environment Agency specify the types and quantities of waste which may be disposed of in each site. Landfill site operators are also subject to the duty of care provisions in Section 34 of the 1990 Act and the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991.

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has considered the current and proposed methods of dealing with waste material from the slaughter of cattle and concluded that these are safe. A news release reporting its conclusions was issued by MAFF on 7 June 1996 and a copy is available in the Library of the House.

of the relevant regulations in the period 1985 to date.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement; [21687]

(2) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement; [21684]

(3) if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from; [21730]

(4) which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21449]

Mr. Boswell: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Advisory Bodies (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21375]

Mr. Boswell: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Avoparcin

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 17 March, *Official Report*, column *379*, regarding avoparcin's use as a feed antibiotic, if he will list by livestock species all dates prior to 1 April on which the licence for avoparcin's use as a feed antibiotic has been *(a)* revoked and *(b)* reinstated since it was first licensed in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [21511]

Mrs. Browning: No licence for the use of avoparcin in animal feedingstuffs has been revoked prior to 1 April 1997.

Cattle Slaughter

Mr. Benton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the stockpiling of brown granular dust from remains of slaughtered cattle in Bootle; what assessment he has made of *(a)* the dangers to the public health posed by this substance and *(b)* the conditions of its storage; and if he will make a statement. [21419]

Mrs. Browning: Meat and bone meal arising from the rendering of cattle carcases under the over-30-months scheme is being stored at five sites in England pending destruction by the best practicable environmental option. Only healthy cattle can be purchased under the scheme and EC regulation 716/96, under which the scheme operates, expressly prohibits the purchase of cattle affected with or suspected of being affected with BSE. These are destroyed under separate arrangements.

The Government are actively pursuing a number of options for the disposal of meat and bone meal arising from the OTMS. The Intervention Board recently agreed a contract with a high temperature incineration company, Rechem, to burn MBM at its Fawley plant, and has an exercise under way for further incineration facilities from which additional MBM disposal capacity is expected to emerge. Also combustion trials have been carried out at PowerGen's test facilities at Ratcliffe on Soar, Nottinghamshire, and at National Power's test facilities at Didcot, Oxfordshire, to establish the feasibility of burning MBM in power stations. These trials have been monitored by the Environment Agency and the results will be placed on the public register. The test results are being fully evaluated, and full weight will be given to the protection of human health and of the environment before any decisions are reached.

The independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which advises Ministers on BSE, has concluded that there was no epidemiological evidence to suggest that the handling of MBM presented a risk to any of those engaged in the related trades. The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens has also considered the health risks associated with the handling of MBM and has issued generic guidance for all occupational groups, including those involved in storage. The Intervention Board executive agency, which has executive responsibility for the day to day running of the scheme, has drawn the guidelines to the attention of storekeepers storing MBM.

The storage of this material as waste is subject to the requirements of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994, as amended. With these requirements in view, IBEA ensures that all potential storage sites meet rigorous technical criteria before they are considered suitable for dry storage and are well managed to keep them free of rodents, insect infestation or excessive odour. Where odour problems have arisen, the IBEA has engaged the services of leading experts in odour suppression technology for advice.

Tuberculosis

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish the results of his inquiry into the possible relationship between TB in badgers and TB in cattle. [21508]

Mrs. Browning: I expect the results to be published later this year.

Meat Hygiene Service (Disciplinary Action)

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many people employed or under contract with the national Meat Hygiene Service as *(a)* official veterinary surgeons, *(b)* meat inspectors and *(c)* other officers have been disciplined for failure to enforce hygiene legislation, for each year from 1995; [21678]

(2) what length of training has been required for *(a)* official veterinary surgeons, *(b)* meat inspectors and *(c)* other posts that are currently within or under contract with the national Meat Hygiene Service in each year since 1985. [21680]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The subjects of these questions are the responsibility of the Meat Hygiene Service and I have asked the chief executive to reply to you direct.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Dr. Gavin Strang, dated 21 March 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) your Parliamentary Questions to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries enquiring how many people employed or under contract with the National Meat Hygiene Service as (a) Official Veterinary Surgeons, (b) meat inspectors and (c) other officers have been disciplined for failure to enforce hygiene legislation, for each year since 1995, and what length of training has been required for (a) Official Veterinary Surgeons, (b) meat inspectors and (c) other posts that are currently within or under contract with the National Meat Hygiene Service in each year since 1985, have been passed to me for reply. [24678] [21680]

No employed or contract MHS staff were disciplined for failure to enforce hygiene legislation in 1995/96. 7 employed Meat Hygiene Inspectors are currently facing internal disciplinary investigation into alleged failure to enforce hygiene legislation. 6 of these are on precautionary paid suspension.

As you are aware the MHS was launched on 1 April 1995. The MHS requires Official Veterinary Surgeons (OVSs) to be qualified veterinary surgeons, members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and to have gained OVS accreditation following attendance at an OVS training course. The OVS training course consists of one weeks college based training together with a practical input prior or post course attendance. Accreditation is approved by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

All Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHIs) employed by the MHS must be qualified by gaining, through examination, the Certificate in Meat Inspection approved by the Royal Society of Health for England and Wales, and the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland for Scotland. The traditional route to acquisition of the certificate in meat inspection is on a day release basis over a two year period with a requirement of at least 200 hours practical experience for red meat and a further minimum of 120 hours for white meat. The Meat Hygiene Service has sponsored the training of Meat Hygiene Inspectors in accordance with the Royal Society of Health and the Royal Environmental Health Institute for Scotland requirements of typically 22 weeks of intense full time combined theoretical and practical training, the latter arranged in meat plants.

Prior to the actual launch of the Agency, the MHS provided weekend induction and operational training for all groups of staff. Post launch numerous training courses have been delivered to veterinary and meat inspection staff on operational issues including animal welfare, hygiene assessment and Specified Bovine Material (SBM) controls.

For other (mainly non operation) posts job specific training has been provided according to individual requirements.

Organophosphates

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the dangers of organophosphate sheep dip to fish and insects in rivers; and if he will make a statement. [21095]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 20 March 1997]:* No veterinary medicine is authorised for use unless it meets stringent statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Safety includes risk to the environment. Applications for marketing authorisations must be supported by information to satisfy the statutory criteria, including details of relevant research. Product labels include warnings about the safe use and disposal of all sheep dips and guidance on disposal is available from the Agriculture Departments.

Fur Farms

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the permitted means of disposal of mink carcases from fur farms. [21241]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 20 March 1997]:* I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Avenue of Statues (London)

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about her proposal for an avenue of statues in London. [21460]

Mr. Sproat: Sir Neil Cossons, the director of the science museum, has been invited to be chairman of a committee to look at the possibility of establishing a project to erect an avenue of statues of famous British inventors, scientists, discoverers, industrialists etc. This avenue would be sited in London, as the capital city of the United Kingdom, but the precise site within London would be a matter for the committee to decide. Among other matters for the committee to decide would be the identification of those to be included as statues, and the sources, and raising, of funding for the project. The committee would be totally independent of the Government, and its membership would be for Sir Neil to decide.

London is plentifully and properly adorned with statues of kings and queens, soldiers, sailors, statesmen and artists etc., but our great scientific and industrial heritage, which is certainly as important as other parts of our heritage, is less well commemorated. This project could help redress that balance.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list those of her Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21743]

Mr. Sproat: *(a)* Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites.

(b) None.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if she will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21722]

Mr. Sproat: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Statutory base

The Theatres Trust

(b) Publish their advice to Government

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art'

(c) Publish an annual report

The Advisory Committee of the Government Art Collection'

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art'

Royal Fine Art Commission'

Theatres Trust'

Treasure Trove Reviewing Committee'

(d) Lay an annual report before Parliament

The Advisory Committee of the Government Art Collection'

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art'

Royal Fine Art Commission'

Treasure Trove Reviewing Committee'

'This is not a statutory requirement.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which of the executive non-departmental bodies sponsored by her Department have a statutory base; if she will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21443]

Mr. Sproat: The information is as follows:

Statutory base

British Library
British Museum
British Tourist Authority
Broadcasting Complaints Commission
Broadcasting Standards Council
English Heritage
English Tourist Board
Football Licensing Authority
Imperial War Museum
Millennium Commission
Museum of London
National Gallery
National Heritage Memorial Fund
National Lottery Charities Board
National Maritime Museum
National Museum and Galleries on Merseyside
National Portrait Gallery
National Museum of Science and Technology
Natural History Museum
Public Lending Right
Royal Armouries
Sir John Soane's Museum
Tate Gallery
Victoria and Albert Museum
Wallace Collection

(a) Admit Members to all board and committee meetings

None

(b) Hold open meetings for the public

None holds formal open board meetings for the public, although many engage in regular dialogue with, or arrange informal events for, members of the public to discuss matters of policy.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of member's interest, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21697]

Mr. Sproat:

(a) None

(b) None

(c) None

(d) Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art[1]

(e) None

(f) None.

[1]It is not a statutory requirement to conduct consultation exercise with outside commercial interests.

Charity Collections

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what advice she has given concerning the owners of premises to which the public are admitted in relation to granting permission to charities to make collections on those premises; and if she will make a statement. [21367]

Mr. Sproat: None. However, the Charity Commission has for a number of years advised retailers about the risks of fraudulent collectors. The commission regularly advises retailers on the licensing requirements for charitable fundraising and how they can make checks to establish whether a charity or fundraiser is a registered charity or is otherwise known to the commission. Stores are encouraged to pass on to the commission information about organisations or individuals who have approached them for permission to collect on their premises and who did not, for whatever reason, appear to be bona fide. The Charity Commission continues to look for opportunities to help retailers to avoid giving permission to possibly fraudulent collectors.

National Coal Mining Museum

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will provide financial assistance to the national coal mining museum for England, based at Wakefield; and if she will make a statement. [21362]

Mr. Sproat: Since 1994, the Government, through the Museums and Galleries Commission, have been providing £300,000 of transitional funding to the museum to give it a breathing space in which to identify alternative sources of income. The heritage lottery fund has now offered in principle to contribute up to 75 per cent. of development costs of £1.3 million at the museum to be incurred over two years. This assistance is intended to preserve the museum's collections, site and public services in the medium term while exploring the opportunities for the museum's longer term viability through a business study. My Department will be making a contribution to £200,000, via the Museums and Galleries Commission, towards the partnership funding that is necessary to secure the heritage lottery fund's grant.

Advisory Groups (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21386]

Mr. Sproat: The table lists the non-elected bodies which provide advice or services in London. It is not, however, possible to identify the proportion of total budgets and running costs related to advice or services specifically for London. The budget and running costs are therefore the estimated and planned totals for each body.

London bodies budgets and estimated running costs for 1996–97 to 1999–2000

£ million

Body		*1996–97 (estimate)*	*1997–98 (plans)*	*1998–99 (plans)*	*1999–2000 (plans)*
Arts Council of England[1,7]	Budget	186.1	186.1	184.6	183.5
	Running costs	11.7	11.0	11.3	11.4
British Library	Budget	119.6	124.5	121.8	121.3
	Running costs	97.9	108.1	104.2	101.9
British Museum	Budget	48.0	59.5	62.0	92.1
	Running costs	41.0	40.5	43.1	42.4
British Film Commission	Budget	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9
	Running costs	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9
British Film Institute[7]	Budget	31.6	16.0	15.6	15.3
	Running costs	14.7	15.5	15.8	16.1
Broadcasting Complaints Commission[6]	Budget	0.6	—	—	—
	Running costs	0.6	—	—	—
Broadcasting Standards Council[4]	Budget	1.4	—	—	—
	Running costs	1.4	—	—	—
Broadcasting Standards Commission[4]	Budget	n/a	2.0	2.0	2.0
	Running costs	n/a	2.0	2.0	2.0
Churches Conservation Trust	Budget	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Running costs	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.8
Community Development Foundation	Budget	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Running costs	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.1
Crafts Council	Budget	4.7	4.8	4.8	4.8
	Running costs	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.0
English Heritage	Budget	130.0	125.7	127.9	126.5
	Running costs	49.2	49.5	50.0	50.5
English Sports Council[5,7]	Budget	18.2	42.8	39.2	38.8
	Running costs	13.1	12.0	12.4	12.9
English Tourist Board	Budget	13.5	12.8	12.7	12.6
	Running costs	2.8	2.7	2.8	2.8
Football Licensing Authority	Budget	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9
	Running costs	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9
Geffrye Museum	Budget	1.9	4.4	2.2	1.3
	Running costs	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.2
GB Sports Council[8]	Budget	33.3	—	—	—
	Running costs	—	—	—	—
Horniman Museum	Budget	3.6	3.2	3.4	3.0
	Running costs	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Imperial War[3] Museum	Budget	26.4	24.3	27.8	23.0
	Running costs	17.2	17.7	18.1	17.5
Library and Information Commission	Budget	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43
	Running costs	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43
Museum of London	Budget	15.7	14.3	14.6	14.6
	Running costs	14.1	12.7	12.9	12.9
Museums and Galleries Commission[7]	Budget	9.3	9.3	9.0	8.9
	Running costs	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7
National Gallery	Budget	34.0	33.0	27.0	26.0
	Running costs	18.7	18.8	19.0	19.0
National Heritage Memorial Fund[7]	Budget	8.1	5.1	5.1	5.1
	Running costs	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6
National Maritime Museum	Budget	13.9	20.9	20.8	17.8
	Running costs	11.1	12.1	11.5	12.4
National Museum of Science and Industry[2]	Budget	31.3	45.0	54.6	43.4
	Running Costs	23.4	24.8	25.6	26.5
National Portrait Gallery	Budget	7.7	7.2	6.9	7.2
	Running costs	5.6	6.0	6.0	6.3
Natural History Museum[3]	Budget	46.3	41.5	39.8	49.5
	Running costs	33.1	34.5	33.9	34.3
Public Lending Right	Budget	5.0	4.9	4.9	4.9
	Running costs	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.6
Royal Armouries	Budget	10.6	6.0	4.5	4.5
	Running costs	3.9	3.6	3.7	3.7
Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts	Budget	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	Running costs	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England)	Budget	11.4	11.4	11.3	11.0
	Running costs	10.4	10.4	10.3	10.1
Royal Fine Art Commission	Budget	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8
	Running costs	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8

London bodies budgets and estimated running costs for 1996–97 to 1999–2000

£ million

Body		*1996–97 (estimate)*	*1997–98 (plans)*	*1998–99 (plans)*	*1999–2000 (plans)*
Sir John Soane's Museum	Budget	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
	Running costs	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
Tate Gallery[2]	Budget	40.6	59.7	53.7	42.7
	Running costs	19.9	20.5	21.2	22.0
UK Sports Council[4]	Budget	3.9	12.7	11.9	11.7
	Running costs	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.4
Victoria and Albert Museum	Budget	38.0	34.8	35.5	35.6
	Running costs	32.1	30.3	30.9	31.1
Wallace Collection	Budget	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.4
	Running costs	2.4	2.2	2.3	2.3

Figures for 1996–97 are estimated outturn. Figures for 1997–98 onwards are planning figures.
[1] Budget figures include grant in aid income only.
[2] These museums have branches outside London but the majority of their expenditure is on branches in London.
[3] The budget figure for the BFI for years 1997–98 to 1999–00 includes grant in aid only.
[4] From 1.4.97 the Broadcasting Standards Council and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission will merge to form the Broadcasting Standards Commission.
[5] The MGC is based in London but provides services and advice throughout the UK.
[6] The GB Sports Council was replaced by the UK Sports Council and the English Sports Council on 1 January 1997. The running cost figures for the GB Sports Council for 1996–97 are split between the two new councils.
[7] Proceeds from the National Lottery have been excluded as it is not possible to estimate the amount that the distributors will receive from the National Lottery Distribution Fund. As the Millennium Commission and the National Lottery Charities Board receive funds only from the Lottery they have been excluded.

Printing and Publications

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department has spent on printing and publications in each of the last five financial years. [20848]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 19 March 1997]:* The amounts spent on producing and printing the Department's publications since its creation in 1992 are as follows:

	£
1992–93 (actual)	Nil
1993–94 (actual)	25,000
1994–95 (actual)	57,000
1995–96 (actual	348,000
1996–97 (spend to date)	532,000

PRIME MINISTER

Ethiopia

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all ministerial visits to Ethiopia, indicating the purpose of the visit, in the last five years. [21369]

The Prime Minister: Visits made by Ministers to Ethiopia in the last five years were as follows:

1993

September: Baroness Chalker (Minister of State FCO/Minister for ODA)

1995

July: Baroness Chalker (Minister of State FCO/Minister for ODA)

August: Mr. Baker (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office)

1996

November: Baroness Chalker (Minister of State FCO/Minister for ODA)

The purpose of all visits by Baroness Chalker was to review the United Kingdom's development programme in Ethiopia and to take forward dialogue on matters of mutual concern. The visit by Mr. Baker reviewed the implementation of UK immigration policy in respect of Ethiopia.

Advisory Groups (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21376]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General.

TREASURY

Government Borrowing (Scotland)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the Scottish share of the United Kingdom general government borrowing requirement for each year since 1979 adopting the same methodology as that set out in the Government expenditure and revenue in Scotland 1994–95. [15669]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* The table shows the figures requested. As Scotland accounts for roughly 9 per cent. of the UK population, this implies that the Scottish fiscal deficit per capita has normally exceeded that of the UK as a whole.

Estimates of the Scottish share of the UK GGBR, excluding North Sea taxes and privatisation proceeds

	Ratio of Scottish GGBR to UK GGBR (per cent.)
1979–80	15
1980–81	17
1981–82	12
1982–83	17
1983–84	15
1984–95	13
1985–86	14
1986–87	21
1987–88	50
1988–89	—
1989–90	—
1990–91	57
1991–92	22
1992–93	17
1993–94	17
1994–95	17

Estimates of the Scottish ratio prior to 1990–91 are very approximate. The ratios of Scottish GGBR to UK GGBR are calculated using rounded data (to the nearest billion pounds).
The ratios in 1888–89 and 1989–90 cannot be calculated, as the UK GGBR was zero or negative.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of *(a)* the total proceeds from the uniform business rate for each local authority area in Britain in each of the last three years and *(b)* the amounts of such moneys paid back to each local authority in each year. [20102]

Mr. Waldegrave: The available information has been collated, and copies have been placed in the Library of the House. The tables show *(a)* the contribution to the English, Welsh and Scottish non-domestic rates pools by each billing authority, and *(b)* the amounts redistributed from each rates pool by local authority recipient.

Basic Pension Plus

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what revenue he expects to raise in each year from the taxation of pension fund contributions under the basic pension plus proposal; and what assumptions this estimate is based on; [20437]

(2) what estimate he has made of lost tax revenue after 2040 due to the change in tax relief under the Government's basic pension plus proposal. [20434]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 17 March 1997]:* It is broadly estimated that the annual savings to the Exchequer from the tax change on contributions would build up gradually from some £170 million in the first year after the change to about £8 billion by around 2040. Thereafter, these savings would continue, but would be offset by a decline in income tax on pensions in payment—from an annual yield of some £7 billion—as the population under the current pension regime reduces. This decline will coincide with a rapid fall in expenditure on state retirement pension which will reach some £40 billion a year in the longer term.

These estimates are very tentative and assume the current tax regime and levels of contributions and pensions in payment. It would not be appropriate to give precise figures for each year, since the exact costs will depend on when the scheme is introduced, what the initial age limit is, and other details to be considered during the consultation.

Departmental Legislation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Bills his Department has sponsored in each of the past 15 years; and how many have been passed by Parliament. [19778]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The number of Bills sponsored by the Chancellor's Departments in each of the last 15 years is given in the table. All have been passed by both Houses of Parliament.

Session	*Bills*
1982–83	7
1983–84	12
1984–85	8
1985–86	5
1986–87	6
1987–88	9
1988–89	5
1989–90	7
1990–91	6
1991–92	7
1992–93	8
1993–94	5
1994–95	4
1995–96	4
1996–97	5

National Lottery

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) of 12 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *443–44* on the national lottery, by providing equivalent figures for the years 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [20557]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* The table provides the Budget projections of payments into and out of the national lottery distribution fund.

National lottery distribution fund—forecast income and expenditure (all figures £ million)

Year	*Income*	*Expenditure*
1996–97	1,541	600
1997–98	1,400	1,200
1998–99	1,470	1,500
1999–2000	1,540	1,800

ECOFIN

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union. [21422]

Mr. Oppenheim: I represented the UK at the Economic and Finance Council—ECOFIN—of the European Union in Brussels on 17 March.

The Council carried out an examination of the revised convergence programmes of Germany and France for the period 1997–2001. The German strategy of pursuing budgetary consolidation while promoting growth and employment through structural reforms was welcomed. The Council also welcomed the objective in the French programme of reducing the Government deficit in the medium term and the measures they have proposed to achieve this.

The Council agreed to the reactivation of previously agreed balance of payments lending to Romainia. Lending to Bulgaria was discussed, but no conclusion reached and the matter will be considered again at a future meeting.

The Council recommended that the European Parliament should grant the Commission discharge for the 1995 budget. However, the Council noted that standards of financial management of the EC budget remained low, and looked forward to the effect of measures in the Commission's sound and efficient management 2000 initiative to improve resource management. A progress report on this initiative is due in June.

The Commission presented proposals for an energy products directive. I made it clear that any proposals which would require the UK to introduce new taxes on gas, electricity or coal would be unacceptable.

The Council discussed technical specifications of euro coins, but no final decisions were reached on this issue. The Council will need to return to this issue at some point in the future.

Working Hours

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many and what percentage of *(a)* male and *(b)* female employees worked (i) less than eight hours a week, (ii) less than 16 hours a week and (iii) part-time in (1) 1970, (2) 1980, (3) 1990 and (4) the most recent year for which figures are available; [21065]

(2) what was the average number of hours per week worked by *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees in (i) 1970, (ii) 1980, (iii) 1990 and (iv) the most recent year for which figures are available by gender. [21066]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 21 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number and percentage of male and female employees who worked less than eight hours a week; less than 16 hours a week and part-time in 1970, 1980, 1990 and most recently.

The only consistent source going back to 1970 is the New Earnings Survey from which this response is derived.

For the general category of part-time employees the estimates requested are as follows:

Numbers and proportion of part-time employees

	Male		Female	
	Number	*Percentage of all employees*	*Number*	*Percentage of all employees*
June 1971	n/a	n/a	2,757,000	34
June 1980	n/a	n/a	3,919,000	42
June 1990	999,000	8	4,677,000	44
June 1996	1,235,000	11	4,904,000	46

A more detailed breakdown on part-time work by number of hours and gender is available in the attached tables which have been taken from the New Earnings Survey.

Copies of the New Earnings Survey itself are available in the House of Commons Library. I will arrange for a copy of the tables to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Unemployed People (Skills and Qualifications)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a breakdown of the skills and qualifications held by those people unemployed in *(a)* Welwyn and Hatfield and *(b)* Hertfordshire. [21308]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 March 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 21 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the skills and qualifications held by those people unemployed in (a) Welwyn and Hatfield and (b) Hertfordshire.

According to 1995 Labour Force Survey Local Area Database, the estimated number of people in Welwyn and Hatfield unemployed under the standard International Labour Office (ILO) definition was less than 6,000. Only estimates above 6,000 are considered reliable enough to be released. Therefore no information can be made available about the skills or qualifications of the unemployed in Welwyn and Hatfield.

The available breakdown of those ILO unemployed in Hertfordshire by highest qualification is shown in the table below:

ILO unemployed in Hertfordshire by highest qualification

(thousands)

	Number
NVQ level 4 and equivalents and above[1]	6
Below NVQ level 4	21
No qualifications	9
All[2]	37

Notes:
[1] Higher Education qualifications.
[2] Total includes those who did not state their qualifications.
Source:
ONS, 1995 LFS Local Area Database.

The LFS Local Area Database can be accessed via the House of Commons Library.

Income

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the average annual rate of increase in average net real disposable income *(a)* between 1974 and 1979 and *(b)* since 1979; [21497]

(2) what was the percentage increase in average net real disposable income *(a)* between 1974 and 1979 and *(b)* since 1979. [21496]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Sir John Stanley, dated 21 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions on the rates of increase in real disposable income. I have assumed that the question relates to real disposable income for the economy as a whole.

The increase in real personal disposable income between 1974 and 1979 was 11.4 per cent and from 1979 to 1995 (the latest available information) the increase was 45.5 per cent. The equivalent changes at annual rates are 2.2. per cent. and 2.4 per cent. respectively.

Information on real personal disposable income is published annually in table 4.1 of the ONS publication *United Kingdom National Accounts, the Blue Book* and estimates of the percentage changes at annual rates in table 16.12. This information is also held on the ONS database. These sources are available in the House of Commons Library.

Corporation Tax

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement of the level of corporation tax in Britain relative to that in other EU countries; and when corporation tax in the United Kingdom was last below its present level. [21499]

Mr. Jack: The United Kingdom continues to provide one of the lowest rates of corporation tax in the European Union. At no time since the introduction of corporation tax in 1965 has the main rate of corporation tax been lower than its present level of 33 per cent.

Adult Learning Courses

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on recent changes in the treatment for VAT of adult learning courses. [21509]

Mr. Oppenheim: I am not aware of any recent changes.

Advisory Groups (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21385]

Mr. Waldegrave: I cannot answer substantively before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Youth Unemployment

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the rate of youth unemployment in *(a)* the United Kingdom,*(b)* Italy, *(c)* Spain, *(d)* Germany and *(e)* France; if he will give the EC average; and if he will make statement. [21366]

Mr. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Sir Irvine Patnick, dated 21 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the rate of youth unemployment in the United Kingdom and other EC countries.

Estimates are available for the United Kingdom from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS uses the International Labour Office (ILO) definition of unemployment which is widely accepted and used for international comparisons. According to estimates from the autumn 1996 LFS 15.6 per cent of people aged 16-24 were ILO unemployed in the UK.

European comparisons are published in the Eurostat annual publication *Labour Force Survey Results*. ILO unemployment rates for various age groups are shown on table 8 of the latest edition which is for 1995. This publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

Cancer Deaths

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths there have been from cancer in people under the age of 40 years in each health authority region in each of the last 10 years. [21549]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 21 March 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent question asking how many deaths have occurred from cancer in people under the age of 40 years in each health authority region in each of the last 10 years.

This information is published from 1986 to 1992 in Table 4 of "Mortality statistics: area, England and Wales", series DH5, no. 13 to no. 19, and from 1993 to 1995 in VS3 tables which are available on floppy disk. All of these sources can be accessed in the House of Commons library.

New procedures for coding cause of death from 1993 mean that figures for 1993 onwards may not be exactly comparable with earlier years. More details may be found in ONS Series DH2 for 1993 (revised) and 1994, which was published in September 1996. Copies are available in the House of Commons library.

Regina *v.* Rees and Rotheroe

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost to public funds of the case of Regina *v.* Rees and Rotheroe, separately identifying the costs of lawyers' fees. [21552]

Mr. Oppenheim: The direct identifiable costs of the customs investigation which gave rise to the case of Regina *v.* Rees and Rotheroe amount to approximately

£20,250. Identifiable costs of customs lawyers are approximately £32,500. In addition there will be direct management costs which cannot be separately identified.

Payments so far made to counsel involved in the case amount to £7,300. The remaining costs of counsel for the prosecution and the defence costs to be paid out of public funds have still to be assessed. The details cannot therefore be provided at this time.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list those of the Royal Mint's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice supplied from; [21745]

(2) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Royal Mint *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement; [21706]

(3) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Royal Mint *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21712]

Mrs. Angela Knight: None.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from; [21750]

(2) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement; [21711]

(3) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21701]

Mrs. Knight: The information could not be obtained in the time available before Prorogation.

Consultancy Contracts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* home and *(b)* overseas consultancy contracts which have been held by the panel of independent forecasters and have been notified to him. [21778]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Membership of the panel of independent forecasters imposes no formal restrictions on the other work undertaken by its members. Members are therefore under no obligation to notify the Chancellor of the Exchequer of consultancy contracts which they undertake in their own capacity.

Building Societies

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to revise the guidance notes published by the Building Societies Commission in respect of section 102A of the Building Societies Act 1986 as inserted by the Building Societies (Joint Account Holders) Act 1995. [21669]

Mrs. Angela Knight: None. Guidance on conversion procedures is a matter for the commission. The guidance that it published in March 1996 took full account of the Building Societies (Joint Account Holders) Act 1995.

International Monetary Fund

Mr. Legg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to be able to respond to the fourth report from the Treasury Committee on the International Monetary, Fund HC 68. [21823]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have today written to the hon. Member as Chairman of the Treasury Committee setting out the response of the Government. Copies of my letter are being placed in the Library of the House.

Finance Act 1997

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the operation of sections 97 and 102 of the Finance Act 1997. [21820]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The definition of "intermediary" for the purposes of the new relief aims broadly to distinguish between dealers and end-investors, on the lines recommended by the Securities and Investments Board in its report to the Chancellor in July 1996.

Sections 97 and 102 of the Finance Act 1997 define "intermediary" as a person who carries on a bona fide business of dealing in stock or securities, and who does not also carry on a business which the sections describe as an "excluded business". It will depend on the facts of the particular case whether a dealer is also carrying on an "excluded business".

One category of "excluded business" is a business which consists wholly or mainly in making or managing investments. Thus if the dealing firm also carries on a separate business of making and managing investments in exchange-traded chargeable securities or stock on its own behalf, that would be an excluded business and the dealer would not qualify as an intermediary, But if the dealer is holding such investments merely as an incidental part of a dealing activity taxable under case 1 of schedule D, and not as a separate business, that would not disqualify the firm from being an intermediary. For example, if the dealer buys and holds shares merely to hedge derivative contracts which it has made, that would not be regarded as a business of making investments for the purpose of the excluded business test.

Similarly, the Inland Revenue would not regard a dealer as disqualified merely because the firm also makes and manages investments for clients, if the investments are not beneficially owned by the dealer. By contrast, if the dealer purchases investments for clients and the clients hold something short of beneficial ownership in those investments—as would happen, for example, under the American arrangements known as prime brokerage—that would be regarded as a business of making or managing investments for the purpose of the excluded business test.

A firm may also be excluded from relief if it carries on a business which consists wholly or mainly of providing services to persons with which the firm is connected, such as members of the same group of companies. For example, if he dealer carries on a business of taking positions in equities as a service to connected persons who would not themselves qualify for relief as intermediaries, the sections would exclude the firm from relief. The Inland Revenue would not however regard the dealer as disqualified if business with connected persons is merely an incidental part of the firm's business with third parties, or if the services the firm provides are not related to handling securities within the scope of stamp duty and stamp duty reserve tax—such as research, secretarial or cleaning services. If the dealing firm buys chargeable securities merely in order to hedge the group's exposure as a result of derivative contracts undertaken with third parties by other members of the group, that would not be regarded as an excluded business.

The sections include a power for the Treasury to make regulations to alter the definition of intermediary, if that proves necessary. That will give flexibility to respond to market developments, or to deal with any particular practical problems which emerge as the new regime is introduced.

I understand that concern has also been expressed about the way in which relief may be withdrawn if the Inland Revenue concludes that a firm which has been recognised as an intermediary has in fact been carrying on an excluded business. The treatment of a particular case will depend on the precise facts. For example, if the intermediary had been recognised on the basis of incorrect or misleading information which it had provided about the nature of its business, any relief already given would be withdrawn. Similarly, if the firm had knowingly started to carry on an excluded business after being recognised as intermediary, it would generally be appropriate to withdraw relief from the time the excluded business started. On the other hand, where the business was extended inadvertently into an excluded area, or there were genuine doubts about whether a particular part of the business came into the excluded category, the Inland Revenue's practice would be to give the intermediary an opportunity to modify or reorganise the business so as to retain intermediary status; and if a decision was taken to discontinue the relief, past transactions would not be affected. If firms have doubts about whether particular types of business are excluded business, they may discuss the issues with the Inland Revenue. The Inland Revenue will consider issuing guidance on other aspects of the new regime if it proves necessary.

In order to qualify for the intermediaries' relief, intermediaries will have to be recognised as such by the exchange of which they are members, under arrangements approved by the Inland Revenue.

Investment Companies

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further progress has been made with proposals for open-ended investment companies which are not subject to the undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities directive. [21821]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Proposals to permit the formation of non-UCITS open ended investment companies were published in a Treasury consultation document, "Open-Ended Investment Companies: The Next Generation", in December 1996. The proposals secured a wide measure of support and the Treasury has received a number of helpful responses from the investment fund industry and other interested parties.

I regret that it has not proved possible to complete the proposed legislation in this Session. The Government remain committed to providing powers for the formation of non-UCITS open ended investment companies.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the intends to bring into force the new stamp duty and stamp duty reserve tax reliefs for intermediaries and for stock borrowing and repo arrangements. [21822]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Sections 97, 98, 102 and 103 of the Finance Act 1997 provide for the new regime to be brought into force from a date to be appointed by the Treasury. Our current planning assumption is that the new regime will be brought into force in September. The precise start date will depend on how soon all the necessary practical arrangements can be put in place. In particular CREST will have to adapt its present system for administering the present reliefs in order to cater for the new reliefs instead. It will take a little time to design and test the new system, and we are grateful to CREST for fitting this change into its programme over the next few months. Market participants will also need to adapt their systems accordingly.

Mersey Docks and Harbour Company

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage stake the Government currently holds in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company; what is the current cash value of this stake; and what practical steps the Government have taken to resolve the current industrial dispute. [21635]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government hold some 13.9 per cent. of the issued share capital in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. The current market value of this stake is approximately £53.4 million. The industrial dispute between the company and its former employees is a matter for the parties concerned. The Government do not intervene in such matters.

Abortions

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many legal abortions were performed in 1995 *(a)* with anti-progesterone and *(b)* without overnight stay on women resident (i) in each health region and (ii) in each district health authority in

England and Wales; and how many of these abortions involved (1) NHS hospitals; (2) NHS agency arrangements and (3) other purchasers. [21827]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply, but cannot do so before Parliament is prorogued. I will, however, write to the right hon. Member.

Rent Payment

Mr. Brooke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement concerning the payment of rent in the context of section 37 of the Finance Act. [21824]

Mr. Oppenheim: Section 37 is an anti-avoidance measure dealing primarily with the situation where a person funds the purchase or construction of a building with a view to occupying it for VAT-exempt purposes. The measure has been drafted so as not to disturb ordinary arms-length commercial leasing arrangements and genuine speculative property development. In these circumstances a tenant simply paying rent is not providing finance for the landlord's initial purchase or construction of the building.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Denmark (Jane Horney)

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from Denmark in connection with the disappearance of Jane Horney. [20350]

Dr. Liam Fox: None.

St. Helena

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) which factors relating to the publicly expressed views of a visitor to St. Helena may be considered in determining the continuance of his leave to remain. [21360]

(2) what instructions were given by the Government of St. Helena to the immigration officers of the island concerning the ending of the visitor's permit for Mr. Mikael Olsson; and what factors underlay this decision. [21361]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: None. The immigration officer implements the St. Helena Government's immigration policy under the provision of the Immigration Ordinance 1972. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) on 20 March 1997, *Official Report*, column *770*.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the internal review of the use, by Indonesia, of United Kingdom-supplied armoured water cannon will be completed. [21407]

Mr. Hanley: We shall continue to study any allegations which we may receive of misuse of British-supplied defence equipment.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Government representations have been made to the Indonesian authorities regarding the use of United Kingdom-supplied Scorpion for internal security purposes in the forthcoming Indonesian elections. [21406]

Mr. Hanley: The Indonesian authorities have given us assurances that British-supplied military equipment will not be used against civilians. They are fully aware of the importance which the British Government attach to these assurances.

Riot Control Equipment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that no further licences for the export of *(a)* armoured water cannon and *(b)* other riot control equipment, will be issued until the current inquiry is completed. [21408]

Mr. Hanley: We shall continue to consider any such applications on their individual merits.

EU Ambassadors

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries and the international organisations to which EU representatives are accredited with ambassadorial status. [21501]

Mr. David Davis: The countries and international organisations to which the European Commission have accredited representatives are listed below. Some of these countries choose to treat the commission delegate or representative as an ambassador and grant him or her privileges and immunities, but this is largely a matter of local custom.

Albania
Algeria
Angola
Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Australia
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belize
Benin
Bolivia
Botswana
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cameroon
Canada
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
Chile
China
Colombia
Comoros
Congo
Costa Rica
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Djibouti
Dominican Republic
Egypt
Equatorial Guinea

Eritrea
Estonia
Ethiopia
Fiji
Former Yugoslavia
Gabon
Gambia
Georgia
Ghana
Grenada
Guatemala
Guinea (Conakry)
Guinea-Bissau
Guyana
Haiti
Hong Kong
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Israel
Ivory Coast
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhastan
Kenya
Latvia
Lebanon
Lesotho
Liberia
Lithuania
Madagascar
Malawi
Mali
Malta
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mexico
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Netherlands Antilles
New Caledonia
Nicaragua
Niger
Nigeria (Lagos)
Nigeria (Abuja)
Norway
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
Sao Tome and Principe
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Slovakia
Slovenia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa (Pretoria)
South Africa (Cape Town)
South Korea
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Surinam
Swaziland
Syria
Tanzania
Thailand
Togo
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Uganda
Ukraine
United States of America
Uruguay
Vanuatu
Venezuela
Vietnam
West Bank and Gaza
Western Samoa
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe
UN Geneva
UN New York
UNESCO Paris
FAO Rome
OSCE Vienna

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what section of the EU treaties representatives of the European Union are accorded ambassadorial status; and if he will make a statement on the basis of their ambassadorial status. [21500]

Mr. Davis: No provisions of the EU treaty, or the treaties establishing the European Communities, provides for according ambassadorial status to any representatives of the European Union. Delegations of the European Commission in third countries are in practice often accorded privileges and immunities by their host states. The head of delegation is the Commissions's representative and known as the delegate. Some countries choose to treat delegates as ambassadors; but this is largely a matter of local custom.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21447]

Mr. Hanley: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member on 21 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *173*.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement; [21717]

(2) if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from; [21739]

(3) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)*

publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21694]

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 26 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *150*, if he will make a statement on his latest discussions with the United States Government on Libyan sanctions; and if he will make a statement on changes in his Department's policy on sanctions towards Libya in each of the last four years. [21551]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: UK and US Government officials discussed UN sanctions against Libya in the weeks preceding the review of sanctions on 14 March. Both Governments remain committed to the rigorous implementation of the sanctions until Libya has complied fully with UN Security Council resolutions 731 and 748. It remains Her Majesty's Government's policy that, since the break in relations with Libya in 1984, we neither encourage nor discourage unembargoed trade with Libya. We support UK exporters to the extent that our limited resources in Tripoli allow.

Libya's continued failure to surrender the two Lockerbie accused, and to comply with the other requirements of the UN Security Council, caused the adoption of resolution 883 which imposed further sanctions effective from 1 December 1993; specifically, a partial assets freeze, a ban on the supply of certain oil-related equipment, and a tightening of sanctions imposed by SCR 748.

UK sanctions against Libya are reviewed every four months. There has been no change in Her Majesty's Government's policy on Libya sanctions since they were imposed, because the reasons for imposing them remain valid.

Balkans

Mr. Gill : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice his Department has received from James Pettifer in respect of *(a)* Albania and *(b)* other Balkan states. [21577]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Freedom International

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list know-how fund consultancy contracts awarded to Freedom International, indicating in each case the year awarded, approximate value, countries concerned and brief description of the project. [21775]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Albania

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the principal areas of advice and assistance given to the Berisha Government in Albania in the fields of *(a)* macroeconomic management, *(b)* financial services regulation and *(c)* prevention of serious fraud. [21666]

(2) if he will list the United Kingdom *(a)* firms, *(b)* partnerships and *(c)* individuals who have been paid via the know-how fund to provide services (i) in Albania or (ii) to the Albanian Government since April 1991. [21665]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

European Parliament

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom will oppose proposals at the intergovernmental conference to include in the treaty a provision requiring the European Parliament to continue to divide its activities between Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg. [21668]

Mr. David Davis: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Liverpool Macroeconomic Research

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list know-how fund consultancy contracts awarded to Liverpool Macroeconomic Research or its principals, indicating in each case the year awarded, approximate value, countries concerned and brief description of the project. [21774]

Sir Nicolas Bonsor: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Sudan

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the possible outcomes of the current fights between the National Democratic Alliance/SPLA forces and the forces of the Government of Sudan; what action he proposes to take; and if he will make a statement. [21825]

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Scottish Members of Parliament

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Lord President of the Council what was the aggregate amount spent on *(a)* parliamentary salaries, *(b)* office costs allowance, *(c)* additional costs allowance, and *(d)* travel expenditure in respect of hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies in 1996. [21598]

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information requested is not in a form which can readily be extracted. However, I have asked the Fees Office to write to the hon. Member in due course with the information he has requested.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Lord President of the Council which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings,

(b) conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21709]

Mr. Newton: I am not responsible for any non-departmental public bodies.

Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council what research his Department has commissioned into the use of drugs by young people; and if he will make a statement. [21595]

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office has not commissioned any research into the use of drugs by young people.

Under the Government's tackling drugs together strategy, the Department of Health was given the responsibility of commissioning research into drug misuse among 11 to 35 year-olds. The first survey of over 5,000 people was conducted by the Health Education Authority and BMRB International in autumn 1995, and the results published in May 1996. A second survey was conducted in autumn 1996, and the results will be made available later this year.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council what formal assessments have been made of the effectiveness of the different elements of the anti-drugs campaign; and if he will make a statement. [21594]

Mr. Newton: The Government are vigorously implementing complementary drug strategies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, tailored to the circumstances of each country. The effectiveness of each of these strategies is under regular review, under the auspices of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on the Misuse of Drugs.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council what discussions his Department has had with the Economic and Social Research Council about applied social research on drug taking; and if he will make a statement. [21596]

Mr. Newton: The central drugs co-ordination unit in the Privy Council Office was offered the opportunity, which it accepted, to comment on the most recent drug-related research grant applications to the Economic and Social Research Council.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Advisory Bodies (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21377]

Mr. Bates: Within the Cabinet Office, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is responsible for the performance of Millennium Central Ltd. the operating company which will set up and run the millennium exhibition in Greenwich. It is not possible to provide figures for the overall budget and estimated running costs of MCL, as these will not be available until the business plan for the exhibition has been finalised.

Criminal Conviction Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if those organisations which are expected to undertake basic checks as a part of contracting for Government business are also required to obtain criminal conviction certificates from employees; and if he will make a statement. [21415]

Mr. Freeman: Government contractors are obliged to carry out basic checks on employees and potential employees who, in the course of working on a particular contract, have a requirement to have access to Government assets. As part of the basic check procedure, employees and potential employees are required to provide a declaration of unspent criminal convictions. This may be passed direct to the contracting Department or agency rather than the employer if the employee prefers.

The Government's proposals for new arrangements for access to criminal records have been set out in the Police Bill. This provides that, in future, individuals will be able to obtain certificated details of their own criminal convictions. These developments will be kept under review with regard to their possible application in the area of basic checks and in security vetting more widely.

Admiralty Arch

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has made for the future of Admiralty Arch. [21429]

Mr. Freeman: Good progress is being made with preparations for the transfer of this important historic building to a new body that will enable it to be renovated and re-used for the benefit of organisations concerned with the promotion of London.

The executive agency currently responsible for its management, Property Advisers to the Civil Estate has drawn up a long lease providing for its occupation by a not-for-profit company or trust representing Londoners' interests through business, local government, the voluntary sector and faith communities. The lease would be subject to the availability of appropriate funding, for example from the national lottery heritage fund. It is envisaged that the trust would be headed by a co-chairmanship.

The new organisation would then be responsible for the refurbishment and maintenance of Admiralty Arch and for arranging for its occupation by appropriate bodies whose purpose is the promotion of London. Several charities and similar organisations have already expressed strong interest.

In the meantime, work is about to begin on strengthening the building. This will entail sequential closures of the arches to traffic and pedestrians which will be phased over the next 16 weeks in order to minimise disruption.

Citizens Charters

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many citizens charters adopted by national public services *(a)* have their performance indicators validated and verified by an external body and *(b)* specify enforceable rights for particular standards of service; and if he will identify those services under *(a)* and *(b)*; [21802]

(2) if he will list each citizens charter, indicating which involved consultation with consumers in *(a)* setting performance standards and *(b)* their preparation; [21783]

(3) if he will list those national citizens charters which *(a)* provide complaints procedures in line with recommendations of the complaints task force and *(b)* provide financial compensation for users when particular standards have not been met; and if he will publish for each the figures for compensation paid out in each financial year since the charter was implemented; [21782]

(4) how many of the national citizens charters are available *(a)* in an appropriate form for the visually impaired and *(b)* in two or more languages other than English; and if he will list those charters in each category; [21780]

(5) if he will list all national public services which have not yet published a citizens charter. [21819]

Mr. Freeman: I shall write to the hon. Member and place copies in the Libraries of the House.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those of the Central Office of Information's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish this response to advice from. [21733]

Mr. Freeman: The Central Office of Information does not sponsor any advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Central Office for Information *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [21688]

Mr. Freeman: The Advisory Committee on Advertising is the only non-departmental public body sponsored by the Central Office of Information. It: *(a)* does not have a statutory base, *(b)* does not publish its advice to Government, *(c)* does not publish an annual report and *(d)* does not lay an annual report before Parliament.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary; [21689]

(2) if he will list those Cabinet Office's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from; [21732]

(3) if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from; [21731]

(4) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21682]

Mr. Freeman: I shall write to the hon. Member and place copies in the Libraries of the House.

WALES

Public Transport (Cardiff)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision he has made for a public sector contribution to the funding under the private finance initiative of the Bute avenue and allied public transport scheme in the financial years *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1988–99. [21530]

Mr. Hague: Cardiff Bay development corporation is currently evaluating private sector bids for Bute avenue. It would be prejudicial to negotiations to reveal information about what public sector provision has been made for the project.

Public bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case under a statutory requirement. [21431]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There is a statutory obligation on national health service trusts to publish an annual report, all other NHS bodies are required to do so by the code of conduct and accountability. There is a statutory obligation on all NHS bodies to publish annual accounts, but no obligation on them to publish minutes of their meetings, although many do. Health authorities and special health authorities are statutorily required to publish the agendas of their meetings. All NHS bodies are required by the code of conduct and accountability to maintain a register of members' interests.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base. [21754]

Mr. Hague: The Historic Buildings Council for Wales; the Ancient Monuments Board for Wales; the local government boundary commission; the staff commission

for Wales; the Welsh industrial development advisory board; the Environment Agency advisory committee for Wales; the Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committee; the Welsh Dental Committee; the Welsh Medical Committee; the Welsh Optical Committee; the Welsh Pharmaceutical Committee; the Welsh Nursing and Midwifery Committee; the Hill Farming Advisory Sub-Committee for Wales and the Library and Information Services Council.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; and if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21760]

Mr. Jones: All national health service bodies, as defined by the Cabinet Office, have a statutory basis. Health authorities and special health authorities are statutorily required to admit members of the public to their meetings. NHS trusts are statutorily required to hold an annual public meeting and many voluntarily open board meetings to the public.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21438]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows: the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Cardiff Bay development corporation, the Development Board for Rural Wales, the Further and Higher Education Funding Council, Housing for Wales, the Land Authority for Wales, the Residuary Body for Wales, the Welsh Development Agency, the Welsh Language Board, the Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, the Wales tourist board and the agricultural wages committees are all established by statute. Other bodies are established under royal warrant or royal charter.

(a) The Residuary Body for Wales and the Land Authority for Wales are both required by statute, under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, to open their board meetings to the public. For the Land Authority for Wales, the public may, by resolution, be excluded from meetings if the nature of the business is confidential or for other special reasons. The public are allowed access to board meetings of the Welsh national board but are asked to leave if confidential matters are to be discussed.

(b) No NDPB is statutorily required to hold open meetings for the public: the Countryside Council for Wales; the National Library for Wales and the National Museums and Galleries of Wales hold such meetings voluntarily.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21748]

Mr. Hague: There are no such bodies.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [21757]

Mr. Jones: National health service bodies, as defined by the Cabinet Office, are subject to investigation by the health service commissioner for Wales (ombudsman), and scrutiny by both the Audit Commission and the National Audit Office.

The principles of open government are incorporated in the code of practice on openness in the national health service with which all national health service bodies must comply. The principles of the citizen's charter apply to national health service bodies and have been incorporated into the patient's charter.

The Welsh Office health department monitors the performance of all national health service bodies in Wales.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21708]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows:
(a) None;

(b) the local government boundary commission has a statutory duty to conduct consultation exercises. The staff commission for Wales conducts such exercises voluntarily as appropriate;

(c) to *(f)* none.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answers of 13 March, *Official Report*, columns *299–00*, if he has received a copy of the briefing note to the board of the Llandough NHS trust dated 27 February, headed "Barry Hospital Defects Progress report"; if he will place a copy of it in the Library; what assessment he has made of the contents of paragraph 2.2 with particular reference to Welsh Health Estates taking over responsibility for the project management of Barry hospital; what further consideration he will give to the previous answers given on the respective responsibilities for project management of Beard Dove and Welsh Health Estates; and if he will make a statement. [21773]

Mr. Hague: I have not received a copy of the report.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the project management work for which Beard Dove took over responsibility for the estate care division of Welsh Health Common Services Authority (i) at the time of the division's privatisation and (ii) since July 1996; which of those projects have since been completed; and if he will list *(a)* the value of work done,

(b) fees earned, *(c)* estimated value of the transferred assets, and *(d)* liabilities and responsibilities at the time of privatisation. [21776]

Mr. Hague: This information is not available centrally. Details of project management work transferred to Beard Dove on 1 July 1996 is held by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Developments since then are a matter for individual trusts.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many speech therapists there are in each health authority area; and what assessment he has made of the necessary establishment of speech therapists in each area. [21602]

Mr Gwilym Jones: The information is given in the table. Speech therapists employed by NHS trusts are shown in the health authority area in which the trust is situated. It is a matter for trusts to determine the number required.

Speech therapists (whole time equivalent numbers), 30 September 1995[1]

New health authority area	*Number (wte)*
Bro Taf	46
Dyfed Powys	28
Gwent	29
Morgannwg	45
North Wales	51

[1] Excluding a small number of speech therapists paid on local pay scales for whom no details of occupation are available centrally.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of *(a)* the recruitment and *(b)* the provision of speech therapists in Wales. [21601]

Mr. Jones: A survey of speech therapy departments in Wales was carried out in 1996 which identified 14.1 whole-time equivalent vacancies. NHS trusts indicated that there were some recruitment difficulties. Provision is being made for a further eight speech therapists to be trained in each annual cohort in Wales in addition to the 22 student places available.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 13 March, *Official Report*, column *300*, what consultation he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority in relation to restitution payments by Beard Dove to the authority, following the termination of its project management responsibility for Barry Community hospital and its transfer to Welsh Health Estates. [21777]

Mr. Hague: None. All issues surrounding this matter are still being considered by Llandough hospital and Community NHS trust.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library all material documents relating to his arrangements and obligations to the European Commission in respect of wildlife compensatory measures for the Cardiff bay barrage; and if he will make a statement on the extent and nature of his obligations. [21787]

Mr. Hague: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Citizens Charters

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list those national citizens charters which *(a)* provide complaints procedures in line with recommendations of the complaints task force and *(b)* provide financial compensation for users when particular standards have not been met; and if he will publish for each the figures for compensation paid out in each financial year since the charter was implemented; [21797]

(2) how many citizens charters adopted by national public services *(a)* have their performance indicators validated and verified by an external body and *(b)* specify enforceable rights for particular standards of service; and if he will identify those services under *(a)* and *(b)*; [21804]

(3) if he will list all national citizens charters, indicating which involved consumer consultation in *(a)* the setting of their performance standards and *(b)* their preparation; [21799]

(4) if he will list the gross public spending for each year since 1990–91, in 1996–97 prices on *(a)* grant-maintained schools, *(b)* city technology colleges, *(c)* training and enterprise councils and *(d)* career service companies; [21810]

(5) how many of the national citizens charters are available *(a)* in an appropriate form for the visually impaired and *(b)* in two or more languages other than English; and if he will identify those charters under *(a)* and *(b)*. [21813]

Mr. Hague: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on progress on signing PFI contracts for *(a)* Chepstow hospital and *(b)* the Red Barn project in the grounds of Nevill Hall hospital, Abergavenny. [21667]

Mr. Hague: I expect the contract for the Chepstow neighbourhood health unit to be signed shortly. The Red Barn project is currently under consideration by Gwent Community NHS trust and Gwent health authority.

SCOTLAND

Doctors and Nurses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses by grade, employed by each area health board in Scotland in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement. [21274]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Farm Enterprises

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the average public subsidy for UK and EU funds to *(a)* dairy, *(b)* arable and *(c)* livestock farm enterprises in Roxburgh and Berwickshire and in Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale for the last five years for which figures are available. [21538]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement; [21723]

(2) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement; [21698]

(3) if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from; [21746]

(4) if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizen's charter; [21451]

(5) which of the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case under a statutory requirement; [21432]

(6) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Scottish Courts Administration *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement; [21713]

(7) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Scottish Courts Administration *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement; [21707]

(8) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Scottish Courts Administration have a statutory base; [21755]

(9) if he will list those of the Scottish Court Administration's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21747]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [21756]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: National health service bodies in Scotland are subject to investigation by the Health Service Commissioner (Ombudsman), and scrutiny by both the Accounts Commission and the National Audit Office.

The principles of open government are incorporated in the code of practice on openness in NHS in Scotland to which all national health service bodies must have regard. The principles of the citizens charter apply to national health service bodies and have been incorporated into the patients charter.

The Scottish health service management executive monitors the performance of all national health service bodies in Scotland.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; and if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21759]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: All national health service bodies in Scotland have a statutory basis. Health boards and special health boards are statutorily required to admit members of the public to their meetings, unless by resolution they exclude the public to all or part of their meetings for a specific reason, for example, security considerations. NHS trusts are statutorily required to hold an annual public meeting and many trusts voluntarily admit the public to their board meetings. The Mental Welfare Commission, the Common Services Agency and the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland are not required to hold any board meetings to which the public is admitted.

Children (Sexual Abuse)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of sexual abuse of children under 16 years of age led to a conviction in each of the last five years. [19076]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table sets out information for the most recent five years for which it is available for those sexual offences within the classification which, by definition, involve sexual abuse of children.

Persons with a charge proved where the main crime was a sexual offence against a child aged under 16, Scotland 1990–1994

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Lewd and libidinous practices	172	160	154	159	182
Unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13	9	2	7	8	3
Unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 16	97	91	57	53	67
Causing or encouraging seduction, prostitution etc. of a girl under 16	1	—	—	—	—
Taking or making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children	1	—	5	—	2

Small Towns Initiative

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what budget has been allocated to Scottish Enterprise to finance the small towns initiative; and if he will make a statement. [21548]

Mr. Kynoch: The budget allocation to Scottish Enterprise is not generally hypothecated to particular initiatives. The 1997–98 costs to Scottish Enterprise of the small towns initiative are expected to be met from its overall budget of £464 million. This budget was determined after consultation with Scottish Enterprise and, with the agreement of the chairmen of that organisation, took account of expected levels of expenditure on the initiative.

Mr. W. J. Duff

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what year auditors working for Greater Glasgow health board first took note of the exceptional nature of the annual service fees paid to Mr. W. J. Duff; and what action was taken. [19046]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Dentists' NHS earnings are monitored by the dental practice division of the Common Services Agency on behalf of the Scottish Dental Practice Board and it is the board which brings to the attention of health boards any concerns about payments to dentists. The auditors for Greater Glasgow health board examine the internal control systems established by the board for handling NHS general dental service payments and administration: they do not look in detail at individual cases.

Local Enterprise Companies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if local enterprise companies publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* minutes of meetings, *(d)* agendas of meetings and *(e)* registers of members' interests; and in each case whether this is under a statutory requirement; [21764]

(2) if he will list gross public spending on local enterprise companies for each year since 1990–91, in 1996–97 prices. [21807]

(3) what is the statutory basis of local enterprise companies; and if they *(a)* admit members of the public to board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21770]

Mr. Kynoch: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

NHS Trusts (Applications)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* hospitals on unsuccessful applications to achieve trust status since 1990. [20182]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Cullen Inquiry

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost to public funds of the Cullen inquiry. [15604]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Legal Aid Fees

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the 10 *(a)* Queen's counsel,

(b) advocates and *(c)* law firms which have received the highest sums of legal aid fees in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [18242]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

NHS Salaries

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the NHS salaries and wages costs for *(a)* administrative, clerical and management staff and *(b)* nurses and midwives in each financial year form 1988–89 in 1995 prices. [21159]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Official Residence, Charlotte Square

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the annual maintenance and running costs associated with his official residence in Charlotte square in the most recent year for which figures are available, indicating the different categories of expenditure. [19153]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Scottish Office Quangos

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the annual publicity budget for (i) the Scottish Office and (ii) Scottish Office quangos in each year since 1986–87 in *(a)* real and *(b)* cash terms. [19154]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Special Advisers

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the costs to public funds in *(a)* salary, *(b)* administrative support and *(c)* travel of the special advisers employed in his Department in the last year for which figures are available. [20635]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Cottage Hospitals

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the cottage hospitals which have *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened in Scotland in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [21300]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Grants and Loans

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 18 March relating to the condition of grants and loans from public bodies and the oral statement of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) of 11 March, *Official Report*, column 48, if the defined political objectives were declared when the company applied for grants from the Highlands and Islands development board, Highlands and Island Enterprise or the local enterprise companies. [21512]

Mr. Kynoch: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Eye Tests

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have had eye tests in Scotland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [21299]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of beds available for *(a)* accident and emergency wards, *(b)* geriatric wards, *(c)* surgical wards and *(d)* paediatric wards, by area health board in Scotland in each year since 1986; and if he will make a statement. [21301]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Cairngorm Funicular Railway

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what public funding will be given to Highlands and Islands Enterprise to meet the agreement obligations in relation to the proposed Cairngorm funicular; and what assessment he has made of the value for money of such expenditure. [21510]

Mr. Kynoch: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Convictions

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* number of convictions, *(b)* conviction rate and *(c)* clear-up rate, for each category of crime, in each region, for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [21587]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. and learned Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Citizens Charters

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list those national citizens charters which *(a)* provide complaints procedures in line with recommendations of the complaints task force and *(b)* provide financial compensation for users when particular standards have not been met; and if he will

publish for each the figures for compensation paid out in each financial year since the charter was implemented; [21798]

(2) how many citizens charters adopted by national public services *(a)* have their performance indicators validated and verified by an external body and *(b)* specify enforceable rights for particular standards of service; and if he will identify those services under *(a)* and *(b)*; [21805]

(3) how many of the national citizens charters are available *(a)* in an appropriate form for the visually impaired and *(b)* in two or more languages other than English; and if he will identify those charters under *(a)* and *(b)*; [21814]

(4) if he will list all national citizens charters, indicating which involved consumer consultation in *(a)* the setting of their performance standards and *(b)* their preparation. [21800]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what monitoring his Department carries our concerning the assurance given by the Government that previously acceptable rail routes would continue to be available after privatisation; and if he will make a statement about the change in the validity of Newcastle upon Tyne to London full-fare tickets for travel to Euston; [21614]

(2) if, for the purposes of the Government's assurance concerning continued acceptance for full-fare ticketing of routes accepted by British Rail, all routes accepted by British Rail prior to privatisation, including Newcastle to Euston, are regarded as reasonable routes. [21616]

Mr. Watts: I have been asked to reply.

A routeing guide has been prepared by the Association of Train Operating Companies, which sets out clearly the permitted routes by which passengers may travel on their journeys. This guide requires the approval of the franchising director and the Rail Regulator and they will be concerned to ensure that if protects all reasonable routes that were allowed by BR before privatisation.

The guide has been given interim approval for an experimental period until 31 May. At this stage it does not include Newcastle to London via Birmingham.

Comments are being sought via rail users consultative committees on the accuracy and completeness of the guide. These will be taken into account before final approval is granted.

I have made no assessment of the impact on business men of using single one-day tickets.

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that nationwide rail rover tickets continue to be *(a)* available and *(b)* widely publicised; and what assessment he has made of the importance of such tickets to the United Kingdom tourism industry [21615]

Mr. Watts: I have been asked to reply.

The all-line rail-rover continues to be available. Promotion of the product is the responsibility of the Association of Train Operating Companies and its members. I have made no assessment of the importance of the product to the United Kingdom tourist industry.

TRANSPORT

Milford Haven

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library all the reports obtained by his Department concerning accidents or reported near misses within the Milford Haven Port Authority area involving vessels in the 10 years prior to 15 February 1996. [16263]

Mr. Bowis: My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of his letter in the Library.

London Underground (Crime Rate)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many crimes were committed on London Underground in each of the last six years. [21534]

Mr. Bowis: Total notifiable offences in 1995–96 in the London Underground area were 14,971. The comparable 1994–95 figure was 15,149. In the time available, it has not been possible to obtain comparable figures for earlier years.

Clapham Junction

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Health and Safety Executive will investigate the overcrowding which occurred at Clapham Junction station early in the evening of 13 March; and what British Transport Police and Railway Company staff resources were available to alleviate or control the crowds. [21771]

Mr. Watts: I understand that HSE will be making inquiries with the station operator, South West Trains Ltd., to ensure that it is complying with its Railway safety case by having adequate procedures in place to control passenger congestion.

The British Transport Police sent four constables to assist with crowd control at Clapham Junction station. It is for railway companies to decide the staffing necessary to meet their safety duties.

Cash Limits

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to change his Department's cash limits for 1996–97. [21779]

Sir George Young: The cash limit for class V vote 2—administration and transport services—will be reduced by £11,000,000 from £154,645,000 to £143,645,000 and the cash limit for class V vote 4—Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency—will be reduced by £2,000,000 from £180,451,000 to £178,451,000.

The reductions in these cash limits arise from the need to offset payments accounted for on class V votes 1, 3 and 5 for trans-European network infrastructure projects in the UK.

Sea Empress

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to publish the marine accidents investigation branch report on the Sea Empress before 1 May. [21583]

Sir George Young: The marine accidents investigation branch's report into the Sea Empress has not yet been submitted to me. If it is submitted to me during the period of the general election campaign, it will not be published, in line with the convention that Departments should avoid announcements which might be likely to compete with political parties or parliamentary candidates for media attention.

Interim recommendations were made by the chief inspector in relation to matters on which he considered early action should be taken, and the necessary action has already been taken.

A500

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the projected starting date and date of completion for the A500 Shavington bypass; and what funds have been set aside for its construction. [21506]

Mr. Watts: Timing of construction will depend upon the availability of resources. The next stage is to serve notices to treat upon landowners and I have instructed the Highways Agency to commence this action. The works are expected to cost some £21 million and to take two years.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the reasons for the delay in the construction of the A500 Shavington bypass. [21507]

Mr. Watts: The A500 Basford–Hough–Shavington bypass is one of many schemes in the national road programme competing for funds. We are taking schemes forward to construction on the basis of economic benefit, environmental impact, route importance and importance for regeneration. The timing of construction of the A500 scheme will be determined by these factors.

Full-fare Train Tickets (London–Newcastle)

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of *(a)* the change in the availability of through full-fare rail tickets from Newcastle to London for business men seeking to break their journey at places between Birmingham and London and return directly to Newcastle upon Tyne, and *(b)* the impact on business men of the need to use single tickets which are valid for only one day; [21612]

(2) what assessment he has made of the degree of compliance with the Government's assurance that routes accepted by British Rail before privatisation for full-fare ticketing purposes would continue to be accepted, *(a)* nationally and *(b)* for journeys from Newcastle upon Tyne to Euston. [21613]

Mr. Watts: A routing guide has been prepared by the Association of Train Operating Companies which sets out clearly the permitted routes by which passengers may travel on their journeys. This guide requires the approval of the franchising director and the Rail Regulator and they will be concerned to ensure that it protects all reasonable routes that were allowed by BR before privatisation.

The guide has been given interim approval for an experimental period until 31 May. At this stage it does not include Newcastle to London via Birmingham.

Comments are being sought via rail users consultative committees on the accuracy and completeness of the guide. These will be taken into account before final approval is granted.

I have made no assessment of the impact on business men of using single one-day tickets.

London Buses

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of compulsory competitive tendering on the operation of London Buses. [21403]

Mr. Bowis: London Transport began tendering bus services in 1985. The whole network is now subject to competitive tender and from 1997 around 22 per cent. of route mileage is being put out to tender on an annual basis.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passengers travelled on London Buses in each of the last five years. [21402]

Mr. Bowis: The information is as follows:

Year	*Passenger journeys (millions)*
1991–92	1,149
1992–93	1,127
1993–94	1,112
1994–95	1,159
1995–96	1,198

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of the Rail Regulator have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21435]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 19 July 1996, *Official Report*, at column *683*.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement; [21437]

(2) which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21439]

Mr. Bowis: Listed below are the answers for each of the Department of Transport's executive NDPBs.

The Traffic Director for London, the London Regional Passengers Committee and Trinity House Lighthouse Authority and the Northern Lighthouse Board have a statutory basis.

(a) The London Regional Passengers Committee under a statutory requirement; but the public can be excluded.

(b) None.

Advisory Groups (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21384]

Mr. Bowis: Very many bodies, elected and unelected, provide advice on transport in London or offer some form of transport service. Of these, three bodies have roles which are specific to London and are responsible to me. These are London Transport, the London Regional Passengers Committee and the Traffic Director for London. The information for these bodies is:

Traffic Director for London

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*
(i) overall budget	17.5	22	22	22
(ii) estimated running costs	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8

Budget and running costs for London Transport are a matter for LT.

My Department provides the LRPC with grant in aid which covers its running costs. The estimated outturn for 1996–97 is £534,000 and the planned level of grant for 1997–98 is £524,000. Figures for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are not available.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on light dues. [19540]

Sir George Young *[pursuant to his reply 16 March, c. 716.]:* I am pleased to announce that light dues for 1997–98 will be reduced by about 4.6 per cent. from 43p to 41p per net tonne with consequential reductions to other charges. This reduction, coming after four years of stability, takes rates back to below those established in 1992. It is a clear demonstration of the increasing efficiency of the three general lighthouse authorities.

I am announcing changes to the light dues regulations which are designed to simplify some aspects of collection and will remove the liability to pay light dues in certain cases. Vessels liable to pay light dues by reference to their tonnage that do not hold an International Tonnage Certificate (1969) will pay on the basis of their gross registered tonnage.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Record Office

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on public access to Public Record Office document AIR 2/16918. [21359]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Public Record Office under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, dated 21 March 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about this document.

The document was open to public inspection in July 1990. Under the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967, once a document has been opened to public inspection it cannot be closed again. Documents may be withdrawn temporarily by their department of origin, but this did not happen with AIR 2/16918 and even if it had happened arrangements could have been made for it to be consulted at the Ministry of Defence.

We know from our records of document usage that AIR 2/16918 was consulted by members of the public on several occasions between 1990 and 1996. In April 1996, it was in our Reprographic section for some photographs to be taken, but it appears that it was subsequently misplaced and, despite several searches, we have so far been unable to locate it.

I am very sorry that it is currently unavailable for consultation and we shall continue to search for it. I shall let you know when we find it. By way of explanation, but not in mitigation, I should add that we hold several million documents on 160 kilometres of shelving, processing over a million document movements each year, and that occasionally and regrettably human error does lead to misplacements.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21444]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor's Department sponsors two such bodies: the Legal Aid Board and the Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board. Both have a statutory basis. However, the latter has been inactive since March 1992 when the Lord Chancellor announced his decision to postpone implementation of the authorised practitioners scheme.

The Legal Aid Board does not, nor is it required to, admit members of the public to board or committee meetings or hold open meetings for the public.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21742]

Mr. Streeter: Of the Lord Chancellor's Department's advisory bodies appearing in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1996", the Insolvency Rules Committee and Land Registration Rule Committee have to be consulted about relevant rules and the Council on Tribunals must be consulted before procedural rules are made for any tribunal specified in schedule 1 to the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992 and on procedural rules made by the Lord Chancellor or the Lord Advocate concerning statutory inquiries.

The Government are not required to publish their response to advice from these bodies.

Although there is no legal requirement to consult the Advisory Council on Public Records, it generally is consulted on legislation affecting public records.

The County Court Rule Committee, Supreme Court Rule Committee, Family Proceedings Rule Committee and Crown Court Rule Committee actually make rules and the Lord Chancellor is a member of all but the first.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if she will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21720]

Mr. Streeter: The following advisory non-departmental public bodies appear under my Department's name in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1996":

Insolvency Rules Committee

County Court Rule Committee

Supreme Court Rule Committee

Land Registration Rule Committee

Family Proceedings Rule Committee

Crown Court Rule Committee

Advisory Council on Public Records

Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct

Council on Tribunals

Law Commission

Legal Aid Advisory Committee (NI)

Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax (NI)

Advisory Committees on JPs in Northern Ireland

Advisory Committees on Juvenile Court Lay Panel (NI)

Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax

Advisory Committees on JPs in England (excluding the Duchy of Lancaster) and Wales

Judicial Studies Board

Honorary Investment Advisory Committee.

All but the last seven have a statutory base.

(a) None is under a statutory requirement to publish its advice to Government; *(b)* The Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct, the Law Commission and the Council on Tribunals are all required by statute to make annual reports to the Lord Chancellor. While there is no statutory requirement on the Advisory Council on Public Records to submit an annual report, there is a requirement that any report by it to the Lord Chancellor should be included in the Public Record Office's own annual report, for which there is a statutory requirement. The Judicial Studies Board also publishes an annual report, but this is not under a statutory requirement; *(c)* apart from that of the Judicial Studies Board, all of the annual reports in *(b)* are laid before Parliament by the Lord Chancellor, under a statutory requirement.

The Legal Aid Advisory Committee (NI) is required to consider the Law Society's annual report on legal aid in Northern Ireland and the Lord Chancellor is required to lay before Parliament a copy of any comments or recommendations made by the committee.

The other bodies do not publish advice or produce annual reports.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21705]

Mr. Streeter: For the advisory non-departmental public bodies listed under my Department in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1996", the answers are as follows:

(a) none.

(b) The following advisory bodies have carried out public consultation exercises:

the Supreme Court Rule Committee

the County Court Rule Committee

the Family Proceedings Rule Committee

the Law Commission

the Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct

the Judicial Studies Board.

(c) the Supreme Court Rule Committee, the County Court Rule Committee and the Family Proceedings Rule Committee regularly consult with individuals and organisations which have a professional or commercial interest in the amendment of rules of court.

The Law Commission do conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests but this is encompassed within (b) above.

(d) none.

(e) none.

(f) none.

There is no statutory requirement for these bodies in these areas.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Firearms Exports

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many licences have been granted for the export of firearms in categories ML1 and PL5018 since 6 December 1996; how many licence applications are currently under consideration; and what is his policy in respect of issuing such export licences for weapons prohibited by the Firearms (Amendment) Bill; [19089]

(2) how many licences have been granted for the export of firearms in categories *(a)* ML1 and *(b)* PL5018 since 6 December 1996; how many such licence applications are currently under consideration; and what is his policy in respect of issuing export licences for weapons prohibited by the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. [21414]

Mr. Nelson: A total of 659 export licences covering goods in categories ML1 and PL5018 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order were issued in the period 7 December 1996 to 7 March 1997. A further 425 export licence applications covering goods rated under those headings were under consideration at close of business on 7 March 1997. In the same period there were also two new open individual export licences issued covering such goods and 25 dealer-to-dealer licences, valid for a period for three years, were issued to registered firearms dealers enabling them to trade with counterparts in EU countries.

Firearms and most military equipment require an export licence before export and all applications for such licences are considered case by case. Careful consideration is given to the political and military implications of allowing individual consignments overseas.

The Government pay particular attention to proposed exports of military goods to countries with poor human rights records, where such goods might be used for internal repression, and to countries or regions where the export of arms might contribute to destabilisation of the area. In all, eight strict criteria for allowing arms sales were agreed by Ministers at Luxembourg and Lisbon European Councils in June 1991 and June 1992.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of licences, organised by class and subclass, *(a)* granted and *(b)* denied for the export of strategic goods to Indonesia, since 1 July 1996. [21409]

Mr. Nelson: Our records show that the numbers of individual licences for Indonesia which were issued between 1 July 1996 and 18 March 1997 are as follows:

Table 1: Individual licences issued under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 ordered by category

Heading	*Number of licences*
ML3	1
ML5	1
ML6	7
ML9	1
ML10	13
ML11	9
ML13	6
ML24	2
PL5006	1
Total	41

Table 2: Individual licences issued under the appropriate Dual-Use legislation (i.e. either the EU Dual-Use Regulation or the Dual-Use and Related Goods (Export Control) Regulations

Heading	*Number of licences*
IC350	2
2B350	2
3A990	3
5A002	1
5D002	1
5E002	1
9A003	1
Total	11

Table 3: Individual licences which were refused in the same period under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 ordered by category

Heading	*Numbers of licences*
ML 3	1
ML 4	1
PL 5002	1
Total	3

Details of subclass could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Regina *v.* Rees and Rotheroe

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the implication of the case of Regina *v.* Rees and Rotheroe for the work of his Department. [21553]

Mr. Nelson: As I said to the hon. Member in the House on 19 March, *Official Report*, columns 870–71, arrangements have been put in place which seek to avoid the accidental oversight that occurred in the case in question.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library those documents his Department made available to lawyers acting in the case of Regina *v.* Rees and Rotheroe. [21554]

Mr. Nelson: No. Documents disclosed to the defence were provided solely for the purposes of the trial.

Advisory Bodies (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21383]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department has responsibility for a broad range of bodies which provide advice or services both in London and outside. A list of these can be found in "Public Bodies 1996" which is available in the Library of the House. In addition, specific details about the agencies and a number of non-departmental public bodies for which my Department is responsible are published in "Trade and Industry: The Government's Expenditure plans 1997–98 to 1999–00" (Cm 3605), published on 20 March 1997, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Further details about particular bodies may be found in their annual

reports. Many of these reports are also either available in the Library of the House or can be obtained direct from the body concerned.

Export Licences

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences classified under the headings ML1 and PL5018 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 have been issued since 6 December 1996. [20670]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* A total of 659 export licences covering goods in categories ML1 and PL5018 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order were issued in the period 7 December 1996 to 7 March 1997.

Firearms Dealers

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many dealer-to-dealer licences have been issued to registered firearms dealers in the period since 6 December 1996. [20671]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* A total of 25 dealer-to-dealer licences, valid for a period of three years, were issued in the period 7 December 1996 to 7 March 1997 to registered firearms dealers enabling them to trade with counterparts in EU countries.

Japanese Investment

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the United Kingdom share of Japanese investment in Europe; how many jobs have been safeguarded since 1979 as a result of inward investment; and if he will make a statement. [21365]

Mr. Greg Knight: The United Kingdom is the No. 1 location in the EU for inward investment with the latest OECD figures available showing that in 1994 the UK had over 40 per cent. of all Japanese investment in the EU. Since 1979 my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau has recorded over 462,000 safeguarded jobs associated with inward investment. This is an enviable record which we are determined to maintain in the face of increased competition in Europe to international investment.

Stored Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what quantities of plutonium are stored under safeguards at United Kingdom nuclear facilities; in what form; if he will list the owners of the plutonium; and what quantities of United Kingdom-owned plutonium are currently on loan to other countries under safeguards. [21306]

Mr. Nelson: All civil plutonium in the United Kingdom is subject to Euratom safeguards and to the terms of the tripartite UK/Euratom/IAEA safeguards agreement (INFCIRC/263). Details of the quantities of such plutonium stored at United Kingdom nuclear facilities, including its form and ownership, are published by my Department each year. A copy of the United Kingdom's annual plutonium figures publication for the year ended 31 March 1996 was placed in the Library of the House of Commons in July 1996. This publication also includes information by country on exports, and imports, of civil plutonium. Information on specific transactions, including loans of material, is commercially confidential. The United Kingdom has a policy of requiring full scope safeguards as a condition of supply which means that exports of plutonium are not allowed to any country, other than the nuclear weapons states, where there are any unsafeguarded nuclear installations.

Privatisation

Sir John Stanley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the increase or decrease in real terms since privatisation in the price of *(a)* gas, *(b)* electricity and *(c)* telephone calls. [21492]

Mr. Page: Between privatisation in quarter four 1986 and quarter four 1996 average UK industrial gas prices have fallen by 59 per cent. in real terms and real domestic prices, including VAT, by 20½ per cent, whilst between privatisation in quarter two 1990 and quarter four 1996 average UK industrial electricity prices have fallen by 17 per cent. in real terms and real domestic prices, including VAT, by 5 per cent. Since privatisation in November 1984 real overall telecom prices have fallen by around 45 per cent.

Trade Fairs

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support will be given to non-core events under trade fair support schemes rules which take place from 1 April until March 1999; and if he will make a statement. [21590]

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) on 17 January 1997, *Official Report*, columns *392–93*, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough on 11 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *124*, when I announced that my Department would offer grants for 300 trade fairs and that my intention is to make all support for the trade fairs after this round available through the sector challenge. All these events are due to take place after 1 April 1997 and before 31 March 1999. During that period there will additionally be those events support for which had already been announced prior to those answers. Details of the supported events can be found in the "Overseas Promotions Guide and Supplementary List" deposited in the Library of the House.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to ensure that a proportion of the sector challenge budget be allocated for trade fairs; and if he will make a statement. [21589]

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) on 17 January 1997, *Official Report* columns *392–93*, when I said that I would be reviewing the way we support trade fairs after the first sector challenge. The results of the first challenge will have to be decided upon by the Government after the forthcoming general election.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Telecommunications *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government,

(c) publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21715]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The following is the information:

English Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Northern Ireland Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Scottish Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Welsh Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Business Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Advisory Committee on Telecommunications for Disabled and Elderly People.

All six ACTs have a statutory basis—section 54 (1) or 54 (4) of the Telecommunications Act 1984—and are remitted by that Act to advise the Director General of Telecommunications (OFTEL).

ACT advice given to Oftel in response to public consultations undertaken by Oftel is made available for public reference in Oftel's library, along with other responses received. Advice given to Oftel in other circumstances may by published, in whole or part, by Oftel or by the ACT itself at the discretion of the chairman by way of press release, newsletter or annual report.

A summary annual report by each ACT is submitted to the director general and published by him as part of Oftel's annual report, which is laid before Parliament. This is a statutory requirement. Each ACT also publishes and disseminates widely a more detailed annual report of its own activities and views. This is voluntary. Copies are not laid before Parliament, but are available to Members of both Houses—and to the public—on request and free of charge.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those of the Office of Telecommunication's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21752]

Mr. Taylor: None.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Telecommunications *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interest, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21703]

Mr. Taylor: The following is the information:

English Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Northern Ireland Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Scottish Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Welsh Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Business Advisory Committee on Telecommunications

Advisory Committee on Telecommunications for Disabled and Elderly People.

None of the ACTs hold their regular meetings in public. Some of the information received by them is commercially sensitive to telecommunications companies and the ACTs would not wish to compromise their access to and use of it. However, at the Chairmen's discretion they can invite external observers to meetings. ACTs may conduct both open/public and closed/targeted consultation exercises, assist Oftel with its own exercises and commission consumer research.

The ACTs published annual reports list the main external activities of their members, however, these do not constitute a full register of interests. For instance, details of private shareholdings in BT, although required by members' term of appointment to be disclosed to the director general, are not published.

ACTs do not publish the formal agendas for, nor minutes of, their meetings. However, their annual reports are intended to give a substantial insight into their work.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21700]

Mr. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the then President of the Board of Trade on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, Column *912*.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21751]

Mr. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 27 March 1996, *Official Report*, columns *606–07*.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21725]

Mr. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 13 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *672*.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21440]

Mr. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 22 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *250*. The information given then is still current with the amendment that the Coal Authority now holds an annual open meeting, on a voluntary basis.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those of Export Credits Guarantee Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21738]

Mr. Nelson: The Export Credits Guarantee Departments takes advice from one non-departmental public body, the Export Guarantees Advisory Council. The answers to the specific questions are none in each case.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Export Credits Guarantee Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21704]

Mr. Nelson: The Export Credits Guarantee Department takes advice from one non-departmental public body, the Export Guarantees Advisory Council. For answers to the specific questions I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 18 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *611*.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Exports Credits Guarantee Deparmtent *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report, and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament, and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21716]

Mr. Nelson: The Export Credits Guarantee Department takes advice form one non-departmental public body, the Export Guarantees Advisory Council. The answers to the specific questions are none in each case except for *(a)*, the Export Guarantees Advisory Council is appointed under the terms of the Export and Investment Guarantees Act 1991.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list those of the Office of Electricity Regulation's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from; [21737]

(2) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Electricity Regulation *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement; [21702]

(3) which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Electricity Regulation *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21714]

Mr. Page: I will write to the hon. Member.

Pembroke Power Station

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he plans to announce his decision on the section 36 application to burn orimulsion at Pembroke power station before 1 May. [21582]

Mr. Lang: I am considering, against the background of the published guidance on procedure and conduct during the general election period, all the material submitted by the applicant and interested parties. I cannot yet say when a decision will be taken.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update his answer of 20 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *594*, regarding incoming telephone calls to the Child Support Agency. [21474]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 21 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security regarding incoming telephone calls to the Child Support Agency.

The latest information available shows that during the period 1 February 1997 to 28 February 1997 the total calls offered by British Telecom to the Agency was 1,622,542.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many incoming telephone calls were made to *(a)* the Child Support Agency centres and *(b)* the national inquiry line in each month since January 1996. [21466]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 21 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of incoming telephone calls made to the Child Support Centres and the National Enquiry Line (NEL) since January 1996.

The attached table contains the number of incoming calls on a monthly basis from January 1996. From April 1996, the period of time over which information is collected changed; information is now collected and recorded over four-weekly periods instead of calendar months.

The attached figures refer to incoming calls offered by BT which represents the total number of incoming calls made.

I hope this is helpful.

Date	*Calls offered to call: handling service by BT*	*Calls offered to NEL by BT*
January 1996	776,796	57,352
February 1996	518,573	84,553
March 1996	423,383	190,054
Lunar month 1	648,908	49,349
Lunar month 2	639,314	52,564
Lunar month 3	761,822	54,061

Date	Calls offered to calls handling service by BT	Calls offered to NEL by BT
Lunar month 4	839,703	61,459
Lunar month 5	950,697	62,532
Lunar month 6	1,426,839	38,419
Lunar month 7	1,527,399	72,332
Lunar month 8	1,342,146	69,171
Lunar month 9	1,774,091	86,995
Lunar month 10	627,359	42,816
Lunar month 11	1,394,469	77,589
Lunar month 12	1,622,542	96,824

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each month since April 1995 the number of deduction of earnings orders *(a)* imposed by the Child Support Agency, *(b)* in force at the end of each month and *(c)* lifted each month. [21467]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 21 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency deduction from earnings orders.

Not all of the requested information is readily available. I have attached a table showing a monthly breakdown since April 1995 of the number of new deduction from earnings orders issued.

I hope this is helpful.

	Number of DEOs issued
April 1995	2,384
May 1995	3,516
June 1995	3,357
July 1995	3,851
August 1995	4,861
September 1995	4,097
October 1995	4,934
November 1995	6,703
December 1995	4,174
January 1996	5,400
February 1996	5,360
March 1996	4,294
Total 1995–96	52,931
April 1996	3,416
May 1996	3,806
June 1996	4,218
July 1996	4,100
August 1996	4,667
September 1996	5,077
October 1996	5,166
November 1996	6,767
December 1996	4,287
January 1997	6,310
February 1997	5,077
Total April 1996 to February 1997	52,891

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many child support assessments *(a)* were being processed, and *(b)* were outstanding for more than 26 weeks at the end of each month since April 1996. [21468]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 21 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency assessments.

I am unable to provide you with precisely the information that you have requested. The Agency measures its performance on the clearance of assessments against its Secretary of State target for 60% of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 26 weeks, and as at 31 March 1997 no more than 10% of all maintenance applications received to be over 52 weeks old.

The attached table gives details of the Agency's performance against this target, together with the number of cases being actioned at the end of each month from April 1996.

I hope this is helpful.

	Number of cases being actioned	Percentage of maintenance assessments cleared within 26 weeks	Percentage of maintenance assessments over 52 weeks old
April 1996	422,454	53	15
May 1996	428,244	52	15
June 1996	435,603	51	16
July 1996	440,741	51	15
August 1996	449,852	51	15
September 1996	456,810	51	15
October 1996	456,590	51	15
November 1996	451,608	51	14
December 1996	441,784	51	14
January 1997	432,150	52	13
February 1997	418,369	53	13

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many outstanding cases are being processed by the Child Support Agency; and how many were being processed on the same date in each of the last three years. [20169]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant C.B. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. John McAllion, dated 21 March 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about cases being actioned by the Child Support Agency.

To give a complete picture, set out in the table below are the numbers of cases which form the caseload of the Agency, the number of cases cleared from launch and the number being actioned at the end of the last three financial years, together with figures at the end of February 1997.

	Approximate caseload[1]	Number of cases cleared from launch (cumulative)	Number of cases being actioned
March 1994	203,600	336,232	550,000
March 1995	345,400	904,381	425,561
March 1996	460,800	1,231,235	409,659
February 1997	545,900	1,553,308	418,369

[1] Figures quoted are from the nearest published Quarterly Statistical Survey.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each month since April 1994 the number of *(a)* referrals from the Child Support Agency to the Independent Tribunal Service, *(b)* referrals outstanding for more than 26 weeks, *(c)* referrals where the Independent Tribunal Service found in favour of (1) the client and (2) the Child Support Agency and *(d)* recommendations made by the Independent Tribunal Service which were (i) accepted and (ii) not accepted by the Child Support Agency. [21469]

Mr. Mitchell: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Income Support (Pensioners)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners in the constituencies of Roxburgh and Berwickshire and of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale have been claiming *(a)* pensioner, *(b)* enhanced pensioner and *(c)* higher pensioner income support premiums at (i) higher and (ii) lower levels for each of the past five years for which figures are available. [21535]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 21 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many pensioners in the constituencies of Roxburgh and Berwickshire and Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale have been claiming (a) pensioners, (b) enhanced pensioner and (c) higher pensioner income support premiums at (i) higher and (ii) lower levels for each of the past five years for which figures are available.

The information requested is not available in the format requested. The Benefits Agency (BA) collates statistics by BA Districts and not by Parliamentary constituencies. Information for East Lowlands District which includes offices at Edinburgh South, Edinburgh East and Galashiels is shown in the attached table.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Income support customers in receipt of pensioner premiums for the Benefit Agency District of East Lowlands

Income support	*Higher pensioner premium*	*Enhanced pensioner premium*	*Pensioner premium*
February 1993	3,257	1,394	3,185
February 1994	3,685	1,354	3,223
February 1995	4,267	1,247	3,318
February 1996	4,660	1,175	3,285
November 1996[1]	4,834	1,121	3,211

Date has been provided by the Benefits Agency Central Data Unit and is subject to change.
Data relates to the actual number of people in receipt of each of the Income Support pensioner premiums as at the last working day of each month for the BA District of East Lowlands. This District includes the BA's offices of Edinburgh East, Edinburgh South and Galashiels.
[1] Validated data is not available for February 1997.

Social Fund Payments

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many successful applications were made in the constituencies of Roxburgh and Berwickshire and of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale for assistance from the social fund for (i) budgeting loans, (ii) crisis loans, (iii) community care grants, (iv) maternity expenses, (v) funeral expenses and (iv) cold weather payments for each of the past five years for which figures are available. [21546]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 21 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question requesting information on successful applications made in the constituencies of Roxburgh, Berwickshire, Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale for assistance from the Social Fund for Budgeting Loans, Crisis Loans, Community Care Grants, Maternity Expenses, Funeral Expenses and Cold Weather Payments, for each of the last five years.

The information requested is not available in the format requested. The Benefits Agency (BA) collates statistics by BA Districts and not by Parliamentary constituencies. Information for East Lowlands Districts which includes offices at Edinburgh South, Edinburgh East and Galashiels is shown in the attached table.

Information relating to Cold Weather Payments can be found in the statistical section of the House of Commons Library. The data is held in the Social Fund Statistical Load file under Cold Weather Payments by District Office. For 1992/93 it is available for each Benefit Office. From 1993/94 to date it is available for each District Office and Area Directorate.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Number of awards, east Lowlands district, 1991–96

Year	*Application type*	*Awards*
1991–92	Budgeting loan	4,757
	Community care grant	1,752
	Crisis loan	5,250
	Funeral payment	317
	Maternity payment	1,322
1992–93	Budgeting loan	4,928
	Community care grant	1,867
	Crisis loan	5,424
	Funeral payment	374
	Maternity payment	1,258
1993–94	Budgeting loan	5,007
	Community care grant	1,813
	Crisis loan payment	5,052
	Funeral payment	404
	Maternity payment	1,230
1994–95	Budgeting loan	4,925
	Community care grant	1898
	Crisis loan	4,753
	Funeral payment	358
	Maternity [payment	1,155
1995–96	Budgeting loan	4,997
	Community care grant	1,749
	Crisis loan	5,073
	Funeral payment	349
	Maternity payment	1,250

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Personal Pensions

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have opted out of occupational pensions into personal pensions in each year since 1988. [19948]

Mr. Heald: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Occupational Pensions

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have taken out occupational pensions since 1988. [19947]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that, during 1993–94 8.9 million people were active members of contracted-out occupational pension schemes. The most recent date for which information about other categories is available is 1991. There were then over 1 million people in not contracted-out occupational pension schemes. A further 3 million people had preserved rights from previous memberships of an occupational pension scheme and 6.5 million people were in receipt of an occupational pension.

Sources:

Contributors and Contributions; Summary Statistics 1993–94.

Government Actuary's Department's Survey of Occupational Pension Schemes 1991.

Outturn Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the outturn expenditure by his Department in the current financial year; how much of this represents *(a)* payments to beneficiaries and *(b)* administrative costs; what estimate he has made of the amount in each of those categories incurred in Wales; and how many staff his Department employs in (i) Wales, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Northern Ireland and (iv) England. [20746]

Mr. Burt: The total estimated outturn for Department of Social Security expenditure in 1996–97 is £90,834 million. The estimated 1996–97 outturn for administrative costs, inclusive of all grants and subsidies, is £3,535 million. The estimated 1996–97 expenditure on payments to beneficiaries, including housing benefit and council tax benefit is £87,299 million. Figures for individual benefits are in the table.

The Department does not routinely collect information by country. However, it is estimated that about 6 per cent. of all social security expenditure is in respect of Wales. The numbers of staff employed by the Department in the constituent parts of the UK on 1 January 1997 are as follows:-

England: 80,658[1]

Scotland: 9,483[1]

Wales: 4,380[1]

Northern Ireland 13[1,2]

Total: 94,514.

Notes:

[1] Figures expressed on a whole time equivalent basis.

[2] As well as 13 staff directly employed by the DSS, the Department repays Department of Health and Social Services for the operational services it provides.

[3] The expenditure figures provided are for the direct administrative costs of the Department and direct payments to beneficiaries. They therefore exclude the cost associated with Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Social security expenditure and estimated outturn 1996–97

Benefits	*Estimated outturn £ million*
Retirement pension	31,851
Xmas bonus	119
Widows benefit	1,052
Unemployment benefit/job seekers allowance (contribution based)	999
Statutory sick pay	26
Incapacity benefit	7,767
Maternity allowance	36
Statutory maternity pay	485
Guardian and child allowance	2
Non-contributory retirement pension	36
Non-contributory xmas bonus	17
War pensions	1,419
Attendance allowance	2,421
Invalid care allowance	768
Severe disablement allowance	893
Disability living allowance	4,361
Disability working allowance	25
Industrial injury benefit	716
Income support for the elderly, income support under 60 years of age, job seekers allowance (income based)	16,475
Earnings top up	11
Child benefit	6,724
One parent benefit	348
Family credit	2,047
Housing benefit and council tax benefit	8,329
Others (small benefits)	372
Total	87,299

Source:
1997 Departmental Report: Table 1.

Benefits Agency Psychiatrists

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many psychiatrists are engaged by the Benefits Agency on Merseyside; and if he will make a statement. [20755]

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Benefits Agency Medical Services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Bob Parry, dated 21 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how many psychiatrists are engaged by the Benefits Agency (BA) on Merseyside; and if he will make a statement.

BA has no doctors on Merseyside who are known to have psychiatric qualifications.

Examining doctors receive specific training in undertaking medical examinations connected with claims for Social Security benefits. Doctors who conduct examinations in connection with Incapacity Benefit are required to undergo a four day modular training course which can be tailored to meet individual needs. Elements of the course include the technical aspects of Incapacity Benefit, the requirements for the content of the medical report form, selecting and justifying the choice of descriptors which specify the level of a customer's disability in each functional area, and mental health problems. The course also has, and I attach great importance to this, elements on customer service and equal opportunities.

In addition to this, all full-time BAMS Doctors have to undergo a two day residential course covering the clinical areas they are likely to encounter such as back pain and psychiatric disorders and those which are likely to cause particular difficulties, such as chronic fatigue states. Many of the sessions in these courses are conducted

by internationally recognised experts in their fields. The Benefits Agency Doctors are then responsible for cascading this information to the part-time fee paid Doctors who are also involved in this work.

I should make it clear that BA does not specifically engage doctors because of their psychiatric expertise.

If the opinion of a hospital specialist is deemed necessary in connection with a claim for benefit, a separate report is requested by BA.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Benefits Agency, Liverpool

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the operations of the Benefits Agency in Liverpool. [20756]

Mr. Burt: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Bob Parry, dated 21 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement on the operations of the Benefits Agency (BA) in Liverpool.

The North West Coast Area Directorate includes 2 BA Districts for Liverpool, Liverpool Mersey and Liverpool North Districts. BA operations in Liverpool are currently delivered from 7 BA sites and 12 Job Centres for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). JSA is jointly delivered with the Employment Service. These Districts deliver the majority of Social Security benefits locally, for example Income Support, Social Fund, Incapacity Benefit and in addition provide information and advice on the full range of benefits administered by the Agency.

There are approximately 900 staff employed in the 2 Liverpool Districts. During the current year both Districts have achieved all Secretary of State targets for the delivery of benefits.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will require the independent tribunal service not to appoint as members of disability appeal tribunals doctors who are used by the Benefits Agency medical services to examine claimants in connection with claims to disability living allowance or attendance allowance. [20995]

Mr. Roger Evans: The appointment of members of disability appeal tribunals is the statutory responsibility of the President of the Independent Tribunal Service, His Honour Judge Bassingthwaighte.

Housing Benefit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for social Security what consultations his Departments held with the Department of the Environment over the effects of the proposed housing benefit regulations which restrict the single room rent to single people aged 25 to 59 years; what assessment he has made of these effects; and what plans he has to transfer funds to the Department of the Environment as a consequence. [21131]

Mr. Roger Evans: There was full consultation as normal between all Departments with an interest in this matter both prior to and after the proposal was announced. The current expenditure plans make no provision for a transfer to the Department of the Environment as a result.

National Insurance

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the level of the national insurance lower earnings limit and contribution ceiling expressed in (i) 1997 prices and (ii) as a percentage of average earnings in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 2025 and *(c)* 2035. [21026]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

		Expressed as a percentage of estimated average earnings		
	1997–98 £	*1997–98*[1]	*2025*[2]	*2035*[2]
Lower earnings limit	62	16.7	9.6	7.9
Upper earnings limit	465	125.5	72.1	59.1

Notes:

[1] Estimated full-time adult average weekly earnings at the mid-point of 1997–98. The estimate is based upon the Office for National Statistics estimate—derived from New Earnings Survey data—of full-time adult average weekly earnings at April 1996 and the assumptions about the increase in average earnings from April 1996 to the mid-point of 1997–98 underlying the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98".

[2] Based on constant 2 per cent. real earnings growth from 1997–98 onwards.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Unclaimed Benefits

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the annual amount of benefit currently forgone by eligible claimants who are entitled to social security benefits but who do not claim in the constituencies of Roxburgh and Berwickshire and of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale. [21536]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available. Latest national estimates of unclaimed income-related benefits are available from the publication "Income-Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up in 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

Parent-plus Contracts

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will announce the awards of parent-plus contracts for the private sector areas; and if he will make a statement. [21626]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: No final decision has been made on the award of contracts.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21699]

Mr. Burt: The information is as follows:

(a) None.

(b) Under a Statutory Requirement;

The National Disability Council has a statutory duty to publish its proposals for a Code of Practice which may include consultation with the public.

Voluntarily;

The Social Security Advisory Committee.

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council.

The Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board frequently consults with medical experts and outside organisations representing disabled people.

(c) Under a Statutory Requirement;

The National Disability Council has a statutory duty to publish its proposals for a Code of Practice which may include consultation with outside commercial interests.

Voluntarily;

The Social Security Advisory Committee.

(d) None.

(e) None.

(f) None.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21724]

Mr. Burt: The information is as follows:

(a) The advisory non-departmental bodies sponsored by this Department are listed in "Public Bodies 1996" and all have a statutory basis.

(b) Under a Statutory Requirement;

None.

Voluntarily;

The advice given to the Secretary of State by the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board is published in its annual report.

The National Disability Council.

(c) Under a Statutory Requirement

The National Disability Council.

Voluntarily

The Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board.

(d) Under a Statutory Requirement

The National Disability Council.

Voluntarily

None.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21753]

Mr. Burt: Except in circumstances prescribed in section 173 of, and schedule 7 to, the Social Security Administration Act 1992, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is required to refer draft regulations to either the Social Security Advisory Committee or the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council for consideration and advice. If the committee reports on proposed regulations he is required to lay before Parliament its report with his responses to any recommendations when he lays the relevant statutory instrument.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21441]

Mr. Burt: All the Department's non-departmental public bodies have a statutory base. They are the Occupational Pensions Board, which will cease to exist from 6 April 1997; the Pensions Compensation Board, which was established in August 1996 and commences full operation on 6 April 1997; and the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, which was established in April 1996 and commences full operation on 6 April 1997.

None admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings, nor do they hold open meetings for the public—although they can do either if they wish.

Benefits Agency, Manchester

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) when work commenced in the Cheetham Hill and Chorlton Benefits Agency offices in order to facilitate the transfer of activities from the Great Ancoats street office; [21490]

(2) when consultation about the closure of the Benefits Agency office in Great Ancoats street, Manchester, was promised to the hon. Member for Stretford; when that consultation took place; and who was consulted; [21488]

(3) what consultation took place between the Benefits Agency and the Contributions Agency about the closure of the Great Ancoats street Benefits Agency office; [21486]

(4) when the decision to close Great Ancoats street Benefits Agency office was published by Ministers; [21489]

(5) what plans there are for access by claimants from the Ancoats area of Manchester to Benefits Agency offices following closure of the Great Ancoats street office. [21487]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the Benefits Agency is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Tony Lloyd, dated 21 March 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your five recent Parliamentary Questions relating to the closure of the Benefits Agency (BA) office at Great Ancoats Street.

As part of the Estates strategy the Area Directorate has given priority, in 1996/97, to projects that would allow it to maximise the use of space in those buildings considered necessary to its operations in the medium and long term. Work commenced at the BA offices at Cheetham and Chorlton on 3 March 1997 to convert space, currently used only for the storage of files, into office accommodation.

The announcement of the consultation exercise about the proposed closure of the BA office at Great Ancoats Street began with consultation letters being issued to Members of Parliament, including yourself, customer representatives and liaison groups on

23 November 1996. Of the 110 letters issued, only 17 responses were received. Of these 6 expressed concerns on the proposed closure. The consultation period ended on 6 January 1997.

The Contribution Agency has been consulted through regular meetings on the proposals for Great Ancoats Street and has been kept closely informed of developments.

The decision to close the Agency's Great Ancoats Street office was made on 13 March 1997 and was announced by the Area Directorate to staff, and local and area trade unions on 14 March 1997. On the same day, letters were sent to all parties involved in the consultation exercise.

Six BA offices at Cheetham, Chorlton, Longsight, Openshaw, Rusholme and Salford will remain following the closure of the Great Ancoats Street office. Customers living in the Ancoats area will be able to attend offices in Cheetham and Chorlton should they wish to attend a BA office in person. In addition for unemployed customers there are 4 Job Centres at Alexander Park, Cheetham, Moss Side and Newton Heath, within 2–3 miles of the Great Ancoats Street site.

Customers can also choose to contact the BA offices by post or telephone. Recent enhancements to the office telephone systems will provide a more efficient telephone service.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Contributions Agency

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the cost of moving Contributions Agency activities to *(a)* Great Ancoats street and *(b)* Stockport. [21485]

Mr. Heald: Movement of activity culminated on 17 March 1997 when Great Ancoats street activity was moved to Stockport.

The current anticipated costs are:

Great Ancoats Street: £1,338.01

Stockport: £72,280.51.

No staff costs have been incorporated in the above figures for the designing and creating the new structure.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals against the decision to withdraw reduced earnings allowance are outstanding; and what steps he is taking to reduce delays. [21404]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for the Independent Tribunal Service.

Pensioner Incomes

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average annual increase in real terms of *(a)* the state retirement pension and *(b)* average pensioner incomes (i) from 1974 to 1979 and (ii) since 1979. [21498]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables.

Table A: State retirement pension

	Level of RP at uprating (April 1996 prices) £	*Average compound annual growth from previous point* *Per cent.*
1974	54.90	—
1979	59.00	1.4
1996	61.15	0.2

Table B: Average pensioners' incomes

	Mean weekly net income, before housing costs, (July 1994 prices) £	*Average compound annual growth from previous point* *Per cent.*
1974	96.10	—
1979	100.80	1.0
1994–95	161.20	3.1

Notes:

1. Table (a) shows the real value of standard rate basic retirement pension, for 1974, 1979 and 1996 (the latest year for which information is available), at April 1996 prices, rounded to the nearest £0.05p.
2. Table (b) shows the mean average net income before housing costs for all pensioner units in July 1994 prices, rounded to the nearest £0.10 for 1974, 1979 and 1994–95, which is the latest period for which data is available. These estimates are subject to a large degree of statistical variability, and should therefore be used to indicate trends over time.
3. The average compound annual percentage growth rate in both tables is rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent.
4. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age (SPA) or a couple where the man, defined as the head, is over SPA.

Sources:

1. The Retail Price Index (all items).
2. Pensioners' Incomes Series data which is largely based on information contained in the Family Expenditure Survey of the calendar years 1974 and 1979 and the financial year 1994–95.

Advisory Groups (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21382]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Three of the Department's executive agencies are responsible for the provision of a range of services across London and the rest of the country. These are the Benefits Agency, the Child Support Agency and the Contributions Agency.

Attached is a list of the BA districts, CSA field divisions, and CA regions which have offices within the London area together with their overall budgets for 1996–97.

Budgets for 1997–98 have not yet been finalised for the districts, field divisions, and regions. Budgets for future years can only be estimated when details of the appropriate public expenditure survey settlement have been finalised.

Benefits Agency (BA) districts with London offices: 1997–97

	£
East London and Anglia	
Barking and Havering	4,712,994
Newham	6,366,404
City	4,979,464
Hackney and Islington	8,450,756
Lea-Roding	7,271,843
Leaside	8,377,027

Benefits Agency (BA) districts with London offices: 1997–97

	£
Chilterns	
Ealing	4,749,932
Euston	6,231,121
Neasden	3,559,192
Harrow and Hillingdon	4,960,722
Barnet	4,695,308
London South	
London Central	3,197,486
South West Thames	9,452,398
Palace	6,082,706
Bankside	6,397,089
Thameside	6,513,063
South Circular	4,920,555
West Kent	5,506,563
Hounslow and Kingston	6,810,468
Benefit centres	
Makerfield	7,886,838
Belfast	11,870,011
Glasgow	14,071,859

The West Kent District includes Bromley office which is the only Branch in that District within the London area, but the budget figure quoted is for the whole District.
The work of Ealing and Euston Districts is remotely processed at Glasgow Benefit Centre; the work of Palace District at Makerfield Benefit Centre; and the work of Neasden and South Circular Districts at Belfast Benefit Centre. Budget details for the Benefits Centres are separately identified.

Child Support Agency (CSA) field divisions with London offices

	1996–97 £
London and the Downs	4,297,673
Essex and Kent	4,065,948
Central Southern	3,494,374

The CSA field divisions cover a wide geographic area including London. The budgets quoted are not solely for those offices within the London area.

Contribution Agency (CA) regions with London offices

	1996–97 £
London North-west	4,878,000
North-east Thames	4,471,000
South Thames	4,283,000

The CA regions also cover a wide area and the budgets quoted are not solely for those offices based in London.

Parliamentary Answers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many questions were tabled for reply by his Department in each Session since 1979–80; in how many instances in each year the reply has been that providing the information involved disproportionate cost; and in how many instances in each year questions have been given the reply that the information was not available centrally. [16788]

Mr Burt: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Session	*Total PQs tabled*	*Disproportionate cost replies*	*Not centrally available replies*
1983–84[1,2]	7,058	n/a	n/a
1984–85[1,2]	5,703	n/a	n/a
1985–86[1,2]	6,056	n/a	n/a
1986–87[1,2]	4,184	n/a	n/a
1987–88[1,2]	7,312	n/a	n/a
1988–89[2]	2,510	n/a	n/a
1989–90[2]	2,526	n/a	n/a
1990–91[2]	2,120	n/a	n/a
1991–92[2]	1,140	n/a	n/a
1992–93[3]	3,244	117	17
1993–94[3]	2,359	129	6
1994–95[3]	2,749	123	25
1995–96[3]	2,817	145	17
1996–97[4]	1,541	30	9

[1] Figures are for the Department of Health and Social Security.
[2] Source: POLIS Database.
[3] Source: Department archive of Written Answers; figures were obtained by a count and may be subject to error.
[4] As at 17 March 1997.

Fraud

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans the Government have to derogate from paragraph 4.3 of Council of Europe recommendation R(86)1 as a consequence of the enactment of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill; and if he will make a statement. [21418]

Mr. Heald: We have no such plans.

National Insurance

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were *(a)* the amounts of national insurance contributions paid by (i) employers and (ii) employees and *(b)* any Exchequer supplement, and the proportion of the NI fund accounted for by each, in today's prices for each year since 1979; and what estimate he has made of future revenues. [21062]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 20 March 1997]:* The information is in the tables.

Estimates of future income from contributions are set out in the "National Insurance Fund Long Term Financial Estimates" (HC160) published in January 1995.

	1979–80		*1980–81*		*1981–82*		*1982–83*		*1983–84*	
	£ billions	*Per cent.*	*£ billions*	*Per cent.*	*£ billions*	*Per cent.*	*£ billions*	*Per cent.*	*£ billions*	*Per cent.*
Total income	45.53	—	46.43	—	45.01	—	45.78	—	44.93	—
Class 1[1]: Employees	11.23	25	11.63	25	13.04	29	15.59	34	16.60	37
Employees	18.01	40	18.20	39	17.36	39	17.95	39	18.64	41
Class 1A	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0
Class 2/4 (self-employed)	0.71	2	0.68	1	0.75	2	0.87	2	0.99	2

	1979–80		1980–81		1981–82		1982–83		1983–84	
	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.
NI surcharge[2]	7.72	17	7.73	17	7.37	16	5.05	11	3.10	7
Treasury payment	6.13	13	6.42	14	4.90	11	4.88	11	5.06	11
Other sources[3]	1.73	4	1.78	4	1.59	4	1.43	3	0.54	1

	1984–85		1985–86		1986–87		1987–88		1988–89	
	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.
Total income	43.43	—	42.34	—	44.49	—	45.81	—	47.14	—
Class 1[1]: Employees	16.94	39	17.38	41	17.99	40	18.97	41	19.80	42
Employers	18.95	44	19.94	47	21.18	48	22.56	49	24.13	51
Class 1A	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0
Class 2/4 (self-employed)	1.06	2	1.07	3	1.10	2	1.16	3	1.31	3
NI surcharge[2]	1.53	4	0.06	0	0.02	0	0.00	0	0.00	0
Treasury payment	4.46	10	3.50	8	3.78	8	3.23	7	2.35	5
Other sources	0.50	1	0.39	1	0.42	1	–0.12	0	–0.44	–1

	1989–90		1990–91		1991–92		1992–93		1993–94	
	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.
Total income	45.47	—	45.18	—	44.85	—	44.68	—	53.61	—
Class 1[1]: Employees	18.99	42	17.16	38	17.14	38	16.92	38	16.60	31
Employers	25.27	56	25.17	56	25.01	56	24.73	55	25.88	48
Class 1A	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.49	1	0.48	1
Class 2/4 (self-employed)	1.39	3	1.36	3	1.34	3	1.36	3	1.53	3
NI surcharge[2]	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0
Treasury payment	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	8.31	16
Other sources	–0.17	0	1.48	3	1.34	3	1.19	3	0.80	1

	1994–95		1995–96	
	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.
Total income	53.15	—	51.12	—
Class 1[1]: Employees	18.92	36	19.62	38
Employers	24.90	47	25.18	49
Class 1A	0.51	1	0.49	1
Class 2/4 (self-employed)	1.52	3	1.54	3
NI surcharge[2]	0.00	0	0.00	0
Treasury payment	6.69	13	3.69	7
Other sources[3]	0.60	1	0.61	1

[1] Gross of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) and Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) deductions.

[2] The National Insurance surcharge was part of general taxation and not paid into the National Insurance Fund.

[3] Figures take into account deductions made by employers in respect of statutory sick pay (SSP) from April 1993 and statutory maternity pay (SMP) from April 1987. The combined SSP and SMP deductions SMP deductions between 1987–88 and 1989–90 exceed other sources of income. From April 1990 figures include amounts paid from the Consolidated Fund as compensation for SSP and SMP deductions.

1. National insurance contribution figures include the NHS element.
2. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

HEALTH

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1992, with special reference to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14951]

Mr. Horam: Bournemouth has benefited from the increases in the real resources available to the national health service which the Government has made available every year since 1979.

Since 1991, the number of general practitioners in Dorset has increased by 10 per cent. and 50 per cent. of the population of Dorset are currently served by a fundholding GP.

Dorset health authority's integrated allocation for the financial year 1997–98 will be £329.6 million, a real terms increase of £6.1 million over the last year's allocation.

Hospital Staff (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* consultants, *(b)* junior hospital doctors, *(c)* nurses, *(d)* staff in professions allied to medicine, *(e)* accident and emergency staff, *(f)* ancillary staff and *(g)* other staff were employed in NHS hospitals in north Yorkshire in 1992; and how many there are currently. [20881]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* Individual hospital units cannot be separately identified in the Department of Health's hospital and community health services work force censuses, but in some cases staff can be sub-divided between those working in hospitals and those working in the community on the basis of their area of work.

In the area covered by North Yorkshire district health authority there were 210 whole-time equivalent, wte, hospital consultants, 210 wte hospital junior doctors—excluding registrars and senior registrars—and 90 wte other hospital doctors employed by the national health service hospital and community health services (HCHS) at September 1995, of which 30 wte worked in the accident and emergency area of work; this information is not available centrally for earlier years. There were 4,010 wte nursing and midwifery staff employed by the NHS HCHS working in hospital areas of work at September 1992 in the same health authority area, of which 50 wte worked in the accident and emergency area of work; information for 1995, the latest year for which results are available, is not available centrally. It is not possible to separately identify other non-medical staff in the same way.

Nursing Staff (Wakefield)

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing staff were employed in the Wakefield district in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1996. [20722]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available in the form requested. There were 2,690 whole-time equivalent nursing and midwifery staff employed by the national health service hospital and community health services in the Wakefield health authority area in 1979. Figures for 1996 are not yet available.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors led the licensing authority *(a)* to grant a product licence for the Pluserix MMR vaccine on 9 February 1995 and *(b)* to withdraw it from public use in 1997; what differences exist between the 1988 product and the 1995 product; if he will place in the Library a copy of all versions of the data sheets for each product; and if he will make a statement. [21560]

Mr. Malone: Discussions between the Licensing Authority and marketing authorisation holder associated with the granting of a product licence are confidential. Pluserix measles, mumps and rubella vaccine still holds a licence. There are no significant differences between Pluserix vaccines licensed in 1988 and 1995 and copies of the data sheets are available in the "Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry Data Sheet Compendium" 1989–90, 1990–91 and 1991–1992 which can be obtained from the Library.

Suicides

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the last five years the number of *(a)* suicides and *(b)* attempted suicides of young people in care in each case (i) in total and (ii) broken down by social services authority; and if he will indicate what recording mechanisms are in place for the social services inspectorate to monitor such data. [20074]

Mr. Burns: Under schedule 2(20) of the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to notify my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health of all deaths of children who are being looked after by the local authority. There is no statutory requirement for the cause of death to be identified although local authorities generally do provide it. Information on numbers of attempted suicide is not held centrally.

The Department's records indicate that there have been a total of 12 suicides of children looked after during the last five years.

Notifications of suicides of children looked after by local authorities 1992–97

Year	*Number of suicides*	*Local authority area*
1992–93	1	London Borough of Wandsworth
	1	Liverpool
	1	Lancashire
1993–94	1	Tameside
	1	Cheshire
1994–95	1	Hertfordshire
	1	Salford
	1	Northumberland
1995–96	1	London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
	2	Hampshire
1996–97	1	Cheshire

Reports of deaths of children looked after are received by the regional offices of the social services inspectorate who identify when further investigation may be required. "Working Together Under the Children Act" requires area child protection committees to carry out a review of any incident leading to the death of a child where child abuse is confirmed or suspected or a child protection issue likely to be of major public concern arises.

North Hampshire Hospital

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* in-patient and *(b)* out-patient treatments were performed in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1996 at the North Hampshire hospital, formerly Basingstoke district hospital; and what was the percentage change between the two dates. [20688]

Mr. Horam: Information on numbers of patients treated is not collected centrally. In-patient activity is recorded in terms of finished consultant episodes. The latest year for which in-patient and out-patient information is available is 1995–96. These data are contained in "Ordinary and day case admissions for England" and "Outpatients and ward attenders for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Prior to 1988–89 in-patient data were collected on a different basis. Information for 1979 is not available on an individual provider basis.

The table details finished consultant episodes and consultant outpatient attendances for North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust, formerly Basingstoke general services unit, for the years 1991–92 and 1995–96.

Finished consultant episodes[1] and consultant outpatient attendances[2], by North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust (formerly Basingstoke General Services Unit), 1991–92 and 1995–96

Year		Finished consultant episodes[1]	Consultant outpatient attendances[2]
1991–92	(Basingstoke General Services Unit)	34,010	[3]—
1993–94	(Basingstoke General Services Unit)	35,859	113,656
1995–96	(North Hampshire Hospital NHS Trust)	33,278	127,798
Average annual percentage change 1991–92 to 1995–96		-0.5	—
Average annual percentage change 1993–94 to 1995–96		—	6.0

Notes:
[1] Finished consultant episodes is the total of ordinary and day case admissions including well babies.
[2] Consultant outpatient attendances is the total of first and subsequent attendances seen.
[3] Denotes not available.
Source:
Department of Health form KP70 for finished consultant episodes.
Department of Health form KH0[O] for consultant outpatient attendances.

North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust came into being at the beginning of the 1994–95 financial year. Prior to this date it was a directly managed unit called Basingstoke general services unit.

Finished consultant episode data prior to 1991–92 were aggregated to district health authority level, and this is the same for consultant outpatient attendances. However, from that year to 1992–93 NHS trust data could be given individually, but not directly managed unit data, this was again aggregated to district health authority level.

Corticosteroids

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Government-funded advisory organisations investigating the effects of corticosteroids do not contain Government appointed representatives. [20835]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 18 March 1997]:* There are no such organisations.

Edgware General Hospital

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the agreement between his Department and the hon. Members for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) and Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) in respect of comprehensive new casualty facilities at Edgware general hospital; and if he will make a statement. [21578]

Mr. Malone: We agreed to suggest to Barnet health authority that they might consider inviting an independent person to assess the service being provided in the urgent treatment centre at Edgware—after any interim arrangements have ended—to confirm that the maximum range of treatments possible in such a service are being offered. The health authority has agreed to do this.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21695]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Hold public meetings:

(ii) under a statutory requirement: none

(ii) voluntarily:

Gene Therapy Advisory Service

(b) Conduct public consultation exercises:

(i) under statutory requirement: none

(ii) voluntarily:

British Pharmacopoeia Commission

Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing

(c) Conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests:

(i) under a statutory requirement: none

(ii) voluntarily:

Steering Committee on Pharmacy Postgraduate Education

Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy

Standing Committee on Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education

Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee

Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing

Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

British Pharmacopoeia Commission

(d) Publish a register of members' interests:

(i) under a statutory requirement: none

(ii) voluntarily:

Advisory Committee on the Registration of Homoeopathic Products

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Medicines Commission

Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy

Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment

Committee on Toxicity of Chemical in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment

Committee on Mutagenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment

Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment

Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

(e) Publish agendas for meetings:

(i) under a statutory requirement: none

(ii) voluntarily: none

(f) Publish the minutes of meetings:

(i) under a statutory requirement: none

(ii) voluntarily: none.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if this is in each case under a statutory requirement. [21434]

Mr. Horam: There is a statutory obligation on all national health service trusts to publish an annual report. All other national health service bodies are required to do so by the Department of Health codes of conduct and accountability for national health service boards. The codes of conduct and accountability also require all national health service bodies to maintain a register of members' interests. There is a statutory obligation for the annual accounts of all national health service bodies to be published. There is no obligation on national health service bodies to publish minutes of meetings, although some do. Health authorities are statutorily obliged to publish the agendas of their meetings, but this requirement does not relate to any other bodies.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; and if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21758]

Mr. Horam: All national health service bodies, as defined by the Cabinet Office, have a statutory basis. Health authorities are statutorily required to admit members of the public to their meetings. Special health authorities are now required to admit members of the public to their meetings if this is stipulated in their establishment order. National health service trusts are not statutorily required to hold board meetings in public, but some trusts choose to do so. All trusts are statutorily required to hold an annual public meeting. There is no requirement on the Dental Practice Board to hold any meetings to which the public is admitted.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those of his Department's advisory non-departmental public bodies which the Government are required to *(a)* consult prior to legislative proposals and *(b)* publish their response to advice from. [21740]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is as follows:

(a) consult prior to legislative proposals:

Committee on Safety Medicines and the Medicines Commission.

(b) publish its response to advice from:

National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the national health service bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [21729]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 21 March 1996 at column *323*.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* publish their advice to Government, *(c)* publish an annual report and *(d)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is under a statutory requirement. [21718]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is as follows:

(a) have a statutory base:

Advisory Board on the Registration of Homeopathic Products

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Medicines Commission

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

Standing Pharmaceutical Advisory Committee

Clinical Standards Advisory Group

Standing Medical Advisory Committee

Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee

Administration of Radioactive Substances Advisory Committee

Unrelated Live Transplant Regulatory Authority

Standing Dental Advisory Committee

(b) publish their advice to Government:

(i) under a statutory requirement: none

(ii) voluntary:

Steering Committee on Pharmacy Postgraduate Education

Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy

Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment

Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment

Standing Committee on Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education

Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee

NHS Health Advisory Service

Gene Therapy Advisory Committee

Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing

Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

(c) publish an annual report:

(i) under a statutory requirement:

Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards

Committee on Safety Medicines

Medicines Commission

(ii) voluntarily:

Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy

Committee for Monitoring the Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship

Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment

Committee on Mutagenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment

Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment

National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group

Standing Committee on Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education

NHS Health Advisory Service

Gene Therapy Advisory Committee

Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing

Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

(d) lay an annual report before Parliament:

(i) under a statutory requirement:

Advisory Board on the Registration of Homeopathic Products

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Medicines Commission and the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

(ii) voluntarily:

Committee for Monitoring the Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship

Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; if he will list those bodies which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board and committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [21446]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 22 February 1996 at columns *269–70*. However, the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting does now voluntarily admit members of the public to all board meetings.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which is the responsible purchasing authority in a case where an asylum seeker who has been residing in the UK is admitted to a psychiatric hospital before a decision is made about his status. [21588]

Mr. Burns: The health authority of the patient's district of residence.

Faithfull Foundation Treatment Centre

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he is having with other Government departments concerning future accommodation for the Faithfull Foundation treatment centre at the Wolvercote clinic in Epsom; and if he will make a statement. [21636]

Mr. Horam: None. The Department of Health is represented on the Faithfull Foundation monitoring group chaired by the Home Office, at a recent meeting of which the future accommodation requirements of the Wolvercote clinic were considered.

NHS Estates Agency

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the key tasks and targets for 1997–98 for the NHS Estates Agency. [21817]

Mr. Horam: I have agreed the agency's key tasks and targets for 1997–98 and have placed copies in the Library.

NHS Pensions Agency

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the key targets for 1997–98 for the NHS Pensions Agency. [21809]

Mr. Horam: I have agreed the agency's key tasks and targets for 1997–98, and have placed copies in the Library.

Medical Devices Agency

Mr Robathan : To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the key targets for 1997–98 for the Medical Devices Agency. [21818]

Mr. Horam: I have agreed the agency's key targets for 1997–98, and have placed copies in the Library.

Nursery, Midwifery and Health Visiting

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has appointed a chairman and members to the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. [21808]

Mr. Dorrell: Professor Ron de Witt has been appointed as chairman and Mrs. Patricia Oakley has been appointed as a non-executive member for the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting from 1 April 1997 for a four-year term. In addition, Miss Pam Charlwood and Professor Jeff Thompson have been re-appointed for a further four-year term.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support his Department gives to *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* self-help groups relating to irritable bowel syndrome. [21557]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health awarded the British Digestive Association, which provides advice and information on a number of gastroenterological conditions, a grant of £18,000 for 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into irritable bowel syndrome. [21556]

Mr. Horam: None.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on current NHS funding for the treatment of irritable bowel syndrome. [21555]

Mr. Horam: It is for local health authorities to decide how best to allocate the resources available to them, taking into consideration the needs of the population served.

NHS Patient Activity

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage increase in patient activity in the NHS between 1974 and 1979; and what has been the increase since 1979. [21502]

Mr. Horam: The number of in-patients and day cases increased by an average 1.2 per cent. per annum between 1974 and 1979 and an average of 3.4 per cent. per annum between 1979 and 1995–96.

Ministerial Visits (Wirral)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times he visited the Wirral, South constituency during *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997. [21430]

Mr. Horam: No visits were made in a ministerial capacity.

Advisory Bodies (London)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the non-elected bodies responsible to his Department which are responsible for providing advice or services in London, indicating in each case the (i) overall budget and (ii) estimated running costs for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [21380]

Mr. Horam: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

General Practioners (Patient Numbers)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients there were per GP practice in 1979; and how many there are currently. [21503]

Mr. Malone: The average number of patients per general practitioner partnership as at 29 March 1996 was 5,593[1]. The figure for 1979 is not available centrally.

[1]*Source*: General Medical Services Census.

Nurses

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data he has collated concerning the increase in the number of posts of *(a)* matron and *(b)* director of nursing services in NHS hospitals; what supervising duties such posts carry; and what guidance his Department has given regarding numbers, duties, or good practice as regards such posts. [18461]

Mr. Horam *[pursuant to his reply 10 March, column 97]:* I am now able to provide additional information. The full reply is as follows:

National health service hospital and community health service—HCHS—staff are not classified by job title, but by the job they do. At September 1995 there were 4,280 whole-time equivalent nurse managers employed by the NHS HCHS in England. These are staff who are required to hold a statutory nursing, midwifery or health visiting qualification to do their job, but who have management responsibilities and have little or no direct clinical involvement. Consequently, staff holding the job titles "Matron" and "Director of Nursing" may be included in these figures, along with other staff with different job titles but whose jobs meet the same criteria.

In the past, staff were classified by national pay scales, some of which are specifically designated for matrons, including deputies and assistants, and directors of nursing. Up until 1994 the Department of Health's non-medical work force census recorded the number of staff on these pay scales, but because of the introduction of clinical grading, the reclassification of some senior nurses onto general and senior manager pay scales and the introduction of local terms and conditions, this information does not accurately identify trends in the numbers of matrons and directors of nursing.

The responsibility for determining the most appropriate form of nurse management and advice lies with the individual national health service employer concerned. The National Health Service Trusts (Membership and Procedure) regulations 1990 state that the executive directors of an NHS trust shall include a registered nurse or registered midwife, except in the case of a trust which does not provide services directly to patients or a trust whose principle function is to provide ambulance or patient transport services. The NHS executive has published two documents that identify the existing roles of trust nurse executive directors: "One year on—The Nurse Executive Director Post" and "Sharpening the Focus: The roles and perceptions of nursing in NHS Trusts". Copies are available in the Library.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

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Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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